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Critical liberatory inclusive pedagogy: arguing for a zero-defect discourse

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This article explores the discourses within critical pedagogy and inclusive education. It highlights the obstacles that academic institutions and educators need to overcome in order to realise an emancipatory and critical pedagogy. The article valorises muted voices and reflects on how the dominant discourse has camouflaged its hegemonic ideology while perpetuating the centre for dominance and pushing students with special educational needs to the periphery; actions which often make such students feel disempowered, disenfranchised, silenced and marginalised. A critical theory is applied in this article to cast light on exclusion, social injustice and marginalisation.

Kritiese bevrydende inklusiewe pedagogie: 'n pleidooi vir 'n foutlose diskoers

Die soeklig word gewerp op diskoerse in kritiese pedagogie en inklusiewe onderwys, met spesiale klem op die struikelblokke wat akademiese instellings en opvoeders moet oorkom ten einde 'n emansiperende en kritiese pedagogie te verwesenlik. Die stemme van hulle wat die swye opgelê is, moet opklink. Daar word ook besin oor hoe die dominante diskoers sy hegemonesie ideologie vermom het terwyl die middelpunt vir oorheersing geperpetueer, en studente met spesiale onderwysbehoefes uitgestoot is. Sodanige studente voel soms dat hulle gemarginaliseer is: sonder mag, stemreg of seggenskap. 'n Kritiese teorie word aangelê om lig te werp op uitsluiting, maatskaplike ongeregtheid en marginalisering.

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This article adopts a critical theory as a theoretical framework in order to capture and locate critical pedagogy and inclusive education. The use of this theoretical lens is necessary to cast light on the issue of exclusion, social injustice, and marginalisation of students with special educational needs (SEN students). The theoretical framework adopted in this article is problematising some practices and assumptions, taken for granted by examining them differently. The value of questioning the educational practices theoretically is that, while it may appear negative or pessimistic, through its consideration of power relations and understanding of power as diffuse and not as a possession to be wielded by the strong unto the weak (Foucault 1980: 67).

Foucault maintains that to tackle the ideological function of science in order to reveal and modify it, one should “question it as a discursive formation”, which involves mapping the system whereby particular objects are formed and the types of enunciations implicated (Foucault 1972: 25). In order to understand the plight of the marginalised, one should not engage in a battle of truth and fiction with the experiences of the disenfranchised, but rather establish how their experiences have been articulated and publicised, and what the “effects in the real” might be (Foucault 1980: 11).

1. Unmasking social injustice

The uncritical promulgation of education as a vehicle for social justice and politics often obscures both the problems and their solutions. Not understanding the experiences of the marginalised, it could be that SEN students are predicated as not understanding social justice or equity and in denying exclusion as a focus of critique and analysis. One of the major challenges in the twenty-first century is that humankind is faced with serious issues of social injustice.

Critical pedagogy and inclusive education share common ground, or at least some common goals. Critical pedagogy provides a much needed paradigmatic change in the world of un-

just society. One of the goals of critical pedagogy is to transform the unequal world of education by establishing a dialogue of the self and the community of students, where individuals must take action to experience a freer self while aiming to transform the world. This is also one of the main goals of inclusive education, namely to transform the educational system in order to value and support the learning of all students in their own shared experiences (Nkoane 2009: 22).

Equally important is that education for social justice also values the socio-political and cultural context of the students and recognises that students' experiences shape their identity (Thousand *et al* 1999: 324). Therefore, from this perspective, any educational practice must identify and use students' experiences in pedagogy as meaningful and relevant to their shared experiences. For example, to teach SEN students it is necessary to engage in a dialogue with them in order to understand and discover the compelling themes in their lives and, using their generative words as key terms, promote conscientisation.

Cook-Sather (2007: 390) asserts that educators and practitioners of pedagogies should strive to recognise and reposition students as authorities on and authors of their own educational experiences and representation of those experiences. Critical pedagogy encourages practitioners of pedagogies to critically analyse the existing social conditions within and beyond classrooms and to critique the dominant arrangements of power and the creation of platforms to enable the participation of marginalised students.

