

Critically Reflective Practice

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Dr Bernie Sullivan

Critical Theory and Action Research

- ▶ Action research is an approach that involves critical thinking
- ▶ Some theorists refer to action research as a critical theory approach
- ▶ Like action research, critical theory started from a sociological background
- ▶ Concerned not merely with how things are but how they might be and should be

Origins of Criticality

- ▶ Socrates was a critical thinker - cost him his life!
- ▶ He questioned the status quo, subjected long-standing beliefs to scrutiny and called conventional wisdom into question
- ▶ For this critical stance, he was condemned to death - for corrupting the morals of the young and doubting the gods

Growth of Critical Theory

- ▶ Modern critical theory originated in Frankfurt School
- ▶ It began between WW1 and 2 and was grounded in Marxism
- ▶ Among the founders were: Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse, Horkheimer and Habermas
- ▶ Sceptical of tradition and absolute claims
- ▶ Anti-establishment - shared Gramsci's (1971) idea of hegemonic imbalance of power
- ▶ Key themes - concepts of alienation (through exploitation) and reification (treating people as things)

Critical Pedagogy

- ▶ Philosophy of education developed by Freire
- ▶ Informs relationships between teaching and learning
- ▶ Is a continuous process of unlearning, learning, relearning, reflection and evaluation
- ▶ It questions the dominant theories of education
- ▶ Particular focus on teaching for social justice - fairness and equity with regard to gender, race, class, disability and sexual orientation
- ▶ Proponents include Giroux, Shor, McLaren, Kincheloe, Apple, Aronowitz, Darder, Lather, hooks, Ladson-Billings and Kozol

Definitions of Critical Pedagogy

- ▶ An educational movement guided by passion and principle to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognise authoritarian tendencies and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action. (Giroux 2010, p.1)
- ▶ Habits of thought, reading, writing and speaking, which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology and personal consequence of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media or discourse. (Shor 1992, p.129)

McLaren's Critical Pedagogy

- ▶ A pedagogy of commitment and obligation - what is and what ought to be
- ▶ Locates the production of critical knowledge leading to praxis in social, spatial and geo-political contexts
- ▶ Political dimension - anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-democratic and emancipatory
- ▶ A praxis of being and becoming, of mental and manual labour, of thinking and doing, of reading and writing the word and the world (in the Freirean sense)

(McLaren 2015)

Critical Questions Posed by McLaren

- ▶ What are the theories that guide the production of critical knowledge?
- ▶ What are the actions that need to be undertaken to help inform our theories of knowledge in the production of social transformation?
- ▶ How can the development of critical consciousness inform a theory of knowledge or a theory of social transformation?
- ▶ How can a theory of knowledge production aid in the development of critical consciousness that leads to acts of social transformation?

(McLaren 2015: 28)

hooks and Critical Pedagogy

- ▶ Education as the practice of freedom through engaged pedagogy
- ▶ Pedagogy that emphasised wholeness - a union of mind, body and spirit (influenced by Thich Nhat Hanh)
- ▶ Engaged pedagogy empowers teachers as well as students
- ▶ ‘Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply’ (hooks 1994: 22)

Different Aspects of Critique

- ▶ Self-reflection
- ▶ Self-evaluation
- ▶ Self-awareness

- ▶ Not from an egotistical perspective but in the interest of enhancement and improvement in one's practice

Critical Reflection

- ▶ Ability to examine critically one's assumptions, strategies, thoughts and actions
- ▶ Challenges us to take a step back and examine our thinking through asking probing questions
- ▶ 'Unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity' (Larrivee 2000, p. 293).

Dewey on Reflective Practice

- ▶ ‘Reflection emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity, it enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view or purposes of which we are aware, to act in deliberate and intentional fashion, to know what we are about when we act.’ (Dewey 1933, p. 17)
- ▶ Cultivating a reflective disposition through attitudes of wholeheartedness, open-mindedness and responsibility

Schön on Reflection

- ▶ Reflection-in-practice: This involves reflecting during the course of the action, observing ourselves in the doing, on-the-spot thinking about the action and developing a new strategy of action and trying it out
- ▶ Reflection-on-practice: This takes place after the action has been completed - retrospectively, it is like pressing the playback button - rewinding and replaying the action, and it allows for deep reflection on all aspects of action
(Schön 1995)

Brookfield's Reflective Lenses

“... the process by which we research the assumptions informing our own practice by viewing these through complementary lenses:

- ▶ the lenses of our students' eyes,
- ▶ colleagues' perceptions,
- ▶ literature
- ▶ and our own autobiography.

Finally, we can review our personal autobiographies as learners so that we can make visceral connections to, and gain a better understanding of, the pleasures and terrors our own students are experiencing.”

(Brookfield 2006: 26)

Conclusion

- ▶ We can see, then, the importance of adopting a critically reflective mindset in the area of education
- ▶ Forming the habit of questioning our own assumptions and ideas will encourage us to develop an inquiry-oriented disposition in our students also
- ▶ Critically reflecting on our practice will create in us a desire to enhance our practice through undertaking self-study action research in that practice