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DEVELOPING COUNTER-HEGEMONIC PEDAGOGY IN ADULT & HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: Using various discourses including critical theory, critical pedagogy, postmodernism, feminist pedagogy and liberation theology, the importance of counterhegemonic pedagogy is underscored. This approach to pedagogy can be facilitated through various methodological engagements but the discussion is about reasoning and counter-storytelling.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on teaching and learning in adult and higher education from the perspective of the facilitator of learning and to draw from the literature and practice how the search for counter-hegemonic pedagogy might be advanced. It is pretty easy to name several contemporary adult education scholars who work in the area of emancipatory learning. Therefore, in this paper, the work of Freire (1972) and Mezirow (1991) will be employed since several themes resonate across their work that are consistent with approaches to counter-hegemonic pedagogy. Accordingly, in this paper, I use divergent discourses, including critical pedagogy, postmodernism, feminist pedagogy, and liberation theology in analyzing the potential of particular pedagogies to be counter-hegemonic. I engage in a process of reporting, reflecting and conceptualizing an approach to liberatory/emancipatory education in which democracy, transformation, liberation and social justice are objectives.

Counter-Hegemonic Education

Hegemony as it is traditionally understood is the success of the dominant class in presenting their definitions of reality and truth. It manifests itself in the political, economic, social and cultural terrains of society as well as through a dynamic process of negotiation between the dominant and subordinate classes. It is about the dominant seeking to make the rest of society believe and accept that their approach to life and understanding of society is the right and only way. As Gramsci pointed out (as cited in Jay, 2003 p. 5), hegemony is never simply imposition from above. Instead, it is maintained through the winning of the consent of subordinate groups by the dominant one (s). A major means for winning this consensus involves the universalizing of the dominant groups interests as the interests of society as a whole.

To be counter-hegemonic is to resist the definitions and understandings of reality and truth that the dominant groups in society proffer to further their own interest, for instance, ideations about race, gender, sexual orientation, economic arrangements of the society etc. Accordingly, teaching for critical thinking and for the raising of consciousness must propose approaches to “thinking the practice” and “emancipatory transformative learning” as tools to foster change and to resist the unrestrained expression of capitalism and the redefinition of education as a private good. These are aspects of society that have been reinforced with the dominance of the neoliberal capitalist ideology.

Resistance to hegemony is demonstrated in various ways and according to Kaufman (2000) can be detected in “nonconformance, passivity, activity, knowledge and meaning” (p. 430). This resistance to hegemony has been seen most notable in the search for counter-

hegemonic pedagogies. In this paper, drawing on understandings of liberatory approaches to pedagogy that have emerged through investigations of critical theory, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogical approaches, postmodernism and liberation theology and other forms of critical and liberative discourses, I will demonstrate some approaches to educational practice that are counter-hegemonic.

Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and Liberation Theology

Critical theory, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, post modernism and liberation theology can be located within liberatory or emancipatory educational framework and the resistance paradigm. These various forms of radical theoretical constructs have a similarity of interest, the liberation of the oppressed. They also have a vision of a more egalitarian and democratic society and hence, drawing from these discourses, I will advance an approach to counter-hegemonic pedagogy.

Critical theory has its foundations in pre-World War I Germany with scholars such as Erich Fromm and Jurgen Habermas. Critical theorists argue that education should not only promote cognitive and intellectual skills, it should also promote social activism. They note that many of the social realities in our lives which we accept without questioning are based on inequalities of power and on undemocratic principles and that any education which is worthwhile must be based on the critique of the practices and beliefs which negate against democratic ideals such as freedom and justice. Moreover, they insist that if education is to truly serve its purpose, it must not only critique injustice, it must also promote social activism designed to end injustice. Critical theorists make a case for educational practice to do the regular things of promoting cognitive and intellectual skills but more so they argue for education to promote social activism.

Critical pedagogy is an educational approach that seeks to promote educational experiences that are transformative, empowering, transgressive and even subversive. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (1972) which aims at helping learners find a sense of agency in their lives through the process of "conscientization," is generally regarded as the foundational text associated with this approach. Critical pedagogy has a vision of a more egalitarian society and posits the view that this state of affairs can be realised through rationality (which might be problematic for some persons) while simultaneously incorporating some aspects of postmodern thought. There are various approaches to critical pedagogy but some common themes can be delineated, for instance the questioning of how power operates in the construction of knowledge, bell hooks (1994) explains: "More than ever before...educators are compelled to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for sharing knowledge" (p.12). This involves rethinking a number of aspects of educational practice including who makes the decisions about what and how to learn, who does the talking and who takes the responsibility for learning.