2. Dialectic voice and praxis

Diaz-Greenberg (1997: 25) emphasises that practitioners of pedagogies who fully embrace a critical pedagogy perspective do a number of things differently. For example, they deliberately mobilise themselves against any form and shape of marginalisation, social injustice, exclusion and segregation. Because these critical pedagogues have committed themselves to social justice and peace, they are opposed to any classroom practices that undermine the

rights of students. In other words, they maintain a particular focus on the critical pedagogy principles of dialogue and dialectic voice.

The principles of critical pedagogy interface with principles involved in challenging the dominant discourse of exclusion segregated separatist perspective to an inclusive perspective. These principles question the dominant discourses to determine how social arrangements are imagined, constructed and challenged. Critical pedagogy and inclusive education join the postcolonial chorus of voices that are opposed to individuals who are at the periphery and students who are outside spheres of power as opposed to those in power. Critical pedagogy, argues for a zero-defect discourse, self-determination, empowering language and the establishment of educational programmes to support disenfranchised and marginalised students (Thousand *et al* 1999: 120).

Critical pedagogy and inclusive education mainly focus on the voices of the voiceless: disempowered communities and individuals, including communities of students. From a critical pedagogical perspective, a person whose voice is elicited, listened to, and acted on, through dialogue, develops an internal awareness and understanding of his/her own reality that makes personal transformation possible. In other words, listening to voices through dialogue is both empowerment and social justice (Nkoane 2009: 26).

The liberatory intentions with critical pedagogies, post-structuralist feminist critiques and revisions of those pedagogies and of exclusion of students' voices are theoretically grounded on a reaction against social injustice, exclusion and marginalisation. The emergence of critical pedagogies and poststructuralist feminist critiques was driven by a "vision of social justice and transformation" based on the recognition of marginalisation, both in human beings' material conditions and in their consciousness, and on the notion that they are subjects and actors in history (Weiler 1990: 30).

Proponents of critical pedagogy and inclusive education challenge the exclusion and silencing of students' voices. Critical

and inclusive pedagogues should encourage dialogue. In this approach to learning, teaching is characterised by cooperation and acceptance, interchangeability and mutuality in the role of pedagogue and learner; the situation dictates that an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and trust be established (Nkoane 2009: 117).

Orner (1992: 76) maintains that discourses on students' voices within critical pedagogy do not adequately recognise that one's voice can at best be tentative and temporary, given the changing – and often contradictory – relations of power at multiple levels of one's social life. Voice is created both deliberately and unconsciously in dialogue with other voices. According to hooks (1994: 54), the engaged voice must never be fixed, frozen or absolute but always in a state of flux, always changing and evolving in dialogue with the world beyond itself.

Proponents of social justice, inclusive education and critical pedagogy always remind one that there is no single student voice; one must recognise and acknowledge how hard it is to learn from voices one does not want to hear and how hard it is to learn to hear those voices (Cook-Sather 2007: 392). In fact, encouraging a position of one dominant discourse motivates the more privileged voices and contains the marginalised ones within the terms set by the most dominant and powerful.

Weiler (1990: 452) asserts that, if marginalised, disenfranchised and excluded persons begin to question their own experiences as the means to understand their own power as knowers and creators of their world and as transformers of their world, then ... Pedagogues should therefore create space and opportunities for students to apply mind and spirit to their own experiences; they should be encouraged to analyse their experiences with a view to changing them.

3. Arguing for a critical liberatory inclusive education

According to Nkoane (2009: 22), critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating and transforming the relationships within classroom teaching; and the production of knowledge.

In addition, critical pedagogy encourages learners, educators and researchers as agents who are actively engaged in promoting social change within the education system. Critical liberatory inclusive education raises the issue of the relationship between the margins and the centres of power in any institution of learning and is concerned with reclaiming power and identity. This article is informed by the critical theoretical conceptualisation that locates inclusive education as a contestation of marginalisation, disenfranchisement and exclusion in bringing about equity in socio-economic spheres. In this article inclusive education is understood as a human rights issue, as pronounced in the 1949 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is the right not to be discriminated against. The declaration attests that everyone has a right to receive education that does not discriminate on the grounds of their differences and likely incapacities (Nkoane 2010: 321).

