pp. 106–122 Journal of Experiential Education • 2005, Volume 28, No. 2

Turning Experiential Education and Critical Pedagogy Theory into Praxis

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The educational theories of experiential education and critical pedagogy intersect in a number of ways. One of the intended aims of both of these pedagogies is that the purpose of education should be to develop a more socially just world (Itin, 1999; Kincheloe, 2004). One of the key issues still facing experiential education theory and critical pedagogy is its implementation within the post-secondary classroom. There is a lack of congruence between the pedagogical theories that are espoused and the actual classroom practices that are employed. The purpose of this article is to explore some of the ways for experiential educators and critical pedagogues to begin engaging in a more purposeful classroom praxis that acts on the theoretical underpinnings of these pedagogies as one means to work toward their shared vision of a more socially just world.

Keywords: Experiential Education, Critical Pedagogy, Theory and Practice

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I often hear people say that experiential education is experience rich but theory poor. For me personally, this saying did perhaps ring true during my early years using experiential education, particularly during the period of time when I was leading wilderness trips full time and experience and play were at the heart of my practice.

Now that I teach experiential education in the post-secondary classroom, in the School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks, & Tourism at Lakehead University, Ontario, and have explored experiential education theory and the broader field of education, I have come to realize that experiences that lack intention, purpose, and direction most often simply represent play. Play is fun; but play is not always enough, especially if there is some educational end toward which the practice (experience) is directed. I believe that my students need to more fully consider the aim, intent, and purpose of their practice(s) as a means to responding to the criticism that experiential education is experience rich but theory poor.

I believe that one means to help students accomplish this is through developing their understanding and their location within some of the broader educational theories. It is interesting to note that many educational theories suffer from a converse weakness to that of experiential education. In other words, it is argued that educational theories are theory rich but experience poor (Eisner, 2002), lacking in practical information about instructional strategies (Gore, 1993). Perhaps there is some value, then, in exploring experiential education alongside other educational theories, as a means to examine the gap between theory and practice.

The purpose of this article is to consider how theory and practice can be employed within the post-secondary experiential education classroom as a means to work toward one of its potential educational aims, the development of a more socially just world (Itin, 1999). This article will also explore and examine the fields of critical pedagogy to help support this argument. Critical pedagogy has numerous educational aims—one that is shared with experiential education is that the purpose of education should be to develop a more socially just world (Kincheloe, 2004).

The overarching purpose of this article will be to explore some of the ways to begin to develop classroom practices that act on the theoretical underpinnings of experiential education and critical pedagogy, and their shared educational aim. One of the underlying assumptions of this article is that by acting on their methodological desires, in essence by "practicing what is preached," experiential educators and critical

pedagogues will be better able to work toward one intended educational aim that their theories purport.

Experiential Education

As I was working toward a Masters of Science degree in experiential education, I discovered intellectually what I had known intuitively—that there is value in engaging in purposeful experience as one component of the educative process. In other words, in addition to learning through books, lectures, and more "traditional" methods of teaching and learning, learning may be enhanced through an intentional experience. An experience may assume many forms. It may be as simple as rearranging the chairs into a circle to encourage dialogue between students or it may be more involved such as engaging in a student-directed classroom experience.

I have seen experiential education employed in a math class where students build "geometry town" to experience the mathematical equations they are learning, and in a science lab where students use an egg drop experiment to better understand a physics concept. Experiential education may also include the use of adventure education and/or wilderness trips as a component of the educative process. In this instance, a course on desert ecology may use the desert as a classroom and bring the texts, notebooks, pens, and students into this newly defined classroom setting.

Support for experiential education can be found in the earliest form of learning from the earliest time of humans. From learning being passed through storytelling and oral tradition to Plato's interest in soul, dialogue, and continuing education, experiential education has prevailed as a dominant mode of learning in Western culture (Richards, 1966; Smith, 2002). John Dewey (1938) expressed his belief that subject matter should not be learned in isolation, and that education should begin with student experience and should be contextual. More recently, Paulo Freire (1970) suggested that educational praxis should combine both action and reflection as part of the educative process, rejecting what he called the "banking model" of education, whereby the role of teachers was to deposit knowledge into the "empty" repository of the student mind.

