

A PEDAGOGY OF RADICAL LOVE: Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Foundations

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Abstract

In this article, we bring biblical, theological, and philosophical perspectives on radical love into creative dialogue with critical pedagogy. The biblical narratives of the book of Ruth and the Parable of the “Good” Samaritan contain paradigms for a radical kind of love that seeks the liberation and well-being of others. These insights on love carry epistemological and methodological implications for critical pedagogy. Such implications can be identified by placing these insights about love in conversation with Paulo Freire’s “pedagogy of love,” as discussed by Antonia Darder. Also, bell hooks’s cultural critiques and emphasis on engaged pedagogy can illumine other implications that relate to cultural experiences. The ultimate goal is to illustrate how love, rooted in biblical and philosophical foundations, motivates cross-cultural and interfaith engagement, and encourages emancipatory action.

Keywords: radical love, critical pedagogy, Christian teachers, black feminism, womanism

*“The mark of really loving someone or something is unconditionality
and excess, engagement and commitment, fire and passion.”*

(John D. Caputo, 2001, p. 5)

In the field of education, most educators candidly acknowledge the importance of love within their classrooms. Particularly, most elementary school educators typically express their primary reason for entering the teaching profession as having a love of children (Ladson-Billings, 2009, pp. 102-103). However, when love is the sole premise for becoming an educator, most teachers do not acknowledge the importance or need to critically scrutinize their underlying experiences, thoughts, and beliefs of love that impact their educational practices. Although the idea of love, for most educators, may truly be genuine, if educators fail to consciously reflect upon their teaching practices and actions with their students, they ultimately fail to recognize their prejudices and biases which can direct or limit their interactions with students (Darder, 2002, p. 120).

Consequently, our primary purpose for writing this article is to provide an analysis of our educational practices and framework of love as scholarly educators in the 21st Century. In order for us to critically investigate our beliefs that impact our teaching philosophies and practices of love, we acknowledge that our identities have been shaped, since childhood, by the Christian religion. In fact, for the majority of teachers in the United States where Christian ideals have historically dominated public school environments (Slattery, 2006, p. 75), the principles of Christianity either explicitly or implicitly shape their identities too. Once again, when teachers unconsciously accept their thoughts and beliefs of love, they neglect becoming critically aware of their teaching philosophies that overtly or covertly reinforce dominant ideologies in regard to their students.

The intention of this article does not involve romanticizing the various principles of Christianity, but writing this article as professed Christians grants us the opportunity to be critical of the Christian religion as it relates to education and our teaching perspectives. Moreover, from our personal experiences in the United States, Christianity as the dominant religion has historically been used as a barrier or divisive concept, which often marginalizes different beliefs. Hence, since we identify as marginalized persons, Kennedy as an African-American woman and Grinter as an African-American male with a disability, it is our desire to utilize experiences of marginalization as critical points of awareness within a U.S. majority religion. Thus, we are writing this article in the hope that other educators who are Christians will become more critically attentive to the intersections of their Christian beliefs with their personal teaching philosophies.

Nonetheless, this article is also for persons who affirm faith in other religions as well as those who do not profess religious conviction; since this article is more about educators developing a critical awareness of why and how they love their students. Although we will incorporate Christian biblical and theological interpretations throughout the article, we do so to highlight important ideas and concepts that translate into other religions, traditions, and cultures. As a result, the article is multidimensional and is divided into four distinct sections. The first sec-

tion will present our working definition of “radical love.” The second section will provide two biblical narratives as examples of a “radical” kind of love. The third section will explain the multiple definitions and aspects of love within a Christian theological framework. The fourth section will provide a philosophical analysis of love using various prominent philosophers within the field of critical pedagogy.

Defining Radical Love

Christianity is the dominant religious tradition in the United States, exerting power and influence in all spheres of American culture including education. Christian ideas and doctrines have been used to marginalize and oppress persons and groups through racist and sexist pedagogical theories and practices. However, this hegemonic use of Christian religion in education can be subverted through a more liberating interpretation of Christian teachings. Biblical, theological, and philosophical resources can be marshaled to promote a critical pedagogy that dismantles oppressive structures in society. As committed and critical Christians, we hope to ground a pedagogy of radical love in the Christian tradition. This grounding is intended to challenge traditional patriarchal perspectives and inspire critical consciousness for social change.