Graham (2006: 16) argues that the term “inclusion” implies a bringing in; it presupposes a whole into which something (or someone) can be incorporated. It is reasonable to argue that there is an implicit centeredness to the term “inclusion”, for it discursive privileges notions of the pre-existing by seeking to include the “other” into a prefabricated, naturalised space. As such, Derrida’s (1967: 358) statement that “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique” is particularly pertinent to inclusive education, for movement is hampered by the multiplicity of meanings lingering within the discourse that surrounds and carries them.

Lather (2003: 263) asserts that there is a requirement to arrest inclusion’s need to speak of and identify otherness, as this works to produce both margin and centre through the privileging of universal categories and universalised subject. Derrida reminds one that the centre into which one talks of including is but a barren and fictional place. If one must talk of inclusion, then one argues for an invocation of the Derridean concept of writing under erasure, in other words:

... to keep something visible but crossed out, to avoid universalizing or monumentalizing it, a form of a warning of an irreducibility outside of intentional control in the play of the world, keeping a term as both a limit and a resource, opening it up to margins (Lather 2003: 263).

Spivak (1997: 48) cautions against (re)inventing language in an attempt to escape that-which-has-gone-before, stating that to make a new word is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believing it is solved. Reference to “inclusive” or in the inclusive education scholarship can challenge the centeredness implicit in tokenistic attempts to include the marginalised “Other”.

Graham & Slee (2008: 280) argue that scholars in inclusive education need to explicate the discourses of inclusion. Such clarity may help to flush out motives and urge one to distinguish between means and ends. The question should not only be how one moves towards inclusion, but also what one should do to disrupt the construction of centre from which exclusion derives. In so doing, one reveals the conditions of exclusion by pointing to exceptional features as markers of difference.

Inclusive education is not about segregation; marginalisation and separatism used to define and separate “others” from “us”, to create “others” that are not “ourselves”. The dominant discourse uses reductionistic or marginalisation psychology to spoil the identity of others and distance them from “ourselves” (Rhodes 1995: 459).

Inclusive education creates a platform for critical pedagogy and for social justice to provide fertile ground in human experiences that is needed to nurture liberatory consciousness. From the point of view of critical pedagogy, inclusive education is important to set aside differences and the marginalisation of students treated as “others” than “ourselves”. Inclusive education challenges the social arrangements or dominant discourse in terms of power relations, which is the relationship between social power and social weakness, between the oppressor and the oppressed. This educational practice is couched within this relationship (Nkoane 2010: 334).

Inclusive education for social justice must be understood as liberatory pedagogy trying to wipe out the spoiled images one has created in one's mind. Inclusive education could be viewed as a critical liberatory pedagogy that is eradicating the differences of the "other", the different ones. Inclusive education is more complex: it offers a fine example of what one is talking about in the pedagogical liberation (Rhodes 1995: 461).

The dominant discourses constructed the "others" as different from "ourselves". According to depth psychology, one constructs the image of others that uses the part of one that one cannot bear to face; this subcategory of psychology attempts to go beneath the surface mask of self that one adopts socially. Depth psychology maintains that what is inside one seems to colour what one sees inside others. The sins of commission and omission that loom inside one threaten an inner peace, and one tries to expel them by casting them into an external presence which is the "others", a spoiled identity (Rhodes 1995: 467). A critical liberatory inclusive education cautions one to be a participant rather than a spectator in the realisation of social justice. This pedagogic practice encourages one to challenge and change the world; not merely to adapt oneself to it uncritically. The content of critical liberatory pedagogy is one's collective responsibility to engage in dialogue and to seek education with a view to social justice and empowerment (Nkoane 2009: 138).

