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Neoliberalism and Postmodernism: The Scylla And Charybdis For Critical Pedagogy And What Can Be Done About It

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Abstract

For most of Western history many have held higher education institutions as paragons of freedom against the tyranny of ignorance and superstition and has imperative to shaping the public good (Bloland, 1995). The rise of neoliberalism during the late 1970s in the West however fundamentally questioned the role of higher education institutions in the process of public good formation. Roughly at the same time that neoliberalism began to question the purposes of higher education institutions, theories which became labeled postmodern also emerged and challenged the notion that knowledge produced by higher education was liberating. Rather, postmodern thinkers (even if they eschewed the label and a coherent school of thought) largely argued that all knowledge was oppressive and that critical theory, while well-meaning was futile. Neoliberals and postmodernist generally chafe at what they consider improbable utopianism albeit for different reasons (Allan, 2011). Yet, there are many of us who hold to the ideals of critical pedagogy and believe that justice can be achieved through education. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate ways in which higher education institutions and critical theorists can create knowledge which promotes the public good, in light of neoliberalism and the postmodern critique. Ultimately, I call for the creation of a new academic discipline, higher education and the public good.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, postmodernism, critical pedagogy

Scylla and Charybdis

For most of Western history many

have held higher education institutions as

paragons of bastions of freedom against the tyranny of ignorance and superstition (Bloland, 1995). During the 1960s campus protests in the United State and Europe, some even argued that these ideals began to materialize. Education and particularly higher education institutions were cast as fundamental to the public good because they challenged the barriers of racism, sexism and authoritarianism (Newfield, 2008). While a vague term, the public good has usually approximated a harmonious state of affairs where heterogeneous but equal citizens can engage in political discussions about their society, where criticism can lead to new solutions. In addition, there is also a relatively equal distribution of wealth or at least mechanisms, which help to distribute wealth more equally.

The rise of neoliberalism during the late 1970s in the West however fundamentally questioned the role of higher education institutions in the process of public good formation. Neoliberals generally held that all institutions, especially public institutions, should be held accountable to the market and should produce a trained workforce and profitable research, not deal with wasteful esoteric and social justice concerns (Harvey,

2005). This paper focuses mostly on America because America can be seen as a proxy for neoliberalism (Peet, 2009). Neoliberalism emerged in America and the United Kingdom and then was and has been imposed on other countries through global trade forums and policies, and sometimes direct force (Chomsky, 1999; Peet, 2009). Higher education institutions in countries around the world have been one of the main sites of enforced neoliberal doctrines imposed by the West (Rhoads & Torres, 2006). In light of the increasing market focus. many policymakers and administrators in higher education began to ponder questions such as: Are social justice concerns costly? Should too higher education institutions mainly prepare students for the workforce or provide a liberal education? How much of the benefits of higher education are individual and how much are social?

Roughly at the same time that neoliberalism began to question the purposes of higher education institutions, certain strands of progressive thought morphed into a debilitating critique of the very structure of the knowledge production system of higher education itself. While by no means a

coherent school of thought, these theories usually fall under the title postmodernism. One theory in particular which called into account the very structure and function of the university and its role as a knowledge producer was Foucault's theory power/knowledge (Bloland, Foucault (1977) argued that knowledge and reason, far from the Enlightenment view of instruments of liberation, were actually tools domination. Foucault of and other postmodern theorists (some which eschewed the label) sought to understand how knowledge produced by higher education and in society in general, oppresses rather than liberates.

These developments highlight higher education institutions changing role in the shaping of the public good for any given region or polity. Currently, as higher education (and even post-secondary institutions) across the globe move to a model of increased privatization, where services and even core functions are outsourced to private companies, and where institutions seek to maximize their profit, attract the best students and create patents, the question of a just and equitable public good is becoming more complex and harder

to answer (Lambert, 2014). On the other side, when researchers and faculty members seek to rectify this situation, postmodern criticisms attack the very nature of the knowledge and ideas produced institutions as oppressive or at the very least unable to lead to positive social change (Allan, 2011; Bloland, 2005). This paper sets out to chart a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of neoliberalism postmodernism for those who practice critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is premised on the fact that suffering and oppression are not inevitable factors of human existence, but rather can be challenged with education (Kincheloe, 2007). Neoliberals and postmodernist generally chafe at what they consider improbable utopianism albeit for different reasons (Allan, 2011).