Toward this end, we define the term “radical love” as the empathetic, active, and passionate impulse to transform social relationships in ways that seek justice and freedom. Our definition is tied to bell hooks’s (1994) explanation of “radical pedagogy” (p. 9). Hooks uses the expression “radical pedagogy” to include views from both feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy (p. 9). While hooks acknowledges the scholarly predominance of White women within feminist pedagogy and White men within critical pedagogy, hooks (1994) points out, “the work of various thinkers on radical pedagogy has in recent years truly included a recognition of differences – those determined by class, race, sexual practice, nationality, and so on” (p. 9). In view of this, our biblical, theological, and philosophical frameworks for a pedagogy of radical love will seek to counter dominant White Christian practices through the re-description of love from an African-American feminist and womanist standpoint. This description of love grants us the opportunity to focus on scholarly voices that are most often marginalized in society and academia – African-American women.

Furthermore, as cultural participants in African-American communities, we will make connections with our beliefs and experiences that have shaped our educational practices throughout the article. Darder (2002) comments, “The issue of knowledge construction is always linked to questions of ideology, for how we construct knowledge is directly connected to the particular frameworks or set of values and beliefs we use to make sense of the world” (p. 68). We acknowledge that our worldviews as Christians have been shaped by the Bible. As educators, the biblical narratives of Ruth and Naomi and the parable of the Samaritan il-

lustrate our personal philosophies as we critically engage our beliefs and teaching practices.

Moreover, we identify the love shown by Ruth and the Samaritan in these narratives as radical because their love overcomes social and religious barriers. Both narratives inform our theology and philosophy of love within feminist, womanist, and critical pedagogy frameworks. Additionally, the story of Ruth and Naomi and the parable of the Samaritan have several implications for the construction of a radical pedagogy of love within public education.

Biblical Foundations

The Story of Ruth and Naomi (The Book of Ruth)

The book of Ruth in the Old Testament of the Bible begins by reporting the conditions in Bethlehem, a small village in the country of Judah. A severe food shortage ravages the land, a common occurrence in the desert-like region. This famine forces a particular family in Bethlehem to migrate from Judah to the neighboring country of Moab. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons travel to Moab for relief. Sometime after their arrival in Moab, Elimelech dies. Naomi and her two sons stay in Moab, and the sons marry two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Ten years later, Naomi's sons also die.

Without a husband or sons to provide adequate support, Naomi must move back to Judah. Her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, join her on her journey home. But along the way, Naomi turns to her daughters-in-law and insists that they go back to their own homes in Moab. Although she is grateful for the love that Orpah and Ruth have shown to her and her deceased family members, Naomi pleads with the women to return to Moab, remarry, and live in peace and stability. Initially, Orpah and Ruth refuse to go back and are determined to go to Judah with Naomi.

Knowing the life of hardship and struggle that lies ahead, Naomi begs the young women to return to Moab. As a childless widow, Naomi has no means to provide for herself or to support her two daughters-in-law. This time, Orpah obeys her mother-in-law's wishes and turns back. Naomi tries to convince Ruth to follow her sister-in-law, but Ruth clings to Naomi, refusing to leave her. Then Ruth says to Naomi:

Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God, my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

May the lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well, if even death parts me from you. (Ruth 2:16-17)

These words indicate Ruth's willingness to de-center her own religious and cultural heritage out of love for Naomi. Naomi is speechless, and silently acquiesces to Ruth's request. The two women return to Judah together.

As Ruth and Naomi approach Bethlehem, the women of the village come out to meet them. Surprised to see her, the women ask, "Is this Naomi?" However, Naomi instructs the women not to call her "Naomi," which means "pleasantness" in Hebrew. Instead, Naomi wants to be called "Mara," which means "bitter" in Hebrew, because of the painful experiences she has endured. The deaths of her husband and sons have left her feeling great sorrow and emptiness.

Now in Bethlehem, Ruth and Naomi have no means of material support. Without male family members to provide for their needs, the two women are on the margins of a patriarchal society. Ruth voluntarily gathers leftover grain from harvest, a practice landowners allowed to support the poor in the community. This humbling and demeaning act on Ruth's part is an illustration of her love and loyalty towards Naomi.

