Playful, intra-active, "world"-traveling: A framework for teaching adults across national borders in feminist ways

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Playful, Intra-active, "World"-Travelling: A Framework for Teaching Adults Across National Borders in Feminist Ways

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"Love is seen not as fusion and erasure of difference, but as incompatible with them. Love reveals plurality," (Lugones, 1987, p. 3). This definition of love, written by feminist scholar Maria Lugones in 1987, is the inspiration behind my effort to theorize a complex, playful, and loving approach to animating feminist praxis and pedagogies for adults while acknowledging human and nonhuman intra-activity. In this paper, I will use the poststructural concept of subjectivities and the posthuman concept of human and nonhuman intra-activity to work alongside Maria Lugones' ideas of ambiguous and plural selves embodied in the acts of playful "world"-travelling and loving perception. I will then propose a theoretical lens for understanding how adult educators might work in feminist ways across national borders.

When Argentinian-born feminist scholar and philosopher Maria Lugones wrote the essay "Playfulness, "world"-travelling, and loving perception," she was interested in unpacking the ways that women fail to love one another and tied this to a failure to identify with and understand difference. Lugones (1987) was concerned with understanding and revealing how plurality and difference among women is central to feminist ways of knowing and being. Through her exploration of how women of color in the United States are forced to travel in and out of "worlds," as a matter of survival, Lugones (1987) argued that the act of "world"-travelling could be undertaken willfully as a way to encourage cross-racial and cross-cultural loving. This led me to consider other questions. First, how do failures to enact loving perception, as the result of failing to identify with others, also lead to failures in teaching and learning? And furthermore, how might it be possible to enact "world"-travelling as a way to work in feminist ways across national borders, particularly for women adult educators?

In the process of describing plurality between women, Lugones (1987) also articulated the plurality of women's selves which is similar to feminist poststructural concept of subjectivities, or the ways that the self is plural, unstable, and in the process of becoming. Lugones (1987) argued that having the quality of ambiguous and plural selves was essential to animating the characteristic of playfulness and engaging in "world"-travel in order to identify ourselves with and love other women. These theories caused me to think about how ambiguous and multiplicitous selves of women adult educators are important to the creation of "world"-travelling pedagogies and generating loving perception in particular teaching and learning environments.

In addition to seeing the ways that Lugones' (1987) work connects with post-structural concepts of subjectivities, I also saw an opening to build upon her theory by putting it to work alongside theories of human and nonhuman intra-activity that have been theorized by some feminist scholars and new materialists. For instance, if "world"-travelling is theorized as a willful practice, how might nonhuman performativity complicate the notions of agency associated only with human actors in the case of women adult educators working across national boundaries? Additionally, how can the concepts of diffraction and intra-activity enrich and complicate our understandings of feminist pedagogical practices such as critical self-reflection and praxis?

Together, these three theoretical frames can be put together in order to produce new ways of thinking about how adult educators might work in feminist ways across national borders. Lugones' (1987) work on playful, "world"-travelling with the intention of cultivating loving perception toward other women is an important anchor piece that can be used to theorize a playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling for women adult educators who are interested in working in feminist ways at the interstices of local and global communities. I will begin by briefly describing the concept of feminist poststructural subjectivities which will later be used to engage with Lugones' (1987) work.

Feminist Poststructural Subjectivities

Feminist poststructural subjectivities are a product of postmodern and poststructural influences on feminist theories. Adult Education scholar Anne B. Ryan (2001) defined feminist poststructuralism as using all of the theoretical tools of poststructuralism while maintaining the feminist tradition of staying rooted in the everyday experiences of women and acknowledging these experiences as political phenomena. Some concerns of feminist poststructuralism include language, discourse, power, gender, subject positions, positioning within discourses, difference, deconstruction, and identity politics (Ryan, 2001). Adult Education scholar Elizabeth Tisdell (1998) identified four elements of poststructural feminist thought: critiquing structural feminist theories, problematizing the notion of "truth," acknowledging that identity is constantly shifting, and deconstructing categories or binary opposites.