Postmodernism however is not necessarily dominant in the university, and in many cases, many academics would most likely argue that postmodern is not prevalent at all in the university. As Bloland (2005) notes however, postmodernism gives scholars a frame in which to view the changes in higher education over the last half century. Higher education as a postmodern institution

does not necessarily manifest from the works of individual scholars. Rather, higher education institutions taken as whole can be argued to exhibit postmodern tendencies. Universities are expected to meet many obligations, disparate from workforce training, to remedial education, to teacher training, to service only to name a few. This fragmentation of mission has eroded any sense of unified purpose for institutions (Bloland, 2005). Further, knowledge produced in higher education institutions is increasingly delivered in fragmented bits as specialization increases and further erodes unity. As knowledge and information increases, institutions face information overload (X, Fullan, 2001). In this state of overload, institutions have a more difficult time making meaning. One of the basic tenets of postmodernism is the loss of "metanarratives" overarching or any meaning or story (Bloland, 2005: Lyotard, 1979). Higher education was traditionally seen as the path to liberation. Yet, as Lyotard (1979) argued, this overarching story inherited from the Enlightenment was exposed as a lie. Higher education did not signal liberation; there was just daily existence. fraught with conflict and

ambiguity. The only thing reminiscent of a guiding story or purpose now is what Lyotard (1979) calls performativity, which is essentially workforce training and profit maximization. The metanarrative of higher education, which perhaps reached its zenith in the 1960s, the metanarrative of education as inevitable progress, is lost. This is one way in which higher education institutions can be viewed as postmodern, because of their lack of perceived purpose and the fragmentation of knowledge (Bloland, 2005). This lack of purpose severely hinders a universities ability to promote the public good.

this neoliberalism At point, and postmodernism are not contradictory as much as they are on a spectrum. At first glance, the main "purpose" of higher education today is as Lytoard suggests something akin performativity. to Performativity is essentially neoliberalism in higher education, workforce training and revenue generation. This is Scylla. However, on further inspection, neoliberalism does not really have a purpose. As Tuck (2012) suggests, neoliberalism is essentially a form of nihilism because it does provide any source of meaning or unity, it does liberate

or bind together. It is a thought system which simply promotes greed and atomization. This is Charybdis. Yet, Bloland (2005) argues that higher education should not abandon the ideas of the Enlightenment, the ideas of unity and liberation. Habermas (1990) said as much.

This paper follows Bloland (2005) and Habermas (1990). It proposes creating purpose in spite of the loss of the metanarrative. This is the course we must chart through Scylla and Charybdis. One way to accomplish this may be to create a new discipline or field which is solely dedicated to providing this sense of unity and direction for higher education. As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, my call for the creation of a new discipline borders on utopian idealism. The reviewer noted that this utopian idealism is not necessarily a negative, but it should be nonetheless addressed. Regarding this idealism, I follow Weiner (2007) and others like Giroux (2011), who argue that scholars must begin to imagine a better world than the one presently inhabited. This paper is an exercise in imagination, a possible blueprint for this better world.

Data Dissemination

One of the hallmarks of a discipline or field is a specialized method of data collection. However, data collection can only be one facet of the public good in higher education. Along with data collection, the public good and higher education is concerned with data dissemination. Knowledge is created by it is not necessarily circulated (Cooper 2013). Cooper (2013) argued that the knowledge created by higher education institutions is useless if it does not inform policymaking and practice. Critical knowledge mobilization builds of Cooper's (2013) ideas. Critical knowledge mobilization is a democratic activity, but it transcends the boundaries of communities, states, regions and even nations. It also cannot be one sided partisan. It cannot be liberal or conservative. For instance, two of the biggest supporters of performance based funding are Bill Gates and Barak Obama, both of which are democrats. In addition, as also \ many democrats had a hand in the creation of performance based funding and other The accountability policies. overriding concern of CKM must be evidence. All ideas must be based on sound

evidence obtained from sound research.