Critical pedagogy, argues for a concerted anti oppression and emancipatory approach to education. It keeps at its centre the need to problematize both the overt and covert exercise of domination- subordination in social structures and processes as part of exploring points of commonalities among various social groups. Part of the mandate of critical pedagogy is that of preparing students to be transformative democratic agents. This calls for an in-depth analysis of social life, in this regard diversity and social justice become some of the lens through which this societal analysis is accomplished. Educating for democracy is not merely instilling new knowledge.

Feminist pedagogy is primarily concerned with examining, unpacking and understanding the ways in which forms of power in society, both overt and covert, operate to stereotype, circumscribe, control and oppress women whether it be in education, the workplace or social institutions. Feminist pedagogy constitutes a major teaching strategy for promoting thinking and for raising critical consciousness about the condition of women, especially as they are affected by socially constructed barriers, designed to protect the status quo and to ensure that entrenched individuals and groups maintain power and hegemony.

Postmodernism constitutes a reaction against scientific and objective ways of knowing and instead argues that there are no absolute truths; knowledge is simply tentative. Moreover, multiple perspectives are to be encouraged to the point where it is permissible for one individual to hold a different view and even contradictory understandings of the same phenomenon at the same time. It is also understood to be a philosophical movement that seeks to expose the internal contradictions of metanarratives by deconstructing modern notions of truth, language, knowledge and power. A central premise of postmodern thinking is the importance of cooperative models to replace rampant competitiveness. "Postmodernisms are responses across the disciplines to the contemporary crisis of representation.

Some radical feminisms and postmodernism have provided space to help us interrogate and tear down "old givens" that are implicated in various forms of oppression. Within postmodernism notions of deconstruction are often called into service (Kaufmann, 2000). Yet, a purely deconstructive posture cannot be admitted in the liberative project without a definite determination to build new understandings and new structures, conceptually and materially. Therefore, education leads to deconstruction and rebuilding. One must become free of self-defeating attitudes and this might occur through deconstruction and the resultant action. However, it does not end there; it must be accompanied by rebuilding or the replacement of the self-defeating attitudes and behaviors with more positive and affirming behaviors.

Liberation theology is a praxis oriented understanding of theology or "God talk." In both the Latin American and Caribbean expressions there is a preference for orthopraxis over orthodoxy (Lowe-Ching, 1995). The theological model allows for the understanding of the Christian message as an indissoluble unity of theory and praxis, more basically mediated through praxis than theory. It admits the need for the first point of departure within the context of hermeneutics to be that of the human experience of life. Thus, questions about human existence and the experience of life are raised as attempts are made to engage in theology. A hermeneutics of suspicion is applied to the received understanding, so in the interpretation of Scripture and theology, there is recognition that theology was used to bolster the oppressors' position and keep the oppressors in a dominant position and the oppressed in servitude. This leads to third aspect of the theological process or method where a new interpretation is sought.

Content and Pedagogy

Resistance to hegemony has been seen most notably in the search for counterhegemonic pedagogies. Much of critical and liberatory education seem to be concerned with the imposition of dominant ways of understanding reality (mainly from a western perspective) as the normative, preferred and in many cases the authentic way of knowing. Content and pedagogy are oftentimes sources of domination that invite resistance. At the content level, there is an opportunity to examine issues from the perspective of those who historically were the silenced voices, from the perspectives of groups that were historically invisible or left out of the reckonings. At the pedagogical level, active strategies, participatory approaches as

well as strategies that promote critical thinking must be embraced. Learners must be led to envision alternative futures, dream about possibilities and new and different social realities. These ways of meaning making that create opportunities for resisting hegemony include non-conformance, passivity, activity, critical self-directed learning, service learning, immersive learning, critical deliberative educational travel, relational learning, collaborative learning, dialectical self-engagements, contemplative action, critical reflection, transformational learning, reasoning and counter-storytelling. These approaches are not exhaustive and of course, they intersect and overlap in multiple ways. Hence, it might be fitting to say counterhegemonic approaches would incorporate active and interactive pedagogical approaches that are dialogical.

Counterhegemonic Pedagogy

Reasoning

An approach to teaching and learning in adult and higher education that is counterhegemonic is certainly important and achievable. Psychohistoriographic Cultural Therapy (PCT) is a method of group psychotherapy (Hickling, 2009) it is considered a session in 'reasoning' and it has been used in Caribbean sites of counselling and psychotherapy and also in educational spaces. The focus of this approach is to create opportunities for individuals to take a long hard look at themselves using psychological, historiographic and oral tradition. It is used in association with cultural traditions and various arts therapies.

An emancipatory approach that is counterhegemonic must take seriously the need to create participatory space for students (hooks, 1984). In this regard, the importance of "reasoning" (Blake Hannah, 1997) as practised by the Rastafari community becomes a very important way in which educational practice can fashion its oppositional stance to traditional unidirectional power norms. Reasoning (especially when it is aligned to PCT) also creates opportunities for self-discovery. It is ("Reasoning") a process that enables members of a community to discuss issues and concerns with each other with the objective of enlightenment and transformation of consciousness. It is a dialogical engagement.