4. Theorising a zero-defect discourse

Giroux (1992: 56) asserts that domination and marginalisation are engrained in the traditional educational system, which has created a culture of silence by eliminating the paths of thought that lead to a language of critique. According to Nkoane (2010: 3340), for SEN students to be empowered and liberated they should challenge and change the world, and not merely adapt themselves to it uncritically.

A critical liberatory inclusive pedagogy creates a platform for the empowerment of SEN students because it seeks to con-

vince the dominant discourse in institutions of learning about disempowerment, disenfranchisement, silence and marginalisation. Empowerment becomes the core justification for liberty within critical discourse. No SEN student is treated as an object or as a means to an instrumental end, and this is the point on which the critical theories of Kant and Marx converge (Nkoane 2009b: 25).

Critical pedagogy creates a space for marginalised, excluded and dominated persons to collectively provide and seize opportunities for themselves. Their experiences should be shared and heard and they should be active to magnify and valorise the zero-defect discourse and to challenge the dominant discursive spaces and practices, which produce depriving tendencies. Proponents of zero-defect discourse should be respected and liberated.

Zero-defect discourse should be rooted in the enlightenment of social justice and empowerment. Zero-reject discourse counters the hegemonic discourse that is more about the discursive practices which, because of positions of power and privilege, sustain the global dominance of casting SEN students toward the periphery or into social trash bins. Zero-defect discourse rejects a system in which certain individuals enjoy a greater degree of social acceptance than others. The theories of Jurgen Habermas and the Frankfurt school, established in 1924 (Wuthnow *et al* 1985: 231, Mahlomaholo & Nkoane 2009: 35), seem the most appropriate theoretical framework for an understanding of the zero-reject discourse. The theories outlined above argue for the knowledge form that critiques an excess of power and its unequal distribution that leads to oppression, exclusion and marginalisation, among others. Critical pedagogy defines this theoretical framework as emancipatory, as it questions how things are, and posits the possibility of an alternative.

Zero-reject discourse advances the emancipatory agenda described by Habermas. Critical pedagogy allows the voices of marginalised and disenfranchised SEN students to be heard. This discourse is appropriate when dealing with issues of social justice and empowerment (Mahlomaholo & Nkoane 2009: 42).

Freire & Macedo (1998: 243) adopt the opinion of the marginalised, in the belief that such groups are not only more insightful about their experiences but also more motivated to change the circumstances of their oppression. In addition, Freire's pedagogy was an act of communion to address not only the questions the oppressed sought to answer but also a commitment to act in the transformation of the very forces that constrained their emancipation.

5. Research design and methodology

The methodology in this article is not driven by essentialism, nor is it used as "narrated", referring to the "narrating of method" in order to achieve objective knowledge or absolute truth. Rather, methodology in this article is used as a theory of knowledge and as an interpretative framework that guides a particular investigation. This article uses deconstruction as a strategy or method for interpreting and analysing data. Derrida (1991: 87) points out that deconstruction is not destruction because of the latter's association with annihilation or negative reduction.

Participants were drawn from one of the higher education institutions in the Free State. The choice of location was informed by economic factors and the easy access to participants. Participants were interviewed by using the Free Attitude Interview technique. Open-ended questions were used which focused on the research questions underpinning the investigation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed in order to determine similarities and differences. Fairclough's (1992: 65) discourse analytic procedure was used to analyse all the transcripts, with the focus on the respondents' statements. This was interpreted in context, leading the researcher to the findings. Finally, the results were interpreted against the background of the literature reviewed. As will become clear, the strategy adopted in this article originates from the tradition of qualitative critical approach, with emancipation of the interviewees as its basic cognitive interest (Nkoane 2010: 324). Textual-orientated discourse analysis focuses

on what people say, and this text is used as evidence to substantiate the readings or interpretations of the study.

The following quotes are the actual voices of SEN students who raised some concerns as to the efforts made by academic institutions to raise awareness and offer them greater access. The academic institutions' perceived lack of effort or consideration of their special needs had a direct impact on SEN students to fully participate and become actively involved in campus life. During the interviews SEN students were of the opinion that these institutions made little or no effort regarding their special needs. The needs of SEN students could prevent them from participating in the full range of student activities offered by universities.

