

Reaching the Margins: Critical Feminist Practices in Nonformal Education for Street Children

DIANE RODRIGUEZ-KIINO

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the value of merging feminist and critical theory to undergird effective nonformal education practices for street children. Worldwide, street and working children deserve the chance, but lack the educational resources, to become critically conscious and productive citizens. The article examines nonformal education, defined as an alternative to traditional schooling, in which students learn vocational trades or academic subjects, aimed at enhancing their lives. Further, the paper intersects and applies feminist and critical epistemologies for marginalized youth. *Vis-à-vis* critical feminist practices, nonformal education programs globally can reach the widest possible sector and facilitate the growth and development of the most vulnerable populations.

Keywords: Nonformal education, street children, feminism, critical pedagogy

In every city in the world, poverty permeates the lives of some children. It is essential to a child's welfare to belong to a family or support group that meets his or her basic needs for survival - food, shelter, and clothing. Yet worldwide recession, natural calamities, and civil strife in developing regions contribute to a distinctly lower standard of living. Alarming, human sexual trafficking, psychological abuse, violence, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and especially homelessness plague many lives. For almost 150 million youth worldwide, the *street* is their home. Most have either a family they must help to support or no family at all (Amnesty International, 2011).

STREET CHILDREN

Although calculating the number of street children globally is nearly impossible, as educational researchers we have an ethical and moral obligation to capture their precarious environmental and sociocultural circumstances (i.e., family connection, child labor, school attendance, and behavior patterns). The definition of the term ‘street child’ differs among authors. In Wernham’s publication, “An Outside Chance, Street Children and Juvenile Justice – an International Perspective,” she draws attention to the multiple spaces that street children occupy internationally and how these contested terrains influence identity. She states:

The term ‘street children’ has both positive and negative connotations. It can label and stigmatise children or it can provide them with an identity and a sense of belonging. It can include a very wide range of children who: are homeless; work on the streets but sleep at home; either do or do not have family contact; work in open-air markets; live on the streets with their families; live in day or night shelters; spend a lot of time in institutions (e.g. prison). (2004, p. 13)

Earlier scholarship in this area reveals three distinct groups: (1) Children *on* the street have family connections and some sense of normality in their lives. They work on the streets, but may sleep at home and attend school. Delinquent behavior is not a common characteristic of this group; (2) Children *of* the street actually live in the street. They may have some connection with their families but basic survival needs are met on the streets, including familial-like companionships. This group is primarily absent from school, exhibits higher levels of delinquent behaviors, and is frequently in conflict with government officials; and (3) Abandoned children have completely broken off all association with their families and live and work in the streets. Like children of the streets, abandoned children express deviant behaviors and rarely attend school (UN Chronicle, 1989; le Roux & Sylvia, 1998a; Wernham, 2004). For the purposes of this research, Children *on* the street, children *of* the street, and abandoned children are the frequently employed terms.

As global citizens, how do we educate and empower this at-risk population? How do we explicitly teach street children about their basic human rights? In addressing the educational needs of street children, it is especially important to understand the differences among them. Educational strategies are designed and modified for children who work on the streets, and for those who work and also live on the streets. Desired pedagogical programs vary according to children’s needs. Children *on* the street may need collective organization skills and increased knowledge of human rights violations to protect themselves against violations of child labor laws. Children *of* the street may need a school curriculum that teaches entrepreneurialism and money management, whereas children *on* the street may

give all of their earnings to their families. Although severely neglected, children *on* the street typically have nuclear family units, which is unlike children *of* the streets, who only have each other.

NONFORMAL EDUCATION

Innovative and inclusive educational programs are essential to providing learning opportunities to all students, especially street children. Nonformal education expressly serves the widest margins and is often viewed as a “second chance,” providing individuals, like street children, with opportunities to learn, options they may not have had during primary or secondary education. Since the 1970s, there has been growth in the evolution of nonformal education systems, distinguishing them from the private and public formal school systems. Stromquist defines nonformal education as:

Education and training for out-of-school youth and adults in classes, courses, or activities intended to promote learning but not constituting part of the formal school system and not leading to formal qualifications such as diplomas or specific trade standards. Nonformal education typically concentrates on short programs of a few months duration. (1998a, p. 4)

Although exemplar nonformal education programs can be found worldwide, they have a profound impact in developing regions where underserved populations abound. Examples include Women’s Issues Network of Belize, which offers short-term leadership seminars for grassroots change agents and the Brazilian nonprofit *Casa de Passagem*, which educates disenfranchised women and youth in everything from basic hygiene to career development. As cited in these two examples, nonformal education and training will often center on increasing civic and political engagement, economic and entrepreneurial vitality, and reproductive health (e.g., birth control methods, prenatal care). Consciousness raising, popularized by revolutionary educator Paulo Freire, can be a key feature of nonformal education practices, in which teachers increase students’ awareness of critical issues affecting their everyday lives. Both Women’s Issues Network of Belize and *Casa de Passagem* are models in this regard.