Experiential education today may be best defined as a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values (Association for Experiential Education, 2004). The aim(s), goal(s), and purpose(s) of experiential education depend upon where it is being practiced, why it is being practiced, and by whom. Some of the commonly cited goals include: character building (Brookes, 2003), critical thinking (Brookfield, 1996), and a more socially just world (Itin, 1999), among others.

Critical Pedagogy

While pedagogy is most simply conceived of as the study of teaching and learning (Knowles, 1973), the term critical pedagogy embodies notions of how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns (Giroux, 1997). Paulo Freire is regarded as the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy for his work on recognizing the relationship among education, politics, imperialism, and liberation (McLaren, 2000). "All descriptions of pedagogy—like knowledge in general—are shaped by those who devise them and the values they hold" (Kincheloe, 2004, pp. 5-6). Kincheloe would argue, however, that one commonality between the various descriptions is that a critical pedagogical vision within schools is grounded in the social, cultural, cognitive, economic, and political context that is part of the larger community and society.

This form of critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society. It explores how the project of schooling may be recast in ways that focus teaching on the development of a moral project(s) for education as social transformation (McLaren, 2003). Critical pedagogy, like experiential education, encourages critical thinking and promotes practices that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations (Keesing-Styles, 2003).

Theory vs. Practice

Theory is often conceived of as an abstract idea or phenomenon. Practice involves an action component that goes beyond the abstraction of theory. In this sense, practice and experience are one and the same. One way to conceive of this is that theory represents knowledge, while practice is the application of that knowledge. One of the key issues still facing the fields of both experiential education and critical pedagogy is its implementation (Estes, 2004; Keesing-Styles, 2003).

There exists a lack of congruence between the pedagogical theories and the actual classroom practices. Freire, an inaugural philosopher of both pedagogies, encourages educators to join him on his professional mission of the search for "unity between theory and practice" (McLaren, 2000, p. 5). Thus, theory informs practice, while experiential and practical knowledge can be employed as a means to understanding and interpreting that theory. This next section will examine the gap that exists between theory and practice within the fields of experiential education and critical pedagogy.

Experiential Education

Many experiential educators identify the lack of congruence between what is theoretically espoused and what is practiced. Kolb (1992) illuminated the gap between what Argyris and Schon (1974) referred to as "theories of action" and "theories in use." For example, Kolb suggested that many experiential education programs emphasize that reflection is an essential element of the experiential learning process and yet practitioners may actually leave little time for debriefing, journaling, group discussion, counseling, or other forms of reflection. "What practitioners actually do in the field in this case, choosing action at the expense of reflection, rather than creating a balance, indicates theory-in-use" (p. 25) rather than theory-in-action. The significant issue here is that, as practitioners, we may say act a certain way, but the espoused theories-in-action may be quite different from what actually happens in the program. More recently, Estes (2004) concluded that while experiential educators claim to value student-centered learning, these values, as evidenced in practice, are often teacher-centered. Kolb and Estes encourage experiential educators to examine the incongruence between espoused values and values in practice within learning environments.

Critical Pedagogy

As valuable as its contribution has been in placing pedagogy in the forefront of discussion, critical pedagogy still exists more as a theory of pedagogy rather than a practical specification, informing educators about the principles that should govern their work but saying little about how they might actually do it (Osborne, 1990). In fact, the work of many critical theorists has come under a similar criticism to the one that was raised earlier in reference to experiential educators. Eisner (2002) criticizes critical theorists as being more interested in displaying the shortcomings of schooling than providing models toward which schools should aspire. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2002) suggest that greater collaboration between critical scholars and school teachers could further strengthen a critical classroom practice. It is agreed that critical theory continues to be excessively abstract and too far removed from the everyday life of schools.

Giroux (1988) declared that critical educational theory has "been unable to move from criticism to substantive vision" (p. 37). He further illustrates this by maintaining that critical theory has been unable to "posit a theoretical discourse and set of categories for constructing forms of knowledge, classroom social relationships, and visions of the future that give substance to the meaning of critical pedagogy" (Giroux, pp. 37-38).