The field where Ruth gathers grains belongs to Boaz, a wealthy landowner who happens to be a distant relative of Elimelech, Naomi's deceased husband. Taken with the young Moabite woman, Boaz eventually marries Ruth and takes responsibility for the care and support of Naomi as well. By the end of the narrative, Ruth is immersed in Judean culture. Ruth conceives and gives birth to a son, thus achieving the highest social status that a woman in Judah could attain—motherhood. Ruth's actions of love and devotion for Naomi also serve to change Naomi's life. Her bitterness and pain are transformed into joy and prosperity. Ruth gives Naomi a new family and a future full of hope.

The Parable of the Samaritan (The Gospel of Luke 10:25-37)

In chapter 10 of the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament of the Bible, Jesus is challenged by a Jewish scribe and expert on the Torah, the Jewish law. This scribe asks Jesus about the definition of the word "neighbor" in the divine command to "love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus responds to the question with a parable. Parables were commonly used by teachers and philosophers in the ancient world to illustrate important ideas and doctrines.

In his parable, Jesus tells the story of a man who is attacked by bandits while traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. As this man lay battered and almost dead on the side of the road, a Jewish priest and, later, a Levite pass by the man on the other side to avoid contact. These two Jewish religious leaders would have been deemed unqualified to perform or participate in rituals if they touched or even approached the possibly dead traveler.

Eventually, a Samaritan comes down the road. Jews hated Samaritans because of cultural and religious differences. Nevertheless, this Samaritan helps the likely Jewish traveler. Though the Samaritan would have also been deemed unqualified for ritual participation, he is motivated to aid the man out of compassion and empathy. The Samaritan attends to the man's wounds, takes him to a lodge, and provides for his continued care.

After finishing the parable Jesus poses a question to the scribe about which person- the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan- was a "neighbor" to the injured man. In response, the scribe indicates that the Samaritan was a true neighbor to the injured man. The Jewish scribe would have understood loving one's "neighbor" to mean loving one's "fellow Jew." But through this parable Jesus redefines "neighbor" as "other." Loving the "other" is the ethic that Jesus teaches. Such love motivates the Samaritan to overcome religious and cultural barriers to help the traveler. Jesus' directive to the scribe is, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Theological Foundations

These two biblical narratives provide concrete examples of "radical love." While resonating within Christianity, this love is critical of traditional views of love expressed by Christians. As stated above, many educators in the United States profess love as the motivating factor for their work in the classroom. Because the understanding of love espoused by many educators is grounded or shaped by the Christian faith, the ideas and assumptions that inform Christian beliefs about love should be identified and critiqued.

While Christian theology offers rich resources into the meaning of love, traditional Christian notions of love often ignore important dimensions of love and fail to understand love in empowering and liberating ways. To critique traditional Christian views on love, we explore the story of Ruth and Naomi and the parable of the Samaritan in conversation with voices from inside and outside the Christian tradition. Also, we will engage critical pedagogy in order to provide educators with a more nuanced understanding of love, what we call "radical love."

The Parable of the Samaritan highlights an important dimension of love -- action. After encountering the injured man on the road, the Samaritan acts to bandage the man's wounds and provide for his material needs. Jesus emphasizes this active quality of love as an essential ethic.

However, a narrow focus on the active dimension of love overlooks a pivotal moment in the parable of the Samaritan. Before the Samaritan acts, he is "moved with pity" when he sees the man lying on the side of the road. The phrase "moved with pity" is best understood as "compassion," "sympathy," or "empathy," a "feeling with" the suffering victim. The Samaritan's love involved an emotional connection, not just an active dimension.

Process theology offers a critique of the traditional focus in Christianity on love as action. Process thinkers highlight the importance of “sympathetic responsiveness” as a key element of love. Sympathetic responsiveness refers to a love that seeks to know and empathize with others in their lived experiences (Cobb and Griffin, 1976, pp. 44-48). After this moment of empathy, the “creative activity” dimension of love leads a person to engage in risk-taking actions that seek justice for others (Cobb and Griffin, 1976, pp. 48-61). Both of these elements, empathy and action, are needed for love to be liberating.

Educators who operate out of the traditional Christian view of love as action may not be sympathetic or empathetic to the lived experiences of their students. Pedagogical strategies will consciously or unconsciously overlook the social locations of their students and thus fail to be empowering. Paulo Freire (2010) describes this kind of teaching as “the banking concept of education,” in which the teacher deposits knowledge to the student in ways that are detached from the student’s life experiences (pp. 71-72).