In this paper, I will focus primarily on the concept of constantly shifting identities, or poststructural feminist subjectivities. The notion of the subject in poststructural thought challenges the liberal-humanist concept that there is a singular and static self. Feminist poststructural subjectivities conceptualize the "self" or subject as plural, unstable, and always becoming (Davies, 2003). Furthermore, feminist poststructuralism not only considers how subjectivities are discursively and historically constituted, but also how the individual is always a site of conflicting and plural forms of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Educational scholar Bronwyn Davies (2010) has also theorized the about the complexity of defining feminist poststructural subjectivities. Davies distinguished between phenomenology's subject-of-will and the poststructuralist ~~subject~~-of-thought, where she places the ~~subject~~ under erasure. She argued that the ~~subject~~ is simultaneously singular and plural, and made up of emergent multiplicities. This has implications for notions of agency, which Davies (2010) argued comes from the capacity to critically examine and produce new thought through the use of imagination, the senses, and the intellect. Davies (2010) described this as distinct from the illusory agency that the subject-of-will is thought to possess, because the subject-of-will only views agency as the process of making choices from itself, and remains ignorant of how choice might be influenced from forces outside of the self. Davies (2010) work and definition of poststructural subjectivities begins to take up material and discursive considerations regarding agency.

Posthuman Concepts of Human and Nonhuman Intra-Activity

When referring to posthuman concepts of human and nonhuman intra-activity in this paper, I draw from Karen Barad's (2007) notions of intra-activity, diffraction, agential realism, ontoepistemology, and posthuman performativity. Barad (2007) was influenced by Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, and Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity in quantum mechanics. Barad (2007) is also situated amongst material feminists and new materialists who take up aspects of Deleuze & Guattari's (1972) philosophy of

immanence, which theorized the entangled nature of the material and the discursive. In the philosophy of immanence, human beings and nature are not seen as separate, but rather entangled in a process of producing each other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). Drawing from this work, Barad (2007) theorized a relationship between the material world and discursive practices, which was different from a trend within poststructural theory to prioritize the discursive over the material (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Karen Barad (2007) was interested in exploring how our intra-actions with human and nonhuman bodies produce subjectivities and performative enactments. Intra-activity is the term that Barad (2007) and others have used to describe the complex entanglement of human and nonhuman bodies, where matter is dynamic and shifting just like the poststructuralist conception of human subjectivities. Another important concept described by Barad (2007) is diffraction. Diffraction is a physical phenomenon that is contrasted with the concept of reflection. Barad (2007) used the metaphor of how ocean waves travel as they pass over a boundary, opening, or obstruction to illuminate the concept of diffraction. As the ocean waves travel across the obstruction they are dispersed differently and both the waves and the obstruction are made fundamentally different in the process of intra-action that occurs. Barad (2007) preferred the term diffraction over the term reflection, because reflection is the process of critical self-positioning that implies sameness and mirroring, and does not necessarily account for change like diffraction does.

Another important concept is Barad's (2007) effort to deliberately connect ontology and epistemology, into a holistic idea of knowing in being. This is referred to as ontoepistemology, similar to the concept of mindbody. Using this ontoepistemological orientation, Barad (2007) discussed how agency is enacted by humans and nonhumans in a framework that she called agential realism. Agential realism explains how agency might be complicated when considering the intra-actions of humans and nonhumans, the material and the discursive, and natural and cultural phenomena (Barad, 2007). These concepts represent a further rejection of binaries and dualisms expressed in poststructural thought by adding the notion of posthuman performativity, or the performance of nonhumans. According to many material feminists and new materialists, nature should not be assumed to be static, but rather also in the process of becoming and intra-acting (Coole & Frost, 2010).

"Worlds" and "World"-Travelling: An Intra-Active Process?

Lugones (1987) theorized her concept of "worlds" and "world"-travelling after experiencing ontological confusion about whether or not she could be described as having the characteristic of "playful." She discovered that some people she knew, those who knew her in worlds where she was "at-ease," thought of her as being a playful person. However, people from other worlds, such as those who knew her in academia, did not think she was a playful person at all. She argued that whether or not she was "playful" depended upon what world she was in, and that this showed how the self could change depending on what world a person happened to be inhabiting. She was careful to note that the change was not due to a lack of ease in the world, but rather that the attribute was not there, and that this demonstrated a shift in self; she had turned from a person who was playful in one world, into a person that was not playful in another world. In light of this observation, Lugones (1987) described that she was not writing about a self, but of plural selves. Even though Lugones (1987) did not frame it in poststructural language, her descriptions serve as a concrete illustration of poststructural subjectivities in action. The plural

selves that she describes are parallel to the notion of the self as plural, non-fixed, and always in the state of becoming. Pivotal to the notion of plural selves and subjectivities described by Lugones (1987) are her definitions of "worlds" and "world"-travelling.