Gore (1993) argues that, in fact, some of the best writings of critical theorists offer little suggestion of strategies that teachers might use in

practice. Furthermore, these writings provide no explication of what attempts are made within these educators' own classrooms to implement the critical pedagogy they espouse. These critiques impel educators, both experiential educators and critical pedagogues, to begin to develop a critical praxis.

Experiential and Critical Praxis

I believe that the potential for experiential education and critical pedagogy to achieve one of their intended aims will be strengthened through examining the ways in which educators can turn the theory of these two pedagogies into purposeful classroom practices. I will take up the notion of praxis as a means to describe classroom practices in this next section of the article. Freire (1970) maintains that praxis involves both action and reflection. From Freire's perspective, there is no final act of knowing. Knowledge has historicity; it is always in the process of being. If absolute knowledge could be attained, the possibility of knowing would disappear for there would no longer be any questions to ask or problems to solve. Praxis, therefore, starts with an abstract idea (theory) or an experience, and incorporates reflection upon that idea or experience and then translates it into purposeful action. Praxis is reflective, active, creative, contextual, purposeful, and socially constructed.

The remainder of this article will be devoted to addressing how to work within some of the aforementioned incongruence and overlap between theory and practice by examining a number of methods to engage in an experiential and critical praxis. More specifically, I will explore some of the ways to begin to develop a praxis that acts on the theoretical underpinnings of experiential education and critical pedagogy, and their shared educational aim that education can be one means to develop a more socially just world.

Giroux (1997) encourages both students and educators to ask themselves the following questions as they begin to practically explore some of the theoretical assumptions that critical pedagogy proffers: (a) What counts as knowledge? (b) How is knowledge produced and legitimized? (c) Whose interests does this knowledge serve? (d) Who has access to knowledge? (e) How is this knowledge distributed within the classroom? (f) What kinds of social relationships within the classroom serve to parallel and reproduce the social relations of production in the wider society? (g) How do the prevailing methods of evaluation serve to legitimize existing forms of knowledge? and (h) What are the contradictions that exist between the ideology embodied in existing forms of knowledge and the objective social reality?

These questions, which examine the role of the dominant ideology in establishing some of the underlying assumptions about teaching and learning, will be explored throughout the remainder of this paper. The dis-

cussion that follows will consider experiential education and critical pedagogy theory, suggesting a number of classroom practices that can be employed as a means to examine some of the previous assumptions in relation to the following: the purpose and structure of schools, the curriculum, teaching methodology, the role of teachers, and the role of students within the post-secondary experiential education classroom.

The Purpose and Structure of Schools

As previously stated, one shared educational aim of both experiential education and critical pedagogy is that they both conceive of teaching, learning, and the project of schooling in ways that focus teaching on the development of a moral project(s) for education as social transformation (Itin, 1999; McLaren, 2003). When students query me about my own intent regarding teaching, I tell them that, for me, the purpose of schools is to develop peoples' critical thinking skills as a means to develop a more socially just world. They often ask me how I am able to maintain this ideal when most people believe that the purpose of schools is to prepare people for a growing and changing workforce (Pinar et al., 2002). I tell them that, in my opinion, schools can do both—they can prepare people for future work in the world "that is," while still offering them a vision of what "could be." For me, that vision of what "could be" is the development of a more socially just world.

Schools do more than provide instruction. Schools provide the norms and principles of conduct that are learned through students' varied experiences in schools and in the larger society. These norms and principles are most often associated with the ideologies of the dominant race, gender, religion, and culture of the social class, or group of people that is in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003). Schools act to perpetuate these dominant ways of knowing.

One way for students to begin to become cognizant of this is by asking them to engage in a series of experiential activities that offer counter-hegemonic insights into the dominant ways of knowing that school structures tend to transmit. If hegemony represents not only political and economic control of one social class over others but also the ability of the dominant class to inject its ways of knowing so that those who are oppressed by it begin to accept it as common knowledge (Giroux, 1997), then counter-hegemony offers a vision of what "could be" different if less oppressive ways of knowing and institutions were in place.