Instead, a process view of love will encourage educators to first be sympathetic to the socio-economic, religious, and cultural contexts of their students. Such sympathy corresponds to Freire’s notion of “solidarity,” seeking to “live *with* others,” which can only be achieved through communication between educators and their students (pp.76-77). Through dialogue, teachers and students become partners in creative and critical thinking that promotes actions of liberation (Freire, 2010, pp. 80-81). Process theology’s empathetic and active love is “radical love” that can inspire teachers to apply a more empowering and liberating pedagogy.

Like process thought, Black women’s perspectives can also be useful in thinking about love in the Christian tradition. For example, the Greek term *eros* in Christianity and society-at-large has been most often associated with “sexual love” or “sexual desire.” However, Black feminists and womanists advocate a broader and deeper understanding of *eros* that refers to passionate and transformative love of self and others.

Black feminist Audre Lorde (2007) states that *eros* or “the erotic” should not be limited to sexuality and is more broadly a source of spiritual power within everyone, especially women (p. 530.) Lorde writes, “When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (p. 55). According to Lorde, *eros* encompasses every aspect of human life, not just the sexual. Thinking anew about the relationship between Ruth and Naomi in light of Lorde’s ideas can help expand Christian definitions of love.

While the Greek word *eros* never appears in the Bible, the love between Ruth and Naomi can be described as “erotic” in Lorde’s idiom. Ruth’s passionate and loyal devotion to her mother-in-law has always been difficult for Christians to

qualify. Interpretations range from Ruth and Naomi as committed friends to lesbian partners. Their bond can be adequately explained by Lorde's (2007) view of the erotic as "those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared; the passions of love, in its deepest meanings" (p. 56). With this understanding of the erotic, Ruth and Naomi's connection is a clear expression of deep love that might characterize a variety of human relationships, sexual or otherwise.

Lorde's ideas about eros as applying to all human relationships carries implications for education. Eros can be applied to relationships in the classroom between educators and students. In her discussion of eroticism, Black feminist and cultural critic bell hooks explores the benefits of promoting eros in the classroom. Hooks draws upon feminist critical pedagogy for an understanding of eros that inspires embodied engagement. Hooks (1994) asserts that eros allows feminist educators to move "beyond the mere transmission of knowledge" and bring "a quality of care and even 'love' to our students" (p. 194). This openness to eros affirms feminist pedagogy's belief that "knowledge and critical thought done in the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living outside the classroom" (hooks, 1994, p. 194).

In feminist education, eros motivates teachers to wholly engage students for critical consciousness. In turn, critical consciousness directly influences ethical and social behavior by causing students to critique gender issues and "live differently" (hooks, 1994, p.194). Hooks also discusses the role of eros for students. Eros enables students "to know themselves better and live in the world more fully" (p. 194). Passion "inspires learning, and can "invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination" (hooks, 1994, p. 195). As a result, "the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized" (hooks, 1994, p. 195).

A "transformation in social relations" is the result of Ruth's love for Naomi. Both women gain needed material support, protection, family, and improved social standing because of love. Social transformation is also an outcome of the Samaritan's love in Jesus' parable. Love enables the Samaritan to discover a new, positive way of relating to a Jewish "other" that overcomes the hatred between the two people groups. Jesus' command to "Go and do likewise" points to his desire for such social transformations in the name of love (Luke 10:37).

Social transformation is also in view in womanist understandings of eros. Eros is a "revolutionary love" that enables Black women to love themselves and awaken to "transformative ways of seeing and being" (Settles, 2006, p. 198). This self-love and awakening to critical consciousness empowers black women to love others and establish diverse communities of "revolutionary love" (Settles, 2006, pp. 198-199). Womanist scholar Settles (2006) states, "Indeed, through the mutual respect of an individual's multiplicity and an acknowledgement of an immi-

nent divine presence, a revolutionary community may emerge that becomes an empowering space for the transformation of love into liberation” (pp. 198-199). Eros encourages self-love, inspires passion and devotion toward others, seeks social transformation in relationships, and builds communities of liberation. This feminist and womanist understanding of eros is another important aspect of “radical love.” This love affirms Christian notions of self-love and love of others captured in Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” For educators, radical love informs the ways in which teachers and students create transformative learning communities that promote justice and equality.