Lugones (1987) described a "world," not as a worldview, but as a number of possible spaces such as a society, a part of society, a space that is incomplete and becoming, a space that references people, places, and things that do not exist within it, and/or made up of people and ideas. She wrote that it was also possible to occupy multiple worlds at the same time, resulting in ambiguous and plural ways of being. Lugones (1987) emphasized that her definition of a "world" was incomplete and subject to continuous revision, a quality which also runs parallel to feminist poststructural sensibilities. Through her description of "worlds," I began to wonder whether these "worlds" could include both human and nonhuman bodies. Lugones' (1987) language does not necessarily highlight the nonhuman or posthuman performativity, however her invitation to continually redefine "worlds" makes the addition of the material to her discursive definitions of "worlds" possible and productive.

Lugones (1987) argued that "worlds" construct people and their selves. If the "worlds" are redefined to explicitly include both human and nonhuman bodies, then Lugones' (1987) idea of how "worlds" construct people and their selves can be seen as an example of Barad's (2007) concept of human and nonhuman intra-action. This is particularly powerful when you consider Lugones' (1987) notion of travel, which she describes as the process where a person shifts into being another person in transit between, or while inhabiting overlapping "worlds." Therefore, the act of deliberately "world"-travelling involves the embodiment of multiple, non-static, subjectivities, where "one does not experience any underlying I." (Lugones, 1987, p. 12). This is consistent with Davies' (2010) theorizing on the ~~subject~~ of poststructuralism. Rather than having a static self, Lugones (1987) referred to animating identities and becoming an ambiguous being and her choice of the word "animating" brings to mind the concept of performativity (Butler, 1990). Although Lugones (1987) did not mention the ways that nonhuman bodies might animate identities and intra-act with human animation of identities, Barad's (2007) concepts of posthuman performativity could be incorporated in order to consider how non-human and human bodies can also become ambiguous beings, capable of intra-acting in playful and survival-rich ways.

Lugones (1987) argued that the quality of animating ambiguous identities can be survival-rich, particularly when it is animated with a "playful" attitude. Citing her own experiences with losing her own playful identity, Lugones (1987) argued that a lack of playfulness does not indicate a lack of ease in a world, but rather a lack of health in that world. In other words, it is not healthy for a body to be in a "world" that constructs that body as unplayful. Already, Lugones (1987) has set up a framework to consider how both human and nonhuman bodies might achieve a healthy state of being and knowing, or an ontoepistemological theory of health through intra-action.

Working Across Borders with Playful, Intra-Active, "World"-Travelling

Playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling takes up the notion of Lugones' (1987) feminist theory of playful, "world"-travelling, relating her concept of plural selves to feminist poststructural subjectivities, and adding Barad's (2007) notions of human and nonhuman intra-activity as a lens for considering teaching and learning. Using Lugones' (1987) work I have distilled four principles that could be taken up in the process of playful, intra-active, "world"-

travelling. These principles include openness to surprise about the way the world "is," openness to self-construction, engaging in creative intra-actions in the world, and not holding norms as sacred. For an educator, these principles might be animated by the attitudes of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, and finding ambiguity, contradictions, and complexity as a source of joy and wisdom. I will describe each of these proposed principles for playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling and consider how they might be put to use by women adult educators who wish to work in feminist ways across national borders.

The first principle for playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling is animating an attitude or way of knowing and being that is open to surprise about the way that the world "is," or how "worlds" might be. This means that an educator would not expect the world to be orderly or neatly packaged, and would at least remain open to the possibility of complexity. Essential to this process of being open to surprise, is a willingness by the educator to relinquish worries about being competent—another important aspect of playfulness that Lugones (1987) mentions. This would also include openness to acknowledging human and nonhuman intra-activity, and the potential for posthuman performativity to surprise educators.