Historically, research has intimated five key components that are important considerations when planning, implementing, and evaluating nonformal education practices. These include the program’s (a) target population; (b) typology and theoretical framework; (c) pedagogical strategy; (d) funding and available resources; and (e) program outcomes. Likewise, Romi and Schmida (2009) cite four variables that impact planning, implementation, and evaluation. These include the program’s administrative unit, its focus on individual or collective agency, pedagogical strategy, and philosophical underpinnings or theoretical framework.

What follows is a recommendation in the areas of theoretical framework and pedagogical strategy, contending that a curriculum undergirded in feminist and critical practices is pivotal to improving the lives of street children. For the purposes of this paper, a critical feminist pedagogy seeks to ameliorate the challenges of oppressed populations (i.e., children), facilitating their transformation into social change agents on micro (individual) and meso (community) levels (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). As emancipatory frameworks, feminist and critical models challenge the current hierarchical structures, which typically reinforce the social exclusion of children from global education systems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist and critical epistemologies can and should be central tools used in planning, implementing, and evaluating liberatory educational practices. Feminist theory increases our awareness of female struggles and is instrumental in the liberation of women (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). Feminism also recognizes the struggle of all dominated groups, including minorities and adolescents. This recognition brings about increased research of systems that create societal changes. Such improved efforts to investigate women's struggles have led to new ways to combat the oppression of females, minorities, and adolescents.

Street children are capable of empowerment, a concept derived primarily from Paulo Freire's theoretical framework for liberatory learning (1970, 1973). His assumptions insist that subjugated individuals, like street and working children, will challenge oppression through education. His theoretical model provides the research lens needed to analyze the situation of oppressed groups and to create pedagogies for democratic societies. The following section seeks to explain the need to view nonformal education through feminist theory and critical thought.

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP

Before discussing feminism's influence on pedagogy, it is important to reveal its role in advancing research practices. Feminist theory is a way of viewing life; it is discerning, innovative, and visionary. It is a way of bringing typically overshadowed insights to the forefront and elucidating women's experiences as concrete and pertinent. Feminist theorists argue that the perspectives of women in their roles as academicians, artists, farmers, corporate executives, medical experts, lawyers, and child bearers need to be accredited and accepted (Mies, 1983). Traditional research does not show women as multi-task-oriented human beings battling socially constructed tensions. Feminist theory, according to Mies, challenges

traditional norms and ways of understanding, as they do not reflect women's experiences or knowledge.

Feminist scholarship is innovative in furthering the claims and achievements of women; it is persistent and avant-garde. Advancements are evidenced in the following areas: (a) increased access to education; (b) increased ownership opportunities; (c) improved egalitarian relationships with the right to freely choose sexual partners and the right to divorce; and (d) increased publicity of issues critical to women (e.g., domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, gender discrimination) (Okazawa-Rey & Kirk, 1998, p. 450). Additionally, feminist theory has expounded the current and prospective intertwined obstacles faced by women, such as race, class, and gender (Tisdell, 1998). As hooks reminds us in *Feminism is for Everybody*, "Feminist movement, especially the work of visionary black activists, paved the way for reconsideration of race and racism that has had a positive impact on society as a whole" (2000, p. 59). Both modern and postmodern feminist theories are unrelenting in seeking to resolve women's burdens.

Feminist theory is visionary because it seeks to create socially-just and egalitarian communities. Despite "a decline in overall mass fervor of feminist movement," feminism is distinctly grounded in our global society and will continue to eradicate all forms of oppression, experienced not only by women but also by any other exploited group (hooks, 2010, p. 94).