Philosophical Foundations

As educators, our idea of a transformative and liberating pedagogy of *radical love* focuses on the interconnections of teacher empathy and action that is best achieved with our students through dialogue. More specifically, Freire (2009), a critical pedagogy philosopher, delineates the significance of educators utilizing a “problem-posing” education where students and teachers become critically engaged with their personal beliefs, thoughts, and actions (i.e. “personal philosophy”). Darder (2002), Freire’s protégé, comments, “All teachers bring their beliefs and values into the classroom and these are transmitted in how we teach and what we teach” (p. 120). Darder’s insights substantiate our objective to assist educators with understanding and becoming more critically conscious of *why* they love their students. For Freire (2009), a “problem-posing” education is facilitated best when educators deliberately seek to stimulate the consciousness of their students through dialogue with the teacher and peers in the classroom. Thus, dialogue in the classroom is an intentional teaching action that essentially assists both teachers and students in becoming more critically aware of their personal ideologies and social interactions.

Furthermore, according to Darder (2002), Freire wholeheartedly concurs that teachers have a responsibility as to how they direct student learning and how they use their authority (i.e. power), explicitly or implicitly, in the classroom. Whereas some teachers think that the use of directive teaching methods (i.e. lectures), may stifle student learning, Darder expresses that teachers should not focus solely on how the content is delivered, but “with the underlying intent and purpose of the knowledge that is being presented and the quality of dialogical opportunities” (p. 112). As a result, educators should choose to use their teaching authority as an explicit teaching and learning tool to uncover and challenge dominant practices and thoughts that are overtly and implicitly communicated during classroom discussions.

For instance, who are the students we consider to be privileged in our classrooms? Who are the students we consider to be poor in our classrooms? Who receives the most or least attention in our classrooms? Who dominates classroom discussions? What are the dominant cultural perspectives (race/ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) represented in our class curriculum materials? Accordingly, educators are presented with numerous opportunities to utilize their authority and power as advocates for students who are inside and outside our socio-cultural frameworks. Darder (2002) reminds us that “cultural processes then are not neutral endeavors but rather are tied to the reproduction of power relationships through social organization” (p. 128). Particularly, in the classroom, educators have been traditionally designated as having the “power” to determine student success or failure. Yet, our goal as educators should not entail abusing our power over students. Instead, educators should use their power to deconstruct and counter dominant social thoughts and practices in their classrooms.

Kennedy’s personal self-reflection of “power” and advocacy for a student involves an African-American female student. Since preschool, this student was identified as being speech and language impaired to increase her overall grammar and vocabulary skills. By her fourth grade year, her receptive and expressive language skills were within functional limits and did not adversely impact her communication skills in the regular education classroom. Consequently, upon her mandated three-year reevaluation, she was exited from the speech and language program. However, after I discussed this action with the student, her classroom teacher informed me that the student cried for the remainder of the day. The classroom teacher helped me realize that the student connected with me as an African-American female and enjoyed coming to speech and language therapy.

As I reflected on this episode, I desired to explain to this student that as a result of my identification with her as an African-American female, I was able to distinguish the cultural influences on her communication skills as a language difference rather than a language disorder. Hence, for me, exiting this student from speech and language therapy, particularly when she did not exhibit a language disorder, was an action of love and care. She should not continue to be inaccurately labeled for her cultural language differences.

For many Black women educators, one’s personal actions in the classroom are in correlation to one’s ethic of care with and for one’s students. Collins (2009) explains the development of an Ethics of Care through Black women’s expressiveness, emotions, and empathy (pp. 281-282) evidenced in their communal interactions. Gay (2010) articulates caring as an explicit and intentional action dependent upon teachers having a knowledge base about ethnic and cultural diversity in education, personal and professional self-awareness (cultural consciousness) and the ability to dialogue about cultural diversity (self-reflections and con-

versations with diverse groups of people) (pp. 68-74). Thus, dialogue is the end result of one's actions of care as a culturally responsive teacher. Although Collins and Gay differ in their explications of care, both descriptions appear foundationally contingent on an individual's personal and dialogical actions toward other people. Similar to the Samaritan's actions of love and care to the injured traveler, an educator's actions of care and love in the classroom should result in culturally diverse dialogue between teacher and students.

Dialogue is also a way of establishing classroom environments where teachers and students are encouraged to recognize their daily cultural participation as "historical subjects of their world" (Darder, 2002, p. 119). Consequently, according to Darder (2002), "students come to see the power that is inherent in their ability to define themselves and give meaning to their world" (p. 119). Likewise, it is also necessary for educators to recognize their power with understanding and defining their concept of love as social participants of history. This way, love will hopefully not become glorified or objectified as an innate or fixed characteristic within human beings. Rather, the concept of love, for educators, should continually develop as a result of our relationships and experiences with students.