I encourage students to discuss the ways in which school structures serve the interests that support the dominant educational and social ideologies. One way to engage students in better understanding and examining the ways in which schools act as agents of socialization and assimilation

is by having them do an institutional "hegemony treasure hunt" (Fawcett, Bell, & Russell, 2002). Having students physically explore the school building, with the particular goal of examining assumptions about the purpose of schools and the school structure, is one way for students to begin to employ the theory in practice. Asking students to walk through the faculty hallways, or a hallway with classrooms in it, and hunt for observable artifacts that allow them to examine some of the commonly held institutional assumptions is also educative. Ask students to consider the following: What did you observe? What assumptions do those observations contain about who holds power and who has a "voice?" In what ways do your observations inform your understanding about the purpose of schools, school structures and school culture? Students can additionally be encouraged to walk down the hallway of the administrative offices considering some of these same questions.

This activity can be done with the specific purpose of examining educational assumptions or can be employed to examine an array of other institutional assumptions including: environmental issues, gender issues, issues related to institutional accessibility, and issues of hierarchy and power, among others.

Curriculum

The content of the curriculum and the methods of pedagogy employed teach lessons (Weiler, 2001). Apple (1990) and Giroux (1988) describe how both the content and form of curriculum are ideological in nature. According to them, the ideals and culture associated with the dominant class were argued to be the ideas and content of schooling. Therefore, knowledge and classroom practices also affirm the values, interests and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society (McLaren, 2003). Eisner (2002) refers to this as the "hidden curriculum." The hidden curriculum consists of the messages given to children not only by school structures but by textbooks, teachers, and other school resources. This curriculum is often believed to serve the interest of the power elite of the school and society, and is therefore inherently unable to support an equitable school system or society (Apple, 1975; Eisner, 2002).

Questioning assumptions about curriculum and its influence on existing forms of public school classroom knowledge, teaching styles, and evaluation will help uncover some of this hidden curriculum. Encouraging students to expand their "treasure hunt" by including an exploration of course content provides one means for them to investigate some of these assumptions. I ask students to look at the syllabi for various courses. I then break students up into small groups and have them share some of the information contained in those syllabi: the required readings,

the assessment methods, the "tone" of the writing, and whatever else they read that "speaks" to the curriculum.

I encourage students to stay in the same small groups and explore some of the curricular assumptions within the context of the broader university. I encourage them to visit the university bookstore and the library, asking them to consider what groups or individuals seem to have more representation in curricular material, and what groups or individuals seem to have less representation. I then ask them about the ways in which their discoveries inform our discussion about the influence of the dominant ideology on curriculum and whether or not Giroux's (1997) ideas about the hidden curriculum are valid and accurate.

I additionally ask students about what sources of knowledge are most frequently represented in the curriculum. I ask students to generate a hierarchical list of what sources of knowledge are considered to be the most valid and what sources are considered to be the least valid. I start this activity by asking them if they believe there is value in experience. In my fourth year experiential education course, they inevitably answer "yes, of course." I then ask them how this source of knowledge compares to the knowledge that is contained within a peer-reviewed journal. They then better understand the question and begin to list multiple sources of knowledge that typically include: peer-reviewed journals, non-peer–reviewed journals, textbooks, newspapers, television, peers, parents, and experience, among others. They have a harder time trying to hierarchically list them than they do generating the list once they have started. When I ask them to try to list them hierarchically, I encourage them to consider their findings from the previously described activities, asking them what sources of knowledge seemed to be more valid than other sources based on the course syllabi and the artifacts from their trip to the bookstore and the library.

Critically questioning some of these assumptions about curriculum impels students to appreciate that while there are many sources of knowledge, there are certainly some that are more valued within the university context. They then begin to understand that knowledge is, at least in part, socially constructed, partial, and contextual. With advanced undergraduate students or with master's students, this information can serve as a springboard to discuss some of the broader issues around constructions of truth, reality, and knowledge and the ways in which the broader educational theories of constructivism, postpositivism, and poststructuralism can further inform this conversation.

Teaching Methodology

Teaching methodology represents another source of educational hegemony. Freire (1970) refers to the "banking model" of education

whereby the student functions as an open repository to whatever knowledge the teacher chooses to deposit that day. This methodology further supports the dominant educational ideology that silences and marginalizes students' voice and experience. This happens through the belief that the main purpose of schools is to transmit the knowledge necessary for people to enter the workforce and that good teaching involves the transmission of that knowledge through the most socially efficient means (Pinar et al., 2002).