In *Teaching to Transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks claimed, "progressive, holistic education *critical pedagogy* is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy" (1994, p. 15). hooks' compelling analysis merged two unitary theoretical models, critical and feminist pedagogy, to create a framework for empowerment in the classroom. While feminism focuses on themes like gender, oppression, emancipation, and power, critical pedagogy focuses on socioeconomics and class dynamics as primary factors of struggle (Tisdell, 1998). As connected models of learning, feminism supports critical pedagogy in the classroom, which emphasizes participant learning. Feminist strategies encourage open dialogues and sharing between teachers and students as part of the learning process. This method is interlocked with self-actualization and consciousness raising, hence critical pedagogy. Despite feminism's emphasis on females, the theory may be applied to a different group, i.e., street children, because of its distinct philosophy of emancipating marginal communities. As Stromquist identified, "feminism...seeks to make human rights applicable to men and women and extends these rights to all countries and cultures" (1998b, p. 4). The following section attempts to explain feminist epistemology and its contribution to critical pedagogy.

Main tenets of feminism. Until the development of postmodern feminism in the late 20th century, three main tenets of feminist theory existed: lib-

eral, radical, and socialist. Underlying all strands of feminist theory is the notion that women are the target of oppression on micro (individual), meso (community), macro (national), and global levels. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey have defined oppression as exploitative actions by a dominant group towards a subordinate population (1998). Members of the dominant group, typically rooted in hierarchical social structures within our society (e.g., family, education, religion, and the media), maintain ethnocentric attitudes. Consequently, they challenge and disparage beliefs, values, and assumptions, which are different from their own. The dominant group's manner of organizing and controlling society is seen as the right way. Each different feminist ideology holds a distinct belief system, which shapes the construction of intervention methods needed to challenge traditional hierarchical systems. However, the liberation of women is a shared agenda.

Liberal feminism draws from political ideologies (Donovan, 2000). Continued inequalities in the treatment of women, e.g., division of labor and gender stereotypes, maintain women's subordinate status. Liberal feminists perceive reason and reflection as effective methods to produce change that is directed towards equality and liberty. Radical feminists, as explained by Donovan, view a patriarchal system as the root of all subjugation of women in society. A patriarchal system places males in a position of control, particularly in the areas of sexuality, personal relationships, and family structures. In order to deconstruct male-dictated, hegemonic societies, radical feminists believe in creating more vertically powered school systems and increasing educational research on the needs of females. Finally, socialist feminists contend that patriarchy in combination with capitalism create a society which segregates individuals along gender and class lines (Donovan). This is particularly poignant when looking at women as laborers. Women's work is underpaid and undervalued, but through the redefinition of women's work, e.g., increased reward and value systems, capitalist patriarchal structures may move towards egalitarian societies.

Since the 1980s, the critical rise of postmodern feminism has challenged the traditional strains of modern feminist theory, vigorously critiquing universal categories (Donovan, 2000). While modern American feminists have typically perceived oppression from the lenses of Anglo middle-class women, postmodernism has identified "the significance of gender with other structural systems of privilege and oppression, such as race, class, and sexual orientation" (Tisdell, 1998, p. 5). In her article relating postmodernism and emancipatory learning, Tisdell provides a powerful example of her own personal attempt at merging postmodernism and critical pedagogy in the classroom. She argued that learners must discuss and understand structural systems of subordination, which she labeled matrices of oppression. Discussions encourage students to develop the tools necessary to combat prevailing obstacles like racial and sexual discrimination (Tisdell, 1998; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). Tisdell discussed her own shortcomings as

a teacher, because she did not identify with these matrices, nor did she recognize relevant knowledge outside of what she believed to be true academia. She did not position herself in the place of her students, who construct knowledge and are impacted by the structural systems of race and class. Once she did, Tisdell became a learner in her own classroom, as she transformed her comprehension of what was valid knowledge by repositioning herself from the perspective of her students. At the same time, her students became more critically aware of how social structures had impacted their own lives and shaped their knowledge, and began to question the dominating forces of these systems.