Barad's (2007) concept of ontoepistemology can be helpful to understanding this principle, because it theorizes the simultaneous and connected act of being and knowing. Lugones (1987) argued that travelling to another person's world would allow someone not only to understand, but also to love the person through knowing them and experiencing a shift in self; essentially becoming new through knowing them. An openness to being surprised by the worlds of others, and the possibilities inherent within them, is critical to this process of allowing ourselves to be changed and to animate loving perception of others. For women adult educators who are interested in working in feminist ways across borders, this could mean entering a teaching and learning space without preconceived notions about what the teaching and learning spaces will be or should be. This could be animated by recognizing or imagining new spaces and arenas for learning when working across cultural and national boundaries.

The second principle of playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling is openness to self-construction that includes posthuman performativity. This means that an educator would not become stuck or fixed on particular constructions of themselves, but would remain open to the possibility of what they might become, in order to work in feminist ways through responding to particular teaching and learning intra-actions. This has particular implications for pedagogy, because it changes the ways that an educator might animate aspects of their "selves" in teaching and learning intra-actions. Specifically, women adult educators who are working across national borders could re-conceptualize what has been called critical self-reflection as a process of diffraction which indicates that all bodies (human and nonhuman) engaged in an intra-action will be changed from the process. This is an elaboration on and re-consideration the term self-reflection, which implies mirroring and sameness between bodies and phenomenon. Women adult educators might also take up an intra-active view of praxis, which would consider how educators not only construct learning environments, but are constructed by them as well.

One of the important aspects of playful, "world"-travelling that Lugones (1987) mentioned was allowing ambiguous and multiplicitous selves to be and to be known. For women adult educators who are interested in working in feminist ways across borders, this could also mean entering a teaching and learning space without preconceived notions about similarities or dissimilarities across shared identities of being female and other intersecting positionalities. For

instance, in English's (2003) work she noted that Western women adult educators often embodied multiple identities which troubled the notion of literature on women and development that singularly might have represented them as colonizers. One way to animate playful, "world"-travelling could be for an educator to lessen their own sense of self-importance or through acknowledging the ways that they are constructed by human and nonhuman phenomena so that more realistic and ethical choices about teaching and learning can be made.

The third principle for engaging in playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling is for an educator to animate and acknowledge themselves as creative intra-active beings as they travel through worlds. Although Lugones (1987) mentioned that to engage in playful, "world"-travelling, a person should act as a creative force in a world, rather than remaining passive, adding the notion of intra-activity to her work shows how we are always already having an impact on our worlds. In this sense, it is not possible to remain a passive force in the world. Even seemingly inactive or passive stances will have some kind of performativity or intra-action. For instance, if an educator chooses to say nothing about an injustice, the passivity of the educator is still an act with material implications for learning in that environment. This requires that women adult educators working across national borders reconsider commonly held notions of agency. Women adult educators working across national borders are not simply constructed by the worlds they travel in and out of, they are also a part of a system of architects of those worlds. By acknowledging that educators have this nuanced and intra-active agency might help educators to create more ethical ways of moving and being in the world.

Finally, the fourth principle for engaging in the pedagogy of playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling is that, while we may have certain rules, none are so sacred that they cannot be changed. This might be animated by women adult educators working across national borders, through a willingness to find ambiguity and complexity as a source of wisdom and enjoying the journey through uncertainty. Although certain principles have been offered as a way to understand what enacting playful, intra-active, "world"-traveling might look like, the process of diffractive, intra-active praxis and the animation of playful ambiguous selves may reveal very different versions of those adult educators and the ways they conduct teaching and learning across national boundaries.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have offered a theoretical lens for how adult educators might work in feminist ways across borders, and how a notion of playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling might serve as one way of accomplishing this goal. I have used the poststructural concept of subjectivities and posthuman concept of human and nonhuman intra-activity to work alongside Maria Lugones' writings about ambiguous and multiplicitous "selves," and I have proposed that adult educators adopt and utilize a framework of playful, intra-active, "world"-travelling. Four principles that could be taken up by adult educators are animating an openness to surprise about the way the world "is" or could be, openness to self-construction, engaging in creative intra-actions in the world, and not holding norms as sacred. Together this flexible framework can help forge new possibilities for working in feminist ways cross-culturally and across national borders.

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