One method to counter the "banking model" of education is the problem-posing (liberatory) method of education espoused by Freire (1970). Within this practice, dialogue is employed as a pedagogical method in juxtaposition to the oppressive monological methods of knowledge transmission. Problem-posing education counters the hierarchical nature of "banking" education by suggesting that education should be cointentional, involving both teachers and students as subjects. Through dialogue new relationships emerge, that of teacher-student and student-teacher (Freire, 1970).

Within this context, there is opportunity for moving beyond some of the limiting factors of banking education. Changing the classroom setting by moving all of the chairs into a circle is one possibility. This simple act "says" a lot. It places the students and the teacher in a physically mutual relationship. Involving students in the creation of goals, objectives, and expectations of the course is another way to help offset some of the power imbalance inherent in the banking model. Choosing course material that is inclusive and represents some of the aforementioned multiple sources of knowledge is important. This, too, can be done in collaboration with students. The teacher gives structure and direction to this process, encouraging academic rigor and thoughtfulness. "The liberating teacher does not wash his or her hands of the students" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 172). Rather, teacher-student and student-teacher are co-creating the methodological practices of the classroom.

Some of these methodological practices may include: experiential activities, small-group work, seminar-style, lecture, student presentation, discussion, and creative expression. In most of my classes, I try to employ a mixed methods approach. I begin by identifying a clear purpose to the lesson and identify related readings. I then try to incorporate mini-lecture, guided discussion or small group work, and an experiential activity as components of each lesson. It is time-consuming, but I do find that students stay engaged and learn more because a mixed methods approach addresses their various learning styles and intelligences.

If multiple "ways of knowing" and multiple sources of knowledge are valued, then multiple methods of assessment and evaluation must also be considered. These may include journals, presentations, and critical reflec-

tion papers, in addition to tests and quizzes. They may also include peer, self, and/or teacher evaluation. As students move through my courses and have better preparation and understanding of the student-centered classroom, I provide them with increased options. Students can contract a mark or they can choose to receive only written feedback on their assignments, rewriting as they progress through the course and then negotiating a mutually agreed upon mark with me at the end of the semester.

Role of Teachers as Agents of Social Change

Because education is by nature social, historical, political, and cultural, "there is no way we can talk about some universal, unchanging role for the teacher" (Shor, 1987, p. 211). "Teachers at all levels of schooling represent a potentially powerful force for social change" (Giroux, 1997, p. 28). Teachers can develop pedagogical theories and methods that link self-reflection and understanding with a commitment to change the nature of the larger society. Teaching is, thus, a theoretical, intellectual, and political practice within the critical classroom. Teachers need to work toward becoming more fully "cognizant of the political nature of their practice and assume responsibility for this rather than denying it" (Shor, 1987, p. 211). The teacher as an agent of social change attempts to build coherence and consistency as a classroom virtue, while recognizing that she is operating as an agent to either perpetuate the institutional structures and those people who hold power within that structure, or to be critical of the institution and those who hold power as a means to lessen oppression. It is imperative that teachers investigate their "situatedness" within this context, helping to reveal some of the inherent biases and assumptions that play themselves out in classroom practice.

One of the first tasks of the critical educator is to explore her own subjectivity and "locate" or situate herself within that praxis. This process is both active and reflexive. Subjectivity, in this sense, represents an ongoing construction of the development of the personal lens through which one sees the world, and through which notions of reality and truth are shaped. This lens, alongside the stories that are told and the narratives that give coherence and meaning to life, inform the history that is engaged, the science that is studied, and the rules of grammar that are employed and taught (Simon, 1992). They further inform the texts that are chosen and the material that is presented. The teacher must therefore explore this subjectivity as a means to understanding not only the ways in which she teaches (methodology), but also the content that is taught.

I often start my course on experiential education with recognition of my own situatedness and bias by telling students a bit about my upbringing, my background, and my own experiences with teaching and learning. I "locate" myself as someone who is a product of the system. I tell them

that although questioning educational assumptions and engaging in counter-hegemonic practices represents a central role in the courses that I teach, I was never particularly good at engaging in this form of praxis myself, as a student. I tell them that I found it hard to question assumptions about teaching, learning, the role of the teacher, and the role of the student when my K-12 school experience prepared me to be silent and passive, and to "brown-nose" the teacher as a means to attaining an "A."