Feminist practices and marginalized youth. In examining the lives of street youth it is important to understand the social structures that oppress and impact the daily activities of adolescents. For example, within the legal and justice system, the dominant and prevailing attitudes of law enforcement agents view street children as deviant offenders (le Roux & Sylvia, 1998b; UNICEF, 2009; Wernham, 2004). Officer references to children as criminals continue to shape community opinions. Additionally, juvenile detention, an element of law enforcement, is designed to provide corrective treatment to street children, aiming to teach minors how to be civic-minded and law-abiding. However, many of these programs are sparse and retain punitive approaches. Unfortunately, even street workers and educators fail to put themselves in the position of their students, causing learners to perceive punishment and authoritarianism as the norm. Feminist approaches and critical pedagogies perceive effective learning and consciousness raising as the deconstruction of the negative self-perceptions of children. They also view it as a process of self-actualization for learners. This would demonstrate a student-centered curriculum, which would include the flexibility of educators to hear the experiences of street children, creating a more reciprocal learning environment. As Romi & Schmida contend:

Non-formal educational settings are more flexible and less structured than those of formal education. Therefore they can provide a safe and secure place for adolescents to experiment with their freedom and experience steps toward independence and adulthood without necessarily facing the retributions of the more confining formal educational system. NFE aims, to a great extent, to help adolescents cope with their struggle toward forming their personal identity. (2009, p. 266)

Feminist and critical pedagogies suggest curricular activities such as open and reflective dialogues, creative art projects, literacy exercises, and dance as effective tools for deconstructing oppressive narratives. The following excerpt by Mittman provides an integrated lesson plan precisely incorporating postmodern feminist approaches and critical theory, aiming to create change in a small, low-income neighborhood:

The teenagers met for weekly rehearsals to learn theater games and improvisation skills that eventually enabled them to create performances. The subject of the dramatic presentations were identified by the youth and then broadcast live on public access television. Parents, youth, and other community members were encouraged to call-in their own ideas concerning the issues presented, including thoughts about what should or could be done about the situation. A counselor/interviewer took telephone calls about these suggestions and the theater group then improvised new scenarios accordingly in order to actually try-out the ideas suggested. Discussions about the viability of those alternatives followed dramatizations. (1997, p.7)

This curriculum has two distinct functions which are evident from the perspective of feminist and critical theories: (a) to enable students to have input throughout their learning experience; and (b) to allow all participants to encounter multiple perspectives of a given problem, challenging traditional explanations (Mittman, 1997). Allowing students to express their perspectives of a given problem facilitated their ability to critically analyze situations affecting their everyday experiences. While encouraging participants' imagination and creativity, Mittman promoted independence by allowing students to direct certain aspects of the program, an example of critical theory. Mittman, the facilitator of this program, described her philosophical position, affirming the children's notions of community challenges and understanding her participants were constantly undergoing transition as teenagers and participants of critical pedagogy.

The main theoretical tenets of feminism and postmodern ideologies demonstrate an apt framework with which to design and deliver nonformal curricula for street children. Giroux (1991) emphasized the complementary nature of modern and postmodern feminist ideologies. Postmodernism, he stated, has been challenged for its overemphasis of individual differences and rejections of universal truths. Modernism, however, has been criticized for imposing Western influences, created and maintained primarily by Anglo males, as superior to all other ways of living. Giroux believes postmodern feminism is an approach which, (a) causes further dialogue to improve and to elaborate both the modern and postmodern feminist theories and; (b) supports hooks' assertion that "sexism, racism, and class exploitation constitute interlocking systems of domination" which must be acknowledged and supported by the feminist movement. Giroux concludes his introduction by providing critical suggestions for incorporating modern and postmodern feminist perspectives in the practice of education and the direction of schools. Inevitably, schools are:

places of critical education in the service of creating a public sphere of citizens who are able to exercise power of their own lives and especially over the conditions of knowledge, production and acquisition. This is

critical pedagogy defined, in part, by the attempt to create the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority. (1991, p. 47)

Feminist theory holds that education is an agent of change. Feminism advocates nonformal education, the inclusion of all individuals in the learning process, and the implementation of liberatory pedagogies. From a feminist perspective, nonformal education challenges the prevailing dominant norms of the formal school system and additionally questions all other overriding forces, such as family, religion, and media (Weiler, 1991). Feminist theorists argue and struggle to include exploited groups in the learning system and to encourage participants to exercise their voices, which may otherwise be silenced in traditional education.