In order to become this necessary vehicle of social criticism and creation, higher education institutions must challenge the truth regime established by neoliberalism policies and create new forms of knowledge. In order to challenge the current truth regime, which inhibits the creation of a truly vibrant public good, higher education institutions can begin to create and disseminate their own knowledge through the process of critical knowledge Higher education mobilization (CKM). institutions are bounded by virtue of their position in a vertical hierarchy with state legislators on top, thus, they must answer to the state (Richardson & Smalling, 2005). But colleges can simultaneously re-position themselves in the emerging glo-na-cal environment and build on horizontal networks.

Critical knowledge mobilization can facilitate and sustain the creation of glo-nacal and other horizontal networks by utilizing the strengths and positions of Research Brokering Organizations (RBOs) (Cooper, 2014). The specific missions of

RBO's are to disseminate knowledge and research to policymakers and practitioners.

Following Cooper (2013), higher education institutions and scholars should seek to build networks with RBO's. These networks. driven by higher education institutions, can create and disseminate new knowledge. Of crucial importance here are faculty members at both public and private colleges. Of course, the term faculty is too monolithic. Researchers cannot generalize the desires and behaviors of all faculty members. Nonetheless. many faculty members. presumably in schools of education, as well as liberal arts and social sciences, and even some in the hard sciences, by virtue of their disciplines, most likely do not agree with the dictates of neoliberalism that have been mandated for them by PBF 2.0 policies (Giroux, 2011; Mallot et al., 2013). Presumably, some faculty members would have an interest in challenging faulty neoliberal truth regimes.

Yet, we know that faculty members are at the bottom of the vertical hierarchies and do not have the power to act outside of these hierarchies, as the PBF 2.0 policies have made sure. One method for faculty members to make information dissemination and identification of RBOs part of their goal is by writing information dissemination into their departmental strategic plans (Cooper, 2013).

While any university department can engage in CKM, schools of education may offer one of the best avenues for pursing CKM. As highlighted earlier, education is not a discipline in the traditional sense, but rather a field because education has no set framework (Berliner, 2002; Labree, 1998). As a field, educational researchers have the freedom to integrate the insights from a variety of disciplines to augment their findings. Education departments can utilize this freedom to create new forms of knowledge and criticize social institutions (Gutierriez & Penua, 2014; Marginson et al; Schoenfield 2010; & Burkhardt, 2003; Weiman, 2014). In addition, education departments train future teachers, which may be the most important position in the university (Hill, 2006). Education departments can begin to identify their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges and determine how they can best disseminate their ideas and to whom (Bryson, 2004). Strategic planning, by pursuing goals of justice, can become a process of empowerment and liberation for those affected by the plans (Self-reference 2).

instance, poverty reduction could become a plank of strategic plans. The method for pursuing poverty reduction does not just entail reducing tuition as the policymakers have it. Strategic planners can address the root of the problem and aim to alleviate the social conditions which cause poverty by working with RBO have and sites of social practice. Faculty members, academic departments, and students could pursue research on poverty reduction and actively share this research with K-12 schools. civic. and philanthropic organizations. Poverty reduction is complex, and higher education institutions produce much needed information and research to tackle this problem, but the information must be disseminated to parties and citizens who can utilize it. The empowerment of certain social actors, actors who traditionally do not have power to advocate for themselves, such as those in poverty, can be

a powerful method in facilitating the creation of a more vibrant public good and newer more complex social bonds between citizens (Fromm, 1956; Fitzsimmons & Uusiautti, 2013; Putnam, 2000).

