The Intertextualist: Future Teachers, Past Pedagogy, and Dedifferentiation in Multicultural Education

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education is thought to consist of five dimensions: content integration, the knowledge-construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Of the five, equity pedagogy is identified as an essential element by leading scholars in the field. Can equity pedagogy alone create the powerful learning experiences needed for multicultural education? This is an important question to consider as conservatism and dedifferentiation challenge multicultural education. If dedifferentiation is a recurring feature that impacts teachers and students, then we need a pedagogy that accounts for its significance. This article explores the ways a pedagogy of intertextuality responds to dedifferentiation and extends equity pedagogy for the development of future teachers and leaders.

Keywords: Activity Theory, Dialogic Pedagogy, Diversity Training, Intertextuality, Multiculturalism

In "Equity Pedagogy: An Essential Component of Multicultural Education," Banks and Banks (1995) discuss the misconception that multicultural education is simply the insertion of content about diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups into the general academic curriculum. The absence and presence of diversity in our academic curricula are perennial concerns. However, the pedagogical features of multicultural education do not receive the same level of attention. Shannon-Baker (2018) agrees that if multicultural education is to

remain effective in the face of rapid changes in education and the larger culture, it must be (re)conceptualized and its various dimensions may have to be reconsidered and possibly reconfigured.

According to Banks (2016) as well as Banks and Banks (1995), multicultural education consists of five dimensions: content integration, the knowledge-construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Of the five, equity pedagogy is identified as an essential element. Banks and Banks (1995) write, "We define equity pedagogy as teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" (p. 152). But what exactly makes it essential? Banks and Banks (1995) argue that equity pedagogy creates active learning experiences. It challenges the notion that teachers are depositors of information and the classroom is simply a site for the transmission of facts (p. 153). The authors claim that all teachers need to be able to competently implement equity pedagogy. But should this be the only pedagogy that we are able to implement?

Bernauer and Tomei (2015) and Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) say no, especially for those of us who teach in adult education programs. The essentialism associated with equity pedagogy mirrors the modernist thinking that multiculturalism must continue to avoid. Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) argue that it is the celebration of differences in postmodernism that helps to open spaces and provide opportunities for multiculturalism to flourish (p. 22). Usher and Edwards (1994) clarify the basic relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Postmodernism privileges plurality and appreciates otherness. It disrupts definitions of objectivity, foundationalism, disciplinarity, and scientificity that are often the hallmarks of modernism. When Banks (2016) as well as Banks and Banks (1995) traffic in the totalizing discourse associated with modernist thinking in the name of multiculturalism, we must ask ourselves if we are unintentionally participating in the maintenance of postmodern initiatives trapped in a modernist paradigm. While not always apparent, this paradox raises questions about our ability to adapt our skills and pedagogical strategies in educational systems that are changing constantly in response to social, political, and technological influences (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Jaschik, 2016). For example, what happens to equity pedagogy as a dimension of multicultural education in the growing push toward online education? As the varying needs of our student populations expand and educational forms diversify, Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) believe that we will see even more changes in terms of our goals, academic structures, curricula, and pedagogy. This constant transformation of our academic landscapes reflects what they call *dedifferentiation.* According to Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997), "dedifferentiation implies a breakdown of clear and settled demarcations between different sectors of education and between education and cognate

fields" (p. 23). As a feature of postmodernism, dedifferentiation is an inherently disruptive process. Christensen and Eyring (2011) argue that this kind of disruption has brought us to a critical crossroad in higher education and hanging on to past practices can imperil the future. As dedifferentiation continues, we must be able to adapt and innovate accordingly (Usher & Edwards, 1994; Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Shannon-Baker, 2018). More importantly, Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) argue that dedifferentiation means that education can no longer monopolize learning, since enterprises and activities in many contexts can be deemed educational. The authors believe that "it is clear that dominant conceptions of knowledge, curricula, and pedagogy are in drastic need of rethinking" (p. 24).

