

# Elements of Critical Consciousness

## Critical Reflection

refers to the process of learning to question social arrangements and structures that marginalize group of people- "learning to see... how history works, how received ways of thinking and feeling perpetuate existing structures of inequality" (Freire, 2000, p. 13).

## Student Statements

"I am much more comfortable engaging within the community to address needs. I have grown in my confidence to be assertive in determining where I can help to make the most difference." - Service-Learning Student

"The owners won't participate in, or contribute to anything we do in the neighborhood. Why do we support them when they grab their children, their fine expensive cars, and our money and dash out of the community before dark everyday?" (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006 p. 845).

## Critical Motivation

the (*perceived*) capacity to affect social and political change through individual or collective activism (Diemer et al., 2015; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts et al., 2011).

## Student Statements

"Get connected with a health organization that interests me and be actively involved in it" - Service-Learning Student

"What I would like to do further in my community is to speak up when situations arise that are insensitive. At times I take a passive approach even when I know people are making comments that shouldn't be made. I have the ability as an individual to educate those around me not in an aggressive manner, but lovingly so that our community can thrive." - Service-Learning Student

## Critical Action

refers to actions designed to counter or respond to injustice in a liberatory manner (Watts et al., 2011)

## Student Statements

"Just prioritize more time with nursing studies...It is a really cool opportunity, it just is not always easy to make time while you have to study and complete other assignments and projects." - Service-Learning Student

"I think it's important for me to continue to engage in the relationships that developed during the trip. I also want to get more involved with UCB. Outside of the university, I want to figure out what issue(s) I want to pay attention to and join movements against them." -Service-Learning Student

# **Key Aspects of Critical Consciousness**

## **Teacher/student and student/teacher relationships**

Freire's theory of education challenges the traditional style of a "banking" education. In "banking" education, teachers are subject-actors who contain knowledge. That knowledge is deposited into the passive learn-objects, who are empty containers. For Freire, those roles are too rigid, giving too much power to teachers and too little power to students. Each teacher must become teacher/student, and each student must become student/ teacher to create an exchange between equal subjects (Freire, 1973 p. 117).

## **Dialogue**

Dialogue is the main way that teacher/student and student/teacher engage with each other. hooks (1994) described dialogue as the simplest way people can cross boundaries erected by systems of oppression to keep people apart (p. 130). Freire (1973) argued that dialogue is a relationship involving empathy nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust.

## **Problem-posing education**

Through dialogue education moves away from a problem-solving project to be one that is problem-posing. Problem-solving education reduces the human experience to mere problems that are solved. On the other hand, problem posing education humanizes life in all of its complexities and empowers humans to have agency to change their lives for the better by understanding and intervening in these complex problems (Freire, 2000 p. ix, xvi, 110).

## **Democratization**

Critical Consciousness (CC) education develops students' capacities to participate in and create democratic spaces (hooks, 1994, p. 39). In traditional forms of education, students learn unilateral authority is normal, yet at the same time, they are contradictory told that they live in a free and democratic society (Shor, 1992, p. 19). Through a CC pedagogy, students experiment with sharing power, co-creating solutions, and taking command of the learning process. A considerable number of educators including Dewey and Piaget, as well as Freire "have asserted that learning works best in an active creative process" (Shor, 1992, p. 21).

## **Human agency**

According to Freire (2016), CC is deeply rooted in lived experience. It was the "real and concrete hunger" of not knowing where or when his next meal was coming from that drove him to be passionate about changing the world (Freire, 2016, p. 15). This hunger created in Freire a deep belief the future was open to possibility and was not predetermined and in turn lead him to take up actions that brought about social change (Freire, 2016, p. 13).

## **Emotional learning**

"Learning cannot be reduced to a purely intellectual activity. It is more than a mental operation and more than the facts or ideas transmitted by books or lectures" (Shor, 1992, p. 23). CC education embraces both the intellectual and emotional aspects of learning. As emotions are brought into the learning experience, students are freed to experience a wide variety of feelings. Some of the emotions that students experience are curiosity, laughter, hope, joy, anxiety, defensiveness, and sadness (Shor, 1992, p. 24).

## **Healing from oppressive systems**

hooks (1994) wrote about an "engaged pedagogy" that connects the ideas learned in the university to the lived experiences of the students (pp. 3-4, 15). Students seek out these kinds of classes because they desire to experience education as a practice of freedom. This freedom emerges as students use ideas in the classroom to liberate themselves from the oppressive systems they experience daily.