The feminist approach builds on “consciousness raising” efforts in order for individuals to rise above their subordinate positions in society. Active participants in nonformal education participate in conversations and workshops, which often lead to increased self-awareness. Feminist theories imply the “process approach” to individual change in which a component of learning is active student participation in the “diagnosis, design, and implementation of teaching and learning” (La Belle, 1986, p. 67). If the essence of feminism is the critical awareness and gained insight of oppressed individuals, forging a connection to the pedagogical strategies of educator and philosopher Paulo Freire would enhance this perspective.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Freire’s revolutionary critical pedagogy views education as the practice of liberation (1970, 1973). This framework develops profound teaching strategies through *conscientização* (as used herein, “consciousness raising.”) Freire defined this term as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality,” to develop profound teaching strategies (1970, p. 17). He perceived education and the learning environment as a venue to transform human beings into active, conscious citizens in society. At the same time, however, educational practices that impede liberation and are bound by the prescriptive approaches to learning, maintain a silenced, oppressed culture. Freire’s critical pedagogy is an approach to create critically aware communities, which counteract silence and oppression. First, however, it is imperative to determine what characterizes the oppressed community. Throughout his writings Freire insisted that oppressed populations are powerless (1970). Although he typically referred to adults, street children are also powerless and marginalized.

Freire wrote that oppressed individuals in our society are manipulated and bound by their oppressors; yet at the same time, these victims are attracted to the oppressors (1970). Street children seek stable, comforting environments in

which to belong. Unfortunately, their surroundings often consist of street gangs or abusive households. Although these settings are repressive, they afford consistency, an “idealized” normality, and possibly a financial support system. From their peripheral perspective, street children cannot realize that many oppressors lead dysfunctional and unstable lives. The children continue to long for this perceived norm.

“Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed” (Freire, 1970, p. 45). As a result of cognitive lags and emotional underdevelopment, street children suffer low levels of self-esteem and may become “alienated and potentially violent” (Blunt, 1994, p. 244). Physical and emotional abuse, primarily from family members or employers, continues to degrade and to lower the self-worth of these targeted adolescents. Following the characterization of oppressed populations, Freire (1970, 1973) revealed an analysis of the cruel realities of marginal communities through identifying the struggles of everyday dichotomies (i.e., humanization and dehumanization). Freire’s pedagogical practices challenged these dualities.

Freire (1970, 1973) also focused on the various dualities of life that negatively affect education systems and the lives of street children. The three dichotomies discussed in this paper, subject/object, integration/adaptation, and humanization/dehumanization reflect the treatment of street children by the prevailing social structures.

Subject/Object: Individuals or learners who are told information and whose creativity and intellect are inhibited and controlled by authoritative figures are regarded as “objects” in society. Objects are the targets of the banking model of education, in which students essentially are “containers,” and education becomes the process of teachers “depositing” information (Freire, 1970, p. 53). On the contrary, “subjects” are students who have been integrated into the learning process and who are expected to critically analyze classroom themes. In the latter scenario, teachers practice problem-posing education, in which students participate, exchange ideas, and confront critical issues. Problem-posing education is supported by the process approach to learning, which creates a horizontal learning atmosphere, enabling both teachers and learners to evolve in the classroom.

Integration/Adaptation: These two contradictory terms are similar in meaning to subject/object. Street children have adapted to their surroundings because they do not possess alternatives. Poverty was not their choice, and these adolescents have few healthy and viable alternatives. The futures of adapted individuals have been prescribed by society and its assumptions. However, children who have persevered through the pressures of poverty and have made the choice to seek new ways of living have integrated “themselves into their context, responding to its challenges” (Freire, 1973, p. 4). Integrated children have the ability to see their realities and to make socially acceptable choices to change their situations.

Humanization/Dehumanization: This experience is an extreme duality that has powerful impacts on the lives of street children. Children who experience “injustice, exploitation, oppression, and violence” undergo dehumanization (Freire, 1970, p. 26). While this is not a child’s destiny, Freire asserted it is a result of powerful forces within an unjust society. For example, policymakers, judges, and law enforcement hold power over street children by dictating their fate in court. The humanization process, conversely, involves trust, communication, and the ability to confront struggles.

Critical practices and marginalized youth. Nonformal education is an essential agent in creating more critically aware students. Uneducated and easily persuaded children act without knowledge. Influenced by oppressors, street youth act without a critical awareness of the context (Freire, 1973). Yet, with nonformal education, street children can move in the direction of “radical human beings”, forming introspective opinions, communicating, engaging in dialogue, understanding humility and commitment (1973). Freire confirms that individuals in marginal communities can rise out of their present state and “transform” their lives from unknowledgeable action to radicalism. Freire’s theory of “revolutionary praxis” involves marginal individuals such as out-of-school-children, participating in a dialogue which critically analyzes their own state of being, causing them to reflect and to act, thus creating positive changes in their lives.