To begin this rethinking process, I propose that we supplement equity pedagogy in the five dimensions of multicultural education with a *pedagogy of intertextuality.* A pedagogy of intertextuality accounts for the impermanence, heterogeneity, and interconnectedness that are common features of postmodern education. As a metaphor for interrelatedness and disruption, intertextuality has much to teach educators and our increasingly diverse student body. In this theoretical assessment, I revisit the genealogy of the concept of intertextuality as a way to acknowledge the importance of its origins in the dialogism of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin and its appropriation by the French theorist Julia Kristeva. This overview provides the framework that reveals the ways in which intertextuality mirrors dedifferentiation and extends our understanding of equity pedagogy in multicultural education. I conclude by outlining the key features of a pedagogy of intertextuality that will help us to develop the teachers and leaders we need now and in the future.

THE ORIGINS OF INTERTEXTUALITY

In their historical reviews of intertextuality, Worton and Still (1990) and Alfaro (1996) trace the idea of intertextuality back to the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. Many of these early philosophers anticipate the figure most central to our contemporary notion of intertextuality. Alfaro (1996) claims that it is in the work of the language philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin that we find the origins of intertextuality as it is commonly conceptualized today. According to Alfaro (1996), "What can uneasily be called 'Bakhtin's philosophy' is a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge, one among other modern epistemologies that seek to grasp human behavior through the use we make of language" (p. 272). The umbrella term for Bakhtin's philosophy is *dialogism.* Dialogism represents the different ways in which Bakhtin meditates on dialogue as a fundamental feature of language and as a modeling system for human existence and representation (Holquist, 1990, p. 33). Key to Bakhtinian thought is the understanding that dialogue mediates the interrelations of meanings between parts and wholes as well as sameness and difference. According to Bakhtin (1984), "Language

lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it. Dialogic interaction is indeed the authentic sphere where language lives. The entire life of language, in any area of its use (in everyday life, in business, scholarship, art, and so forth), is permeated with dialogic relationships" (p. 183). In dialogism, languages intersect with one another in a variety of ways and they do not exclude. Bakhtin (1981) insists that "The word in language is half someone else's" (p. 293).

According to Orr (2001), Julia Kristeva is credited with introducing Bakhtin's ideas to Western audiences (pp. 24-28). However, Alfaro (1996) warns that it is important to note the distinctions between Bakhtin's and Kristeva's contribution to intertextuality. She writes, "Bakhtin's emphasis on the historical uniqueness of the context of every utterance distances his terms from the endlessly expanding scope of intertextuality. In Kristeva's usage, the intersection of textual surfaces in a literary word can never be circumscribed; it is open to endless dissemination" (1996, p. 276). Bakhtin scholars in America often complain that Kristeva misrepresents Bakhtin's ideas (Morson & Emerson, 1990). One result of this criticism has been the proliferation of interpretations of intertextuality. Orr (2001) and Alfaro (1996) review the contributions provided by theorists such as Todorov, Culler, Genette, Riffaterre, and Barthes. Both acknowledge that all of these theorists are somewhat indebted to Kristeva. These theorists either criticize or co-opt the innovation that Kristeva builds on the foundation established by Bakhtin. Echoing Bakhtin, Kristeva (1986) tells us that dialogism characterizes writing as subjective, communicative, and intertextual. In one of her earliest appropriations of Bakhtin, Kristeva (1986) claims, "each word (text) is an intersection of word (text) where at least one other word (text) can be read… any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p. 37). Kristeva (1984) rebrands intertextuality as *transposition* because intertextuality was being oversimplified as the study of the interrelationship of sources (pp. 59-60).

In Kristeva's world view, intertextuality has greater significance and implications. Texts represent language as both a signifying process and a sociocultural process. Human identities are caught up in the same processes as texts. In fact, one is an extension of the other in postmodern thought (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 55-56; Payne, 1993, pp. 180-181). The transformation of the human subject using a reinterpretation of texts serves as the impetus and foundation for Kristeva's semiotics. Semiotics is the study of meaning-making using language as a sign system. It helps us to understand the many ways in which our realities and practices are all social constructions. These social constructions behave like language and texts (Scholes, 1985, p. xi; Shotter, 1993, p. 26). *Semiotics* becomes the term that Kristeva adopts and adapts in order to characterize the disruption, signification, and possibilities found in the reconfiguration of one sign or text into another. To define this continuous integrative and transformative process, Kristeva (1984) uses the terms *symbolic* and *semiotic.* Grounding her terms in the tradition of psychoanalysis, Kristeva (1984) claims that the symbolic and the semiotic are