I find that students become more at ease with some of the issues that are being presented in class after I self-disclose in this way. They recognize that it is okay for this "work" to be unsettling, and that it is okay for them to want to know how to be liberated while still maintaining an A average. I encourage students to examine assumptions about my own classroom and my own teaching. When the students and I start to fall back into some of the hegemonic patterns of a more traditional classroom, I encourage them to "name" these and to have the courage to stop the class so that we can examine what is happening. I encourage them to do the same with marking. A good system of marking is one that is regarded as fair and reasonable by those who are being marked, as well as by the person who is doing the marking.

I practically implement some of the theoretical ideals of student-centered learning, including: valuing student voice, promoting and practicing dialogue, shared decision-making, and valuing their previous experiences and their ways of knowing. I also tell them that my role as teacher is different than their role as students because of my, at least presumed, greater maturity of experience (Dewey, 1938). This puts me in the somewhat privileged position of facilitating certain aspects of the course, including: the initial course content, assessment methods, and marks.

Because I take a student-centered approach to teaching and learning in both the second and third-year courses that I teach, by the time students enroll in my fourth-year experiential education course, they have received some preparation to engage in a student-directed classroom. I provide some initial direction to the student-directed experiential education course, but decisions about assessment methods, course content, teaching methodology, and final marks are decided collaboratively by the class. I have learned that certain groups of students need more guidance than other groups when engaging in this process. I provide resources that help to inform their decisions and the minimal structure necessary to encourage success with establishing the content for this twelve-week course.

The Role of Students as Agents of Social Change

According to most critical theorists and experiential educators, students are not empty vessels, but rather are individuals with life experience and knowledge, situated within their own cultural, class, racial, historical,

and gender contexts (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Students arrive in the critical classroom with their individual expectations, hopes, dreams, diverse backgrounds, and life experiences, including a long history of previous schooling and educational hegemony.

When the role of the student in the critical classroom is thus considered, the assumption is that not only will an educator create a classroom condition that offers students the opportunity to work toward social change, to have a voice in the educational process, to have the knowledge and courage to be critical, and to be interested in and committed to this process, but that students have a responsibility to critically commit themselves to this process. This affords students the opportunity to fulfill their prescribed role (within the critical process) as agents of social change.

Students need to receive adequate preparation for functioning within the critical classroom context. If schools operate in accordance with their established roles in society (Giroux, 1997), it is quite possible that students may operate in the same manner. In other words, many students have been taught from early on that to be a "good student" means to be silent, passive, and accepting; a good student's primary purpose is to learn the knowledge the educator imparts in an unquestioning manner. hooks (1994) reinforces this by maintaining that even during college, the primary lesson was to learn obedience to authority.

Students need to locate themselves within the critical classroom in the same way the teacher does, exploring their own epistemologies and biases. Asking students to write educational autobiographies to explore their experiences with schools and with learning represents one starting point to this process. Encouraging students to share and discuss their autobiographies allows them an opportunity to better understand their various subjectivities and the differing educational experiences of students within the classroom. One common result of this process of "naming" is that students may awake from their passivity and begin to question some of their own previously held assumptions about teaching and learning. It also allows them to see that each individual within the classroom has had different experiences and holds different assumptions about teaching and learning.

I additionally ask students to consider their upbringing, parents, siblings, education, religion, and the values that inform their beliefs and to draw concentric circles that represent, in essence, the lens they employ to view the world. Students are then able to use this lens in describing how they, in part, "see" and interpret information and sources of knowledge. Asking students to read *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack* (McIntosh, 1989), and asking them to unpack their individual "backpack" of privilege allows them to name themselves and relate that to the domi-

nant ideology, locating their "positionality" in relation to that ideology.

Risks and Student-Directed Classrooms

It would be naïve of me to conclude here that the result of this is that students become liberated and begin to take responsibility for their education. The process of naming themselves, questioning educational assumptions, and engaging in student-directed classrooms is full of risk. Some of these risks may result in growth and positive change, or some of these risks may have more negative consequences or may be miseducative. Students and teachers may be empowered or they may feel frightened or threatened.