Within a Christian biblical perspective, Ruth and the Samaritan demonstrate their ability to actively define love as subjective beings in accordance to their social and cultural experiences. Even as an ancient Moabite woman, Ruth challenges Naomi's petition that she return to her native homeland and culture. However, some feminist and postcolonial scholars question Ruth giving up her culture and assimilating into Naomi's culture. Yet, who ultimately determines that Ruth completely gave up her culture? If we emphasize Ruth's incorporation into Naomi's culture as something detrimental to Ruth's identity, then we consequently disregard the fact that identity and culture are fluid and varied (Darder, 2002, p. 128). For Darder (2002), "culture represents social processes that are intimately linked to class, gender, sexual and racialized formations, upheld by particular social structures, such as those which we find in public schools" (p. 128). Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for educators to question their own cultural identities as well as their cultural perceptions of their students. For this reason, one could surmise that Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi resulted from the questioning of her own identity and culture.

Although Ruth and Naomi have different ethnic cultural traditions, they both experience social marginalization as women and widows. In their cultures, women were socially defined as being weak and vulnerable in comparison to men. As widows without male family members to provide for them, Ruth and Naomi automatically received social class designations as being poor and underprivileged. Conversely, at the end of the narrative, we learn of Ruth and Naomi's social class status change when Ruth marries Boaz, a wealthy landowner. However, why does Ruth need to marry Boaz to achieve a higher social class status? Or, why is it not

possible for Ruth and Naomi to live “happily ever after” together? Ultimately, this scenario reflects ancient Israel’s classism, sexism and heterosexism, oppressive structures that remain prevalent within Western and Judeo-Christian traditions. These structures have maintained their strength through the control and domination of persons deemed powerless.

In fact, this is the lesson that Jesus teaches with the Parable of the Samaritan. One might have expected the Jewish priest or Levite to stop and assist the injured traveler. However, it is not the Jewish priest or Levite who aids the traveler, but the Samaritan, someone with differing cultural and religious beliefs. Hence, the Samaritan uses his personal power to actively define and express his love for the traveler as a practical demonstration of interfaith engagement. Kennedy recalls working with an African-American male fifth-grade student who often referred to his perspective and practices as a Jehovah’s Witness during his speech therapy sessions. During discussions concerning his minimal progress in speech therapy, this student expressed his belief that his Cerebral Palsy (mild severity) and speech impairment would eventually reach a state of “perfection” or “healing” upon his death.

Even in my attempt to discuss the vocational benefits of having good speech conversational skills, this student always framed his responses within his beliefs and practices as a Jehovah’s Witness. To substantiate his arguments, he sometimes brought his Bible and Jehovah’s Witness pamphlets with him to our speech therapy sessions. Although Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christians have some opposing theological beliefs, I never debated about religious differences with him. By allowing this student to express his religious beliefs, I also provided a dialogical space for him to communicate his desires to not receiving speech therapy in middle school. Moreover, my love as an educator for this student was demonstrated in my openness and willingness to listen to his Jehovah’s Witness religious beliefs and practices without imposing my Christian religious perspective on him.

For some persons who identify with various practices of religion, not sharing one’s beliefs with other people is considered irreligious. However, in *On Religion: Thinking in Action*, Caputo (2001) disputes prevailing notions and restrictions of religion to the various confessional faith practices (p. 9). Instead, Caputo (2001) aspires to deconstruct binary thinking tendencies evidenced within our expressive connotations with demarcating persons as either being religious or secular (p. 2). In Caputo’s opinion, the contradiction between being religious or secular is not whether one participates with organized religion or not. But, the ultimate indication of a nonreligious person is the absence of love for other people (p. 3). Caputo expresses, “A lot of supposedly secular people love something madly, while a lot of supposedly religious people love nothing more than getting their own way and bending others to their own will -- “in the name of God” (p. 3).