In order for street children to participate in their own recovery process the following three elements must exist within the curriculum: (a) a student-centered philosophy; (b) critical confrontation of student issues; and (c) deliberate actions taken by students to address their problems (Freire, 1973, p. 16). The following methodology is a modified version of Freire’s original five-phase program for the critical consciousness of illiterate populations (p. 49). The module was initially created to increase the political awareness of the poor in Brazil. Here, Freire’s revolutionary process has been adapted for nonformal education programs enrolling street and working children. The main tenets of the original plan, awareness and action, remain central to the modified version.

- Interview – The interview process is conducted after the child has decided to utilize the services of a particular nonformal education project. This phase is designed to provide an initial connection between the nonformal educator and the participant. “These interviews reveal longings, frustrations, disbeliefs, hopes, and an impetus to participate” (Freire, 1973, p. 49). The exchange of ideas and information between the interviewer and the participant seeks to develop the foundations of a relationship.
- Identify goals and objectives – This process is designed to assist children in strategizing desired outcomes. Phase two is a way for the educators and their respective nonformal education program to coach participants

in decision making skills and measure levels of critical awareness, i.e., an assessment of how decisions are made, what strategies or techniques participants use to make those decisions, and what external forces are affecting those decisions.

- Discuss and identify problem situations – At this point educators and youth participants share problems and challenges related to their everyday struggles. As both parties gain insight and they move towards a greater understanding of themselves and each other.
- Elaborate on the above – Both educators and participants continue to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses. This stage seeks to develop greater trust between participants and program services.
- Raise consciousness through activity and dialogue – In Freire’s original methodology, he targets illiterate and powerless individuals. He poses a “thinking word” as a strategy to move participants to critically assess their situation. In educating street children, a “thinking word” can refer to confronting conflicts or life realities in order to encourage participants to reflect critically and analytically before making decisions.

Miller-Pasquale and Amestoy Lee (1997) and Offit (2008) provide an example of a popular nonformal education project rooted in Freire’s conception of education for critical consciousness. Ongoing teacher training and student-centered curricula are key features which indicate this program and its teachers are advocates for social change. A humanizing approach involving respect for and encouragement of the student is also present in the program structure.

Modeled after Freire’s critical approach to emancipatory education, ChildHope and Pennat sponsor a nonformal education project operating in downtown Guatemala City (Offit, 2008). The program focuses on teaching working children through pedagogies such as alternative classrooms and a modified and relevant curriculum. The location of this project is a key feature of its innovative strategies toward learning. Teachers flexibly meet with their students “under trees in the park, in the streets next to their *puestos* (individual stands or stalls), and in small ‘classrooms’ created in the *mercados*” (Miller-Pasquale & Amestoy Lee, 1997, p. 63).

In addition to classroom location, this highly accessible program also has an adaptive curriculum, supports the professional development of teachers, and creates an environment for parent participation (Offit, 2008). Children learn at their various reading and math levels, not the assumed levels commensurate with age and grade. Participants receive the basic and pertinent information needed to function on the street, such as money management techniques and drug and disease prevention methods. ChildHope and Pennat also offer an accommodating school day, where children attend class around their work schedules. All teachers are required to have a Guatemalan teaching certification and three months of training

prior to their post, in addition to monthly in-services. A particular strength of this program is the successful inclusion of parents. Parents must promise not to hinder their children's regular attendance at school.

THE INTERSECTION OF FEMINIST AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES

Both feminist and critical epistemologies are founded on benevolent philosophies aiming to change the direction of our global society. The very root of both models holds an understanding of human development.

Despite the parallel perspectives of feminist and critical theories, feminist scholars have noted the ability of their discourse to enhance Freire's work, particularly with regard to women, knowledge, oppression, and consciousness raising. Critical theory is based on individuals resisting economic and political repression. However, minimal claims are directed towards or focused on women. Among others, Weiler (1991) and hooks (1994) principally discussed these gendered issues and the contributions of feminism interwoven with critical pedagogy. It is important to note the following critiques are not a rejection of Paulo Freire's theoretical model; rather, they are a way to expand upon and enrich his ideas through criticism and analysis.

Both Weiler (1991) and hooks (1994) referred to Freire's (1970) usage of masculine vocabulary as sexist language. As a proponent of Freire's work, hooks asserts this notion has been a difficult challenge for her to tolerate in her analysis of this revolutionary pedagogy. She has always recognized Freire's tendency to use sexist language and views this dilemma as a man with significant introspection demonstrating fallibility. An excerpt from Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, underscores hooks' concern.

