Theoretical Underpinnings for the Classroom as Community

Insights drawn from, “Education for Social Transformation: Infusing Feminist Ethics and Critical Pedagogy into Community-Based Research” by Cynthia Ganote and Patrizia Longo

Feminist Relational Theory:

Starts from social practices and relationships, and calls for a re-conception of the notion of rights, autonomy, and justice. A feminist relational approach holds that we are essentially and fundamentally social and interdependent beings and that who we are and what we become are constituted by the ensemble of social relations in which we are situated.

The question becomes, what happens when we take the interdependence of human beings as the starting point for our discussions and teaching?

Feminist Ethics:

- Understanding the self as embedded in relationality increases the importance of the other in knowledge production.
- One experiences individuality only through knowing others. Thus, relational knowledge is mutually created, permeable, changing, dynamic, and built over time.
- Feminist ethics recognizes that oppression is a pervasive moral wrong and that our evaluation of pedagogy must be sensitive to the questions of oppression.
- Feminist morality emphasizes the commitment to context and particularity rather than abstraction. Distinctiveness of the other becomes a central focus and thus moral concern includes the differences between people. Because others’ experiences are not a reflection of our own, critical dialogue is required.

Critical Pedagogy

- Freire understands that people educate each other through the mediation of the world.
- He argues that critical dialogue occurs through the creation of a co-intentional educational space.
- With a co-intentional classroom, critical dialogue leads to a critical awareness of inequalities.
- A critical pedagogy treats knowledge as an interconnected, social process that happens within community.

Feminist Ethics and Critical Pedagogy

The feminist relational approach emerging from feminist ethics, combined with critical pedagogy, offers a transformative model of interested, embedded, and connected inquiry into experience in a community-based classroom.

Questions to Consider

What are your initial reactions to the article?
What impact would an understanding of interconnectedness have on dialogue? An understanding of mutual knowledge production, community as a process?

Both Benhabib and hooks emphasize the importance of the individual voice. How do you maintain the individual voice amidst a communal classroom?

How would this approach help to achieve community in the classroom?

**Community Definition (5 minutes)**

Now that we’ve discussed the article, let’s come up with a community definition for all of us here at the workshop. What are some words that you think of when you hear the word, “community”?
Recommended Readings