can then mobilize Instructors student researchers and student teachers to bring their critical knowledge into their places of work. Faculty and students can bring their knowledge to school boards, county governments, and state legislators. Further, faculty, students, and other interested parties can forge and sustain membership in civic Researchers organizations. can forge with horizontal networks science departments in universities, private science foundations, environmental organizations, humanitarian organizations and government officials to advocate for more just uses of STEM and STEM training. There are literally endless possibilities for CKM and the forging of new networks to challenge the neoliberal truth regime. The forging of networks can be a lever of power to challenge the formal power of policymakers (Bohman & Deal, 2008). CKM may be able to forge the links of a global democracy which transcends national borders

(McGrew, 2002). In the widest sense, this global democracy can be considered Jeffersonian, as it will allow multiple actors greater access not only to their own society, but perhaps to an emerging global society as well (Giroux, 2011). These actors can utilize the networks of global civil society (Kaldor, 2000). From these networks, social actors can act civically toward a global public good. These various horizontal linkages between universities, RBO's and sites of practice will take very different forms as created amongst different thev are populations in different regions.

Some of the activities that I am advocating for already occur. For instance, during the decade of the 2000s, The National Forum on Higher Education and Public Good, The Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education at the University of Michigan and the Kettering Foundation led a series of talks and meetings with residents of Brightmoor Michigan, which is largely urban, poverty stricken neighborhood of Detroit. The effort led to increased civic participation from the residents of Brightmoor, in the form of attending public meetings, creating new

civic organizations and becoming active in local politics (Joslin & Burkhardt, 2011). Another example involved a group of interdisciplinary scholars from the University of Montana, UC Riverside, Chief Dull Knife Community College, and a Malian Agricultural College working Malian villagers in Africa to prevent and stop the spread of Ebola (Dunkel & George, 2011). These examples represent a good start to CKM, but in order to challenge the truth neoliberalism regime and conservatism, more critical efforts will be needed.

CKM, as opposed to KM, advocates for higher education institutions to foster deliberate and coordinated action between various institutions, organizations, RBO's and sites of practice to challenge neoliberal and neoconservative truth regimes and to shape the public good of various glo-na-cal networks and produce global public goods in these networks. CKM recognizes that human bonding and social cohesiveness are bound with information production, up dissemination and interpretation. Thus, CKM can be a method to synthesize the human individual and the production,

dissemination and interpretation of information. As a synthesis, CKM can also be praxis, the combining of theory and action. Education cannot just lead to action without corresponding a theoretical component. Rather, social action must be informed by calculated and empirical research and theories. This deliberate and coordinated effort to challenge injustice is central to CKM. Truth regimes injustices must be recognized and challenged. One way to accomplish this is by creating empirical methods such as the ones outlined earlier understand how the public good of a region is shaped. Only then can the public good be challenged with praxis.

By bringing research and findings to practitioners, policymakers, and most importantly, parties that can pressure policymakers, higher education institutions can actively shape the public good. This vision of the public good, as examined in the last section, is one rooted in global creation and the creation of global public goods. The essence of CKM is not only the creation of knowledge, but the actual use and implementation of this knowledge.

Moreover, CKM can become a political mechanism to help diverse groups, some with limited power, some with no power, to negotiate the public good and mitigate public "bads." As Sandler (1999) notes, scholars must also pay attention to how public goods and bads in the present will affect later generations. Will a public good in the present become a public bad for a later generation? Scholars must examine the impact of public goods and bads not just for the present, but posterity as well.

In the widest sense, CKM can help higher education be truly accountable, not just to market, but to the wider social and democratic needs of states, regions and even globally. CKM may even be able to lead a gradual revolution by cultivating the inherent possibilities for connection and change that exist in our glo-na-cal networks (Berman, 1988; Hedges, 2013). This revolution could usher in a new phase of the public good and global democracy.

CKM, Students and Faculty

The space for justice must start with students; both undergraduate and graduate.

Students this must create space. Undergraduate students should be encouraged to debate in class. Professors could act as passionate facilitators and encourage students to actually think about neo-liberalism's effect on their education and their society as well as failed attempts by the left and public organizations. Students could also be encouraged to create newsletters or websites either for graded work or extracurricular work. With the use of social media all students on campus could be encouraged to submit ideas. The idea is to get students involved in major discussions on morality.