Reasoning is an approach to discussion in pursuit of higher meaning. It is easily likened to an intense dialogue. To reason on an issue, parties must have some familiarity with the subject matter and are prepared to re-evaluate their views and opinions when a higher truth is presented. The problem with most people is that they allow their false sense of self (ego) to get in the way. They are usually playing for an audience or are deliberately saying things that they do not genuinely believe. In ancient times, parties in disagreement would have special meetings where they would smoke herbs or drink java before engaging the issues. They would first spend time stating their ancestral lineage to realize their most ancient connections before tackling the problem. This allowed them to rekindle their humanity/common relations so they could reason as part of a larger family. What they agreed upon in that state is what would be acted upon. Today people do not have to smoke or drink to do this but still most people do not rekindle their common bonds before engaging serious discussions. Think of the difference this would make to the Israeli/Palestinian issue if, before they started talking about their disagreements they used the current historical and scientific information to rekindle awareness of their common humanity. With that information refreshed in their minds they could then go about discussing the issues. "Reasoning" involves the creation of participatory spaces for collaborative engagements. The creation of participatory spaces enabling student voices to be heard is important in adult and higher education. An approach to teaching and learning that foregrounds reasoning will therefore be transformational. Oppressive truth claims can be engaged and discussed. "Reasoning" will

entail reconceptualization of mentor/mentee and the traditional teacher/student model based on mutual respect for each other but recognizing the intellectual advancement of the mentor. Reasoning is a very serious activity. It requires a commitment to thoroughgoing ethical engagement. That which is stated, ought to be the truth as the speaker understand it. It involves the exchanges of meaning and not simply repeating words that both parties interpret differently. Reasoning is not easy; it involves the on-going search for more truths to ACT upon. Power then from a pedagogical perspective is not held completely by one individual, there is place for the group and there is place for the interactional activity. It is not a commodity to be possessed. Power then offers productive possibilities.

An approach to pedagogy that allows reasoning to be incorporated provides an opportunity for teachers to challenge the status quo, relinquish power to students, and become advocates for more wholesome practices in the classroom. They can also model democratic practices. Teachers who are serious about emancipatory pedagogy will ensure that engagement with the students is always dialogical and create space for democratic practices to be inscribed in the relationship.

Counter-Storytelling

Another approach that is certainly important in counterhegemonic pedagogy is that of storytelling. Storytelling has an awesome role in communicating meaningfully and challenging myths (Delgado, 1989). As stated by Bruner (1986), stories give “a map of possible roles and possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-definition are possible (or desirable)” (p. 2, cited in Collins & Cooper, Saxby, 1994).

Counter-storytelling has been used, perhaps most notably by anti-racist educators to contradict racist depictions of reality and offer an alternative perspective. Counterstorytelling has also been used to show that race-neutral characterization of life are in effect a farce and in fact, they are operating to position white privilege within a sphere of influence that reinforce and legitimise that particular ideological framework. Hence, they support the inequity that exists in white racist societies. Counter-storytelling has a huge role in undermining majoritarian stories as the only or singular realities. The definition of counter-storytelling offered by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) is most apt. They define counter-storytelling as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” including people of colour, women, gay, and the poor (p. 26). Counter-stories are therefore important in providing an opportunity for the voices of those with other stories to be heard. They stand in opposition to the dominant narratives of those that are the more powerful in society. The stories of the dominant usually carry the perspectives and the beliefs associated with the dominant cultures, in fact, they usually carry multiple layers of assumptions that provide tacit justification for some of the ills of society such as racism sexism, classism. They are majoritarian stories or the stories of the, privileged of the society (Caucasians, middle and upper classes heterosexuals etc.). Delgado and Stefancic (1993) pointed out that majoritarian stories draw on the tacit knowledge of persons in the dominant group but they also distort and silence the experiences of the dominated. These dominant or majoritarian stories speak from the perspective of universality and of course they come with the voice of authority hence, those perspectives are held to be normal, standard and universal. Counter-stories undermine and undercut racist, sexist, homophobic and classist understandings of life. Counter-stories are one way marginalise groups resist the dominant perspective and in this regard, they can be counterhegemonic.

Implications of Counterhegemonic Pedagogy for the Development of Adult and Higher Education Theory and Practice

Adult and higher education professors or facilitators of education often recognize the importance of social justice in their work. In fact, many adult educators readily affirm that they teach for social justice and they teach for their students to develop agency. However, many do not see their work in terms of activism. In this paper I called attention to this important hallmark of teaching especially in adult and higher education of activism and agency. Hence, in this conceptual paper, I am proposing that we utilize emancipatory transformative learning as a tool to foster change.

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