## References

- Brookfield, S.D. (1990). Using critical incidents to explore learners' assumptions. In pages 177-193 of J. Mezirow (Ed). *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- Carlson, E. D., Engebretson, J., & Chamberlain, R. M. (2006). Photovoice as a social process of critical consciousness. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(6), 836-852.
- Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R. D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A. A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1516-1530. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1516
- Diemer, M., McWhirter, E., Ozer, E., & Rapa, L. (2015). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of critical consciousness. *Urban Review*, 47(5), 809-823. doi:10.1007/s11256-015-0336-7
- Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Park, C. J., & Perry, J. C. (2014). Development and validation of the critical consciousness scale. *Youth & Society*, , 0044118X14538289.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness* (1st American ed.). New York: Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (1998). Cultural action and conscientization. *Harvard Educational Review*, 68(4), 499.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2016). *Letters to cristina* Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1999). *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Ginwright, S., & James, T. (2002). From assets to agents of change: Social justice, organizing, and youth development. In B. Kirshner, J. L. O'Donoghue, M. McLaughlin, B. Kirshner (Ed), J. L. O'Donoghue (Ed) & M. McLaughlin (Ed) (Eds.), (pp. 27-46). San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass.
- Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (2003). Teaching democracy: What schools need to do. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(1), 34-66.
- Lloyd, A. S. (1972). Freire, conscientization, and adult education. *Adult Education*, 23(1), 3-20. doi:10.1177/074171367202300101

McWhirter, E. H., & McWhirter, B. T. (2016). Critical consciousness and vocational development among latina/o high school youth: Initial development and testing of a measure. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 24(3), 543-558. doi:10.1177/1069072715599535

Mitchell, T. D. (2008). Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 50-65.

Mitchell, T. D. (2015). Using a Critical Service-Learning Approach to Facilitate Civic Identity Development. *Theory Into Practice*, 54(1), 20-28. doi:10.1080/00405841.2015.977657

Mitchell, T. D., Donahue, D. M., & Young-Law, C. (2012). Service Learning as a Pedagogy of Whiteness. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(4), 612-629. doi:10.1080/10665684.2012.715534

Prilleltensky, I. (2012). Wellness as fairness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(1), 1-21. doi:10.1007/s10464-011-9448-8

Shin, R. Q., Ezeofor, I., Smith, L. C., Welch, J. C., & Goodrich, K. M. (2016). The development and validation of the contemporary critical consciousness measure. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 63(2), 210-223. doi:10.1037/cou0000137

Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thomas, A. J., Barrie, R., Brunner, J., Clawson, A., Hewitt, A., Jeremie-Brink, G., & Rowe-Johnson, M. (2014). Assessing critical consciousness in youth and young adults. *Journal of Research on Adolescence (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 24(3), 485-496. doi:10.1111/jora.12132

Watts, R. J., Diemer, M. A., & Voight, A. M. (2011). Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions. *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development*, 2011(134), 43-57. doi:10.1002/cd.310

Watts, R. J., & Flanagan, C. (2007). Pushing the envelope on youth civic engagement: A developmental and liberation psychology perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(6), 779-792.

## **Case Study #1: (Community Based Learning Director perspective)**

You work in a university's community engagement office. A professor who teaches a course on intercultural leadership approaches you because they would like to use a "community engagement" or "service-learning" component in the course. The professor's idea is to have the students work with people who are experiencing homelessness because this will be a "significant" cross cultural experience for the students. The professor's idea is to have students visit different organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness. During these visits students would eat and have conversations with individuals who are experiencing homelessness. The professor is requesting that you help connect this course to different community organizations.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Briefly explain how this project could support a charity paradigm.
2. What power dynamics are at play as college students engage with people who are experiencing homelessness?
3. Brainstorm ways that you could restructure this project to help develop students' critical consciousness? How would you propose these ideas to the professor?

## Case Study #2: (Faculty perspective)

You are designing a community engaged learning course. A colleague at another university shares with you the learning outcomes for a course that they teach (listed below). You believe the requirements could be more challenging and better reflect the strengths of critical consciousness.

### Learning Outcomes

#### *Knowledge*

1. Identify and describe some values, beliefs, and behaviors of one's own culture.
2. Identify and describe some values, beliefs, and behaviors of the culture with which the student is interacting.
3. Identify and describe some distinguishing features of subgroups (e.g., class, gender, socioeconomic, religion, etc) within these cultures.
4. Identify and describe how cultural difference impacts interactions.
5. Learn a method of guided reflection and analysis.

#### *Skills*

1. Ask questions that lead to a deeper understanding of another culture.
2. Engage in active listening to gain understanding from interactions with someone from another culture.
3. Engage in person-to-person interactions with someone from another culture in a way that demonstrates an understanding of and respect for difference.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do these learning outcomes support a charity paradigm?
2. How could these learning outcomes be reframed with CC so that they develop critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action?
3. How would these reframed learning outcomes address issues of power?

Reflect on the choice that Shor (1992) suggests we have in reproducing/reinforcing or transforming our social condition.

“Critical Consciousness refers to the way we see ourselves in relation to knowledge and power in the society, to the way we use and study language, and to the way we act in school and daily life to reproduce or to transform our conditions” (Shor, 1992, p. 129).

### **Case Study #3: (Non-profit organization perspective)**

You work for a non-profit organization that works at addressing the opportunity gap in education. Your program focuses on literacy skills in K-3rd graders. A university service-learning office approaches you wanting to provide service-learning students to work as tutors in your program. You have been working with college students for a few years and you have witnessed how easy it is for tutors to see their volunteer experience through a charity paradigm. You want to be intentional this time to structure this project in such a way to help develop the volunteers CC.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Identify how this project could support a charity paradigm.
2. What power dynamics are at play as college students tutor in this kind of setting?
3. Brainstorm ways that you could structure this project to help develop students' critical consciousness?