inseparable. They are two features of the same process. The symbolic relies on fixed meanings and the hierarchical structures associated with modernism. However, the semiotic is the opposite of the symbolic. It celebrates the multiplicity and heterogeneity underpinning postmodernism. For Kristeva (1984), the semiotic revises and remodels the symbolic (p. 62). The heterogeneity of meaning—like the inherent dialogism in texts—provides the semiotic with the capacity to disrupt the power of the symbolic and all of the hierarchies, oppositions, and dominating structures that it represents in society (pp. 69-71). In other words, the semiotic acts as an agent that is always in a position to challenge and change the symbolic, giving the semiotic the kind of political power and pedagogical influence that can help us to create more freedom for humans and a better and more equitable society (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 80-89; Payne, 1993, p. 180).

A PEDAGOGY OF INTERTEXTUALITY

What often gets lost in the criticism and the complexity surrounding Kristeva's conceptualization(s) of intertextuality and semiotics is that she sees the text as a form of practice. For Kristeva, the text is the embodiment of the idea of intertextuality and its transformative processes. In intertextuality, theory and practice are inseparable because they are two phases of the same constructivist process. Texts disrupt and they deconstruct. According to Payne (1993) and Scholes (1985), texts are always and everywhere a force for social transformation. They characterize what Bernstein (1990) describes as the inner logic of pedagogic practices. In his study of pedagogic processes, Bernstein (1990) concludes that the production, reproduction, and overall transformation of culture are essentially relational and pedagogical. Pedagogy is an example of social and cultural relations (pp. 64-65). These relations are mediated through texts. Refusing to attach itself to an established order, the text fosters linguistic, social, and cultural changes simultaneously (Kristeva, 1984, p. 180). When texts are constructed in the process of intertextuality, a new space opens to make room for another text that is a response to the prior text. This is the fundamental logic associated with the kind of practices that are needed to maintain equitable social relations. "In calling the text a practice," Kristeva argues, "we must not forget that it is a new practice, radically different from the mechanistic practice of a null and void, atomistic subject who refuses to acknowledge that he is a subject of language" (1984, p. 210).

Our use of language reminds us that we are always adapting, interpreting, and responding in an endless process of (inter)textualization or what is simply called reading and writing in activity theory. While not a dominant theoretical perspective among educators, activity theory presents us with an important understanding of intertextuality as a theory of learning (Shotter, 1991, 1993). Activity theory is influenced by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, a major contributor to constructivism. For Vygotsky (1978),

language shapes human activities into structures that can be reshaped repeatedly depending on contexts (p. 28). Because the contexts for human activities are always changing, Vygotsky says that the tools for learning also change. His work is viewed by some scholars as an "important predecessor and perhaps even as clinical underpinning to Bakhtin's philosophy of language" (Emerson, 1986, p. 27). From the perspectives of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, language must always play a central role in the articulation of any theory of learning. Russell (1995) agrees when he explains that an active theory of learning focuses on the interconnections among language, human behavior, and consciousness in an activity system. Activity systems are goal-oriented, contextual, situated, cooperative, and interactive. As a fundamental unit of analysis for understanding culture and people, activity systems help us to connect the psychological and social processes that constitute and condition both (p. 53). Russell (1995) identifies the interactive elements of activity theory as a performative system: "subject (a person or persons), and object(ive) (an objective or goal or common task), and tools (including signs) that mediate the interaction" (p. 53). Also, Russell (1995) claims that there are, arguably, five important constituents involved in this system. He writes, "Activity systems are historically developed, mediated by tools, dialectically structured, analyzed as the relations of participants and tools, and changed through zones of proximal development" (p. 54). Mediational tools could include actual tools, computers, speaking, reading, writing, music, architecture, and physicality (p. 54). Russell (1995) claims that texts are also tools one uses to carry out activities. Just as there are a variety of tools for completing different activities, there are also a variety of texts one can use. As human activities change in complex systems and situations, these texts/tools help us to adapt and transform our environments. Russell (1995) writes, "For those tools that are in the form of texts, meanings almost always arise in relation to previous texts (intertextuality) as well as in relation to nontextual phenomena" (p. 55). In activity theory, learning is situated and contextualized in some kind of system of relations. It is also the result of one's participation in that system.