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. (Freire, 1970, p. 69)

Freire's intentions clearly did not include sexual discrimination. However, from this excerpt we can deduce that women are excluded from Freire's analysis of those who participate in dialogue and those who make decisions in society. This proves that women's voices, not just men's, are often concealed or negated in the process of discourse. Notwithstanding this fact, hooks remained faithful to Freire's critical theory because it was liberatory in scope. She felt the sexist language deserved critical analysis, but the overall theme did not merit dismissal.

A second criticism of critical theory was the limited and unvarying possibilities of oppression described in Freire's discourse analysis. Identifying males as the

subjugated individuals, Freire confined his analysis of oppression. He "...leaves unaddressed the forms of oppression experienced by different actors, the possibility of struggles among people oppressed differently by different groups" (Weiler, 1991 p. 453). Freire highlighted the effects of tyranny without acknowledging the positions of women and children, who experience different, yet equal forms of oppression. Freire's theoretical perspective of dualities views experiences of dehumanization and humanization as universal and common to all members of society regardless of difference (Weiler, 1991). "Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness" (Freire, 1970, p. 25). Feminist theorists questioned Freire's description of humanizing experiences. Is a humanizing experience within a man's contextual framework? Are women included in humanizing experiences? Freire's work is critiqued for viewing humanizing experiences from very abstract terms with inadequate references to diversity.

A third area of theoretical expansion can be found in Freire's assumptions that consciousness raising activities will lead to collective action by oppressed populations. Freire argues for "the need for the critical intervention of the people in reality through the praxis" (1970, p. 35). However, Weiler poses the possibility of individuals developing critical analysis skills independent of each other, and the likelihood of individual, not collective, action. While feminist theorists advocate collective action, they also encourage the free will and autonomy of subjugated persons. Increased self-reliance and self-worth, which are individualistic in nature, are also effects of consciousness raising. Even within groups, not all oppressive experiences are uniform. These differences should be recognized because, as feminists have proven, increased consciousness can lead to independence.

Weiler disagrees with Freire's assumption that authority figures and teachers are male. Freire's model addresses the role of the teacher as experiencing transformation similar to that of the learner. That is, the teacher and the learner are on equal levels and thus must process knowledge in a reciprocal fashion, creating very minimal forces of power. Weiler (1991) agrees with the reciprocity of teaching and learning, yet she critiques this notion particularly with regard to female instructors. She claims Freire has failed to address the relationship of teacher authority and power in reference to difference (i.e., sex, gender, ethnicity, and age). For example, women have struggled to have their knowledge and achievements viewed with respect. Whether teaching in the capacity of a nonformal educator, an elementary school teacher, or a university professor, females must claim to have authority in their specified field. They should also be viewed as role models in the classroom for advancing and achieving to the status of teacher and "knower" (Weiler, 1991). Freire does not address the unequal distribution of power as a result of multicultural and gender differences. Human characteristics such as sex,

gender, ethnicity, and age not only shape how teachers position themselves within their classroom, but also determine their levels of assertiveness.

Feminist theory provides a fifth enhancement to the work of Paulo Freire. While Freire views consciousness raising as a vital experience in questioning universal truths and bringing forth suppressed knowledge, feminist theorists rely heavily on the interpretation of feelings in providing profound insight.

Both experience and feeling were central to consciousness raising and remain central to feminist pedagogy in academia; they are claimed as a kind of 'inner knowing,' shaped by society but at the same time containing an oppositional quality. Feeling is looked to as a guide to deeper truth than that of abstract rationality. (Weiler, 1991, p. 463)

Feminist pedagogy, as critical theory, is rooted in praxis, which stems from consciousness raising (i.e. the discussion of shared feelings and experiences). The women's studies discipline began with the formation of consciousness raising groups and other liberation activities during the 1960s and 1970s (Weiler, 1991). Discussing feelings has been essential to the development of a feminist pedagogy and its reflective framework.

These critiques notwithstanding, the fusion of feminist and critical ideologies creates a sound theoretical framework for nonformal education practices that aim to serve street children. Despite their informal coping mechanisms, street and working children are a decidedly at-risk population, as they lack legal clout and integral health and education resources. In order to reach and effectively serve this group, nonformal education curricula must include spaces for employing fair and equitable treatment, building trust, communicating openly, and inspiring social change, as street children, on individual and collective levels, deserve the chance to succeed and become productive global citizens.

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