An important factor in ensuring that knowledge is not repressive when involved in discussions is to beware of polemics. Foucault (1983) argued that to engage in polemics is to go into a discussion with a preconceived notion of what is correct and what is not. Foucault maintained that one has to engage with another, especially one who holds opposite views, in order to reach some sort of truth. Faculty and students would do well to follow this dictum. Even left wing scholars can become dogmatists if they are not willing to engage in

conversation and seek truth.

More than just class discussions however, students must mobilize their knowledge and actually use it. If students are taught to use their knowledge to promote the public good and to simply make life better and more just for people, this may be an effective method to push against the repressiveness inherent in the creation of knowledge. One way to inspire hope is for professors to take their students to local town and school board meetings. This should not be read as call to make students partisan. Rather, students must be inspired to follow their own callings- even if those ideas are in stark contrast to their professors. Students in all and fields can disciplines use their knowledge and learning to pressure local officials and professors in many disciplines can promote this. Service learning can be utilized (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Colleges and departments can even set up class grades as service projects for interested students. Encouraging students to work for the public good can inspire a sense of hope and love in students. Attending town meetings is only one option however.

The results from the research methods from above should be utilized as coursework. The research above can help to shed light on new public goods that are needed, as well as existing ones that must be strengthened, and which actors should be responsible for remedying public bads. The research above can also attempt to strengthen bonds between citizens by actually teaching altruism, empathy, love and social capital, as well as techniques to promote these ideas. One way to teach empathy outlined by Kohn (1990) is perspective taking, where students must practice understanding how different people see the world. These discussions and research projects between faculty and students should be one of the foundations of higher education and the public good.

Working towards new visions of public goods and the public good, not simple credentials such as a diploma or the lure of a well-paying job, also speaks to Erikson's stages of human development. Most student development theorists concentrate on the fourth stage, the formation of identity (Evans et al., 2010). Yet CKM, while building identity and self-worth, can be used to allow students to achieve social and

political goals and in the widest sense a sense of accomplishment. Erikson argued that as young adults mature, they start to seriously contemplate the things they have achieved in their life and what legacy they will leave. Similarly, Keagan (1994) argued that students usually come into college at phase 3, the socialized mind, where they look to others to formulate their self-image By encouraging students to and worth. become active, to create new ideas and disseminate them, this can greatly aid in their development, in their identity and selfworth, and may give them something to be proud of later in life. A consumer driven culture does not encourage achievement, just consumption. Yet achievement, rooted in self-development can perhaps act as an antidote to consumerism.

Fostering a sense of achievement, especially achievement aimed at social ills, can also help students to achieve Keagan (1994) and Baxter Magolda's (2009) phase 4 of self-authorship. By using their knowledge in a practical way to effect change, even locally, students can start a global chain reaction, enhance the public good and develop individually. Attention to human

development can also help to promote empower/knowledge by highlighting the creative and transformative capabilities of knowledge. Along with individual growth, social growth and progression result as well.

The point is that popular pressure for change can affect the way global elites handle their business and affairs. We must never lose sight of the fact that global pressure is a weapon. CKM is meant to harness this weapon and not just use information in a defensive manner, but use it to empower those without a say and change the way organizations function and ultimately, to shape the public good in ways which are more beneficial to a majority of the world's population.

Conclusion

Much of what I have proposed does take place in higher education and in other disciplines. Yet, the process is fragmented. As a new field, I am proposing cohesiveness for these activities and foundations. This new field I am proposing reflects a new aspect of the human condition. In a wider sense, the creation of this new field is a reflection of human progress. Berman

(1988) argues that modernity (note that he does not recognize postmodernity) is violent, frightening and in constant flux. Yet, despite all this, or rather because of the flux, modernity is flush with opportunities for progress. The creation of a new field, the public good in higher education may be one way to utilize these inherent opportunities. It also may be an effective way to chart a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of neoliberalism and postmodernism recognizing the inherent oppressiveness of knowledge and putting knowledge to liberatory uses in the age of neoliberalism.

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