The risk-taking involved in a student-directed classroom almost always results in students disagreeing with either fellow students or the teacher over not only what texts should be read but how they should be read, and this process of questioning expands to curricular material in its entirety, as well as course assessment methods, methodology, required assignments, and all other aspects of any given course, in any given semester. Simon (1992) warns that this may lead to a number of questions, including: Who will make the decision about not only what we read, but what we write? What process of deliberation will be used and what forms of authority will be invoked?

The teacher needs to be prepared for how unsettling this process can be and needs to act upon her somewhat privileged position as facilitator to help guide this process. There is no set of prescriptive practices that describe how to do this. A teacher needs to rely on her own experience, her mastery of the subject matter, and her intuition when choosing to engage students in this process. It may be wise for a teacher who is new to the post-secondary classroom to begin this process slowly, considering ways to make the classroom more student-centered before delving into the complexities of a student-directed classroom experience.

There is also risk when students and teachers engage in the process of naming themselves. The project of naming oneself can provide teachers and students with a language of critique that proffers an understanding of how different subjectivities are positioned within a historically specific range of ideologies and social practices. But what happens when a student's voice expresses a "way of knowing" that bumps up against another student's "way of knowing" and the two are contradictory? Who gets heard? Do voices that express racism, sexism, or elitism have credence if the intent of the critical classroom is to create less oppressive ways of knowing and structures?

There is great potential in incorporating some of the play-based and group dynamics activities familiar to experiential educators to help with this. It is important to be attentive to creating a classroom community that

encourages a safe space for teaching and learning, but that also establishes ground rules that discourage further oppression and silencing. Helping students establish their level of comfort with sharing and discussing some of these issues by asking them to engage in a comfort zone activity on the first day of class is one place to start. When students disagree, employing the reflective activity known as fishbowling (Knapp, 1992) will allow students the opportunity to authentically listen to one another when trying to work through some of these differences.

Despite these challenges, the post-secondary experiential education classroom exists as an exciting site of learning. It can provide a foundation upon which to begin to encourage students to engage in a dialogue that analyzes the dominant ideologies and social practices that constitute schools and the larger society. This can provide a means for students to further consider the ways in which they can act as agents of social change in developing a different vision of schools and society, one that can reflect the ideals of a more socially just world.

Conclusion

A challenge to the critical pedagogue is how to incorporate some of these principles and avoid mere tokenism. A simple adjustment to the physical space of the classroom may not lead to greater dialogue and less hierarchy. Students accustomed to some of the comforts of the banking model of education (Freire, 1970) may be unable or unwilling to accept this change in methodology. It is important for an educator to act as facilitator and guide, teacher-student, student-teacher and engage in meaningful praxis with students, while avoiding paternalism. This, too, represents a challenge to critical pedagogy in practice.

There are many other challenges to engaging in this form of classroom praxis, including: lack of student preparation, institutional constraints, student resistance, and the fact that research is often valued over teaching in post-secondary institutions and student-centered teaching requires a lot of time. That said, I believe the advantages to engaging in a more purposeful classroom praxis that acts on the theoretical underpinnings of experiential education and critical pedagogy can be one means to working toward a vision of a more socially just world.

Greater collaboration between theorists and teachers could further strengthen both the theory and the practice of the post-secondary experiential education classroom. It is agreed that critical pedagogy continues to be excessively abstract and too far removed from the everyday life of schools. "There is much to be learned from reflecting on the congruency (or lack thereof) between our methodological desires and practices" (Russell, 2003, p. 131).

This paper provides a vision of what "could be." It proffers ideals on the construction of a post-secondary classroom praxis that emphasizes the potential for classroom practices to reflect pedagogical theory. Shor and Freire (1987) ask, "What kind of teaching could make critical learning happen?" (p. 19). Imparting theoretical knowledge is no longer enough. In turn, an isolated experience that is disconnected to a broader theory or set of ideas is also insufficient. There is great potential in combining the best of both. The post-secondary experiential education classroom provides one site for the pursuit of a critical pedagogical praxis that is rich in both theory and practice.

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