E1: At this moment, well, taken a greater effort there is little that is made for us. (Okay) [...] to come and register here, it was my own initiative not because of the initiatives from this university.

E2: We still don't have facilities [Okay] and then think of any blind student in this campus [...] we still have certain problems or issues that need to be sorted out [...] also is a problem with quadriplegic students.

E3: The library problem may not be able to be solved now (Okay)... some of the problems the university knows them [...] Yes we can identify them but unless the management of the university does something or they come forward and it is up to lectures if they are impressed [Yes] [...] if these things are not addressed, so we not see any increase in access [Yes, Okay].

SEN students tended to view themselves as victims of circumstances. This is not surprising, given the fact that some institutions have done little towards inclusive education. These students were of the opinion that academic institutions should consult them regarding planning and matters affecting them. SEN students view their institutions as static and not amenable to change. They maintained that some transformation was necessary.

The above excerpts clearly indicate that SEN students theorised about the practices of their institutions in the same manner as dominant and dominating ideology conceptualises these. This position in discourse enabled SEN students to engage

in “passionate research” in search of “discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us” (Hall 1994: 393).

SEN students cannot be wished away. It is a matter of urgency to become aware of their existence and to respond to their needs. The discourse of SEN students is an empowering one. It defines their existence and deconstructs the barriers they face in their daily lives. Their lived experiences are regarded as a trap where the dominant discourses appear to devalue their existence. The solution is for SEN students to understand their positioning within the post-structuralism discourse. This means that SEN students should refuse to think of themselves as non-existent, or to permit the institutions of learning to pin them down. In practice, SEN students should raise their voices against the dominant discourse, and should not perceive themselves as nonentities but as the same as all other students who are termed able (Nkoane 2010: 337).

Dominant discourse has positioned SEN students in a particular way because of hurdles imposed by some academic institutions. Students seemed to sound counter-hegemonic with the discourse and contested the power relations produced by centre of power. This became clear when they positioned themselves as not waiting to find out about the efforts of the institutions to raise access to academic institutions.

The discourse of students indicated and described how power creates discourse and how discourse, in turn, creates positionality. These students had a particular knowledge of “the other” (for example, of the socio-economic-historic-cultural-political context), which is a positioning achieved through discursive spaces and practices. The state of a dominant discourse treating SEN students as if they were nonentities implies that these students could rise above the forces of marginalisation and become the counter-hegemonic power force to raise their existence and to fight for inclusion (Nkoane 2010: 338).

In analysing the discourses of SEN students, it is clear that they were subjugated by a force of power to positions as subaltern classes and that they experienced discomfort within their position in institutions of learning. In practice, they did not enjoy the same benefits, privileges and rights as the dominant classes. This created dissatisfaction among them. This positioning in discursive space and practices tended to position them on the counter-side where they opposed the hegemonic interests.

The dominant discursive spaces and practices, as SEN students indicated in the above extracts, in turn, produced spaces and practices that were both diabolical and antagonistic by depriving SEN students access to institutions of learning. As such opponents of the hegemonic discourse became visible and known.

6. Conclusion

The discussions and propositions offered in this article are intended to produce new ways of viewing and understanding inclusive education. If one fails to realise liberatory inclusive education, one may as well be part of what Derrida (1991: 87) terms a gramophony, in which one is forced to perpetuate exclusion, social injustice, marginalisation and oppression.

Propositions offered in this article remind one that critical liberatory inclusive pedagogy is about oneself and this requires one to perceive oneself as implicated in social injustice, marginalisation, oppression and exclusion. The voices of marginalised students have shed light on how one's own practices create barriers.

In conclusion: one should always engage in dialogue with others to discover where and how their voices are being silenced. Zero-reject discourse amplifies the voices of those who were oppressed and prevented from talking back – affirming their existence as human beings.

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