Another feature of the activity system that Gadotti (1996) believes is important is its dialectical structure. The dialectal structure recognizes that change occurs as a result of conflict and cooperation (Russell, 1995, p. 55). In fact, Gadotti (1996) argues that conflict is an important element in learning theory. Conflict pedagogy acknowledges that all things are in motion and always interrelated and permeated by the regulatory and hierarchical nature of power. For Gadotti (1996), the use of conflict as a teaching strategy is important in any transformative pedagogy. He writes, "the role of the educator is to educate. Educating presupposes a transformation, and there is no kind of peaceful transformation. There is always conflict and rupture with something, with, for instance, prejudice, habits, types of behaviors, and the like" (1996, p. xvi). Yet, equity pedagogy often emphasizes consensus and de-emphasizes conflict, despite the fact that rapid change often undercuts consensus just as soon as it is reached. Gadotti (1996) agrees that an overemphasis on unity and

equality in pedagogy might do more to hinder than help our efforts to understand differences and diversity in various multicultural contexts. Equity pedagogy could benefit from what Shannon-Baker (2018) calls the "additive approach" to multicultural education. Not only should educators be able to connect the past to the present but also one pedagogy to another. Equity pedagogy tends to sever multicultural education from action and discourage intersectional understanding of identity and interaction (Shannon-Baker, 2018, p. 53). As educators, we must learn to be effective mediators. According to Giroux (1992), teaching is a form of mediation between differences. He claims, "we can't be good mediators unless we are aware of what the referents of the mediation we engage in are…. The thing about teaching is that the specificity of the context is always central. We can't get away with invoking rules and procedures that cut across contexts" (Giroux, 1992, p. 17). It is in intertextuality and activity theory that we discover "politics and pedagogy developed around new languages capable of acknowledging the multiple, contradictory, and complex subject positions people occupy within different social, cultural, and economic locations" (Giroux, 1992, p. 21).

CONCLUSION

This discussion presents an alternative perspective on learning theory that may prove to be a useful resource for those who work in various areas of multicultural education. When viewed through a dialogic lens, intertextuality becomes the figurative equivalent of dedifferentiation. Both emphasize the complex nature of all transformations. Transformation creates disruption, but it also presents us with opportunities to improve and to develop new ideas, strategies, and practices for teaching and learning in multicultural contexts. There needs to be a better understanding of the interrelationships among language, change, and democracy in these contexts. Intertextuality offers us a useful approach. A pedagogy of intertextuality is essentially a philosophy of teaching and learning that imagines texts as a metaphor, medium, and method for democratizing culture and society. It is congruent with equity pedagogy in the sense that it supports constructivism and cross-cultural integration. However, intertextuality adds an extra dimension to equity pedagogy. It serves as a paradigm for studying the kinds of complexities that some intersectionalists, interdisciplinarians, and digital pedagogues believe we do not have (Bernauer & Tomei, 2015; McCall, 2005; Newell, 2001). Also, intertextuality recognizes language and impermanence as central features in our understanding of democracy (Hirschkop, 1999). Democracy itself is a form of continuous practice that is intertextual, intersectional, interdisciplinary, and always conflictual. Therefore, we should not downplay conflict and difference in pedagogy. Instead, we must turn them into productive teaching moments that clarify our understanding of difference and diversity from one cultural context to the next. For teaching and learning,

intertextuality depends on the dialogism, consensus, and conflict inherent in all notions of difference and diversity (Graff, 2003; Trifonas, 2003).

In the end, intertextuality is critical praxis. It recognizes learning as reflection and performance. Performance involves adaptation in some context. Like humans, texts perform. They interact and interrelate in the same way people do. Humans are their cultures. They even create their own personal cultures in a process of acceptance, appropriation, and rejection. We are in a continuous process of change as we engage in the various interconnected systems that shape and form our environments and our lives. Intertextuality is a metaphor for this process, and this process is as dialogic and heterogeneous for humans as texts. As a result, intertextuality reminds the equity pedagogue that we do not face the same barriers, social dilemmas, and life chances. We can never accommodate all of the differences and diversities in the community or classroom. However, we can recognize these differences as forms of texts and use them as teaching tools. This is why educators and leaders must be able to negotiate, integrate, and implement a wide variety of pedagogical practices that speak directly to impermanence and heterogeneity in all areas of education and society. Intertextuality is one more strategy that helps us to reach this goal.

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