Therefore, it appears especially important for educators who identify themselves as being religious persons to scrutinize their professed actions of love with their students. Are our actions of love embedded within concealed motives to manipulate and/or control classroom instruction? Or, do we engage the actions of our love in dialogue with our culturally diverse students? Darder (2002) comments,

Given the uncanny way unexamined assumptions and beliefs about the world unexpectedly creep into our practice as teachers, it is imperative that critical educators consistently reflect on their practices and educational decisions. Doing so helps teachers to uncover contradictions that may inadvertently interfere in their efforts to construct a revolutionary practice and thus, to make different choices. (p. 68)

Seemingly, then, the purpose of education does not involve educators transferring their particular religious perspectives, explicitly or implicitly, into their students, but giving students the necessary tools to become independent thinkers.

Since teaching for Freire and Darder is “an act of love”, Darder (2002) remarks, “Teachers who have answered the call to a liberatory practice of education are, in fact, truly motivated by their passion for learning and teaching and their love for others” (p. 92). Hence, this passion for learning, should encourage educators to facilitate dialogue in their classrooms, which, in Freire’s (2009) opinion, is a distinctive element of a “problem posing” liberatory education (p. 89). If dialogue is to occur in the classroom, then love, as its foundation, will seek to construct an environment of participants who are mutually committed to their capabilities to create and re-create as liberated human beings (Freire, 2009, p. 89). In the story of Ruth and Naomi, even though Naomi, in her state of sullenness, attempts to persuade Ruth to leave and return home, Ruth responds to Naomi’s request with a passionate commitment to their relationship.

According to Freire (1998), human beings are “conditioned” by their social, cultural, and historical experiences (p. 54). Thus, our actions of love are also contingent upon our developed social, cultural, and historical perspectives. What if Ruth’s actions of love were prompted as a result of her identification with Naomi as a marginalized woman and widow in society? Or, what if the Samaritan’s actions of love initiated from his connection to the marginalization of the injured traveler? Nevertheless, despite our constructed perceptions of Ruth’s or the Samaritan’s actions, hooks (1994) would more than likely argue that we should not only contemplate the intentions of their actions, but also recognize the risks involved with their actions.

For hooks (1994), the willingness of educators to take risks with their students symbolizes the crucial initiation of “engaged pedagogy” (p. 21). In hooks’s (1994) perspective, “engaged pedagogy” involves both educators and students becoming vulnerable in the classroom with the sharing of experiences, while making critical

practical connections with their personal philosophies and actions (p. 21). Thus, at the core of “engaged pedagogy” is dialogue between teachers and students. This dialogue is facilitated best when established on the premise of love (Freire, 2009, p. 89). Love as a dialogical teaching foundation of “engaged pedagogy” will seek to include the voices and experiences of everyone, not just the teacher’s voice or certain privileged students (hooks, 1994, p. 8). hooks (1994) considers the inclusion of all voices in the classroom as an essential component of a radical pedagogy (p. 8). hooks expresses,

Any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone’s presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone’s presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. (p. 8)

Given that love should facilitate the actions of teaching, regardless of religious affiliation, educators are essentially called to remain critically attentive to the development of their personal philosophy and actions of love.

Conclusion

Because many educators in the United States identify as themselves as Christians who have love for their students, we have interrogated the idea of love through biblical, theological, and philosophical lens. Our examination and critique of love carries several implications for critical pedagogy. When eros love is applied in education, the potential for critical consciousness and social transformation is enhanced. Guided by a Black feminist/womanist conception of eros, an individual learns to love and respect the self. A person understands that her/his perspectives and experiences are legitimate and valuable. This understanding can serve critical pedagogy’s mission to help students discover the place and power of their own unique voices. The revolutionary love of eros also causes the individual to question and examine the world in ways that critique and even challenge dominance. Critical thought is therefore nurtured by erotic love.

The engagement of critical thought is continuously fostered through the co-existence of love and dialogue in the classroom. The exchange of dialogue should facilitate a “problem-posing” education where educators and students critically contemplate the explicit and hidden assumptions of their beliefs and social practices. When established on the premise of love, dialogue in the classroom assists with the inclusion of cultural voices usually marginalized in society such as women of color, lesbian/gay people, persons with disabilities, and individuals from low-income home backgrounds. It is usually through dialogue that we become

more aware of our social and cultural conditioning as well as our participation, or not, in the making and remaking of history.

We have listened to many of these marginalized voices to constructing a pedagogy of *radical love*. Though sparked the dominance of the Christianity in U.S. education, our pedagogical framework can encompass educators who do and do not identify as Christian. Motivated by passion, all educators can express empathetic and active love for students through an ethic of care and dialogue that encourages critical consciousness and facilitates social transformation.

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