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Critical Education and Postcolonialism

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Introduction

Educators and scholars use the phrase "critical education" to refer to many different forms of critique that may be similar to or incommensurable with each other. Even when referring to postcolonial orientations to critical education, there are still a variety of perspectives grounded on different interpretations of criticality and of postcolonialism itself. Part of the problem with trying to disentangle similarities and incommensurabilities of perspectives is that the dominant academic culture creates aspirations for universal forms of consensus on definitions and "ways forward." When these aspirations are at work, differences are perceived as obstacles to what is perceived as "progress." However, from a different perspective, working through incommensurabilities, paradoxes, complexities, and contradictions – working with and through difference – can also be seen as essential and generative in terms of intellectual depth and accountability. This is already an illustration of a form of postcolonial critical orientation that works against the grain of naturalized Enlightenment desires for mastery and intellectual normativity that ground the dominant academic culture.

In this entry, different types of critique, of postcolonial studies, and of critical education and implications for educational research, policy, and practice are outlined. Strategic and performative distinctions are established that aim to amplify differences and nuances between intellectual communities that are generally glossed over. This is done in order to create vocabularies that illuminate both what is visible and what has been absent in recurrent discussions. The distinctions presented here are informed by postcolonial analyses; however, they are educational and performative, rather than normative or representational: they do not aim to dictate what really exists, what one should believe in or the correct path one should take. The distinctions are instead created to displace normalized discussions and imaginaries, provoke new responses, and prompt further critiques (including critiques of the distinctions themselves).

Different Types of Critique

When establishing strategic distinctions, it is useful to use analogies to decontextualize the dominant ways in which a topic is usually approached. Taking art as an analogy for critique can help in developing new vocabularies to talk about the

relationship between knowledge, reality, and representation. In this entry, a strategic distinction between three types of art is proposed: "decorative art," "naming art," and "vomiting art." Decorative art aims to affirm existing imaginaries and discourses by creating something that fits the definition, chains of affect, images, and social scripts around the concept of beauty that is normalized within a particular community (e.g., Rembrandt, Remer, and Ibsen). Naming art aims to expose what a particular normalization leaves out, what is foreclosed, taking people to the edge of what is familiar (e.g., Escher, Velazquez, and Boal). Vomiting art aims to explode and externalize the debris of established/familiar frames of reference in an attempt to liberate its audience for something new, but undefined – aiming to push spectators over the edge, into an abyss beyond the securities of representation (e.g., Kantor, Duchamp, and Schechner).

Reading critique through these analogies, a few different types of critique emerge within and between the intersections of the distinctions. For example, there are decorative critiques that aim to identify and solve problems through established and naturalized parameters of what is possible and desirable, without going beyond these parameters. These types of critique do not problematize the relationship between representation and reality, assuming that, for example, the concept of beauty is universal, but only a selected few are educated to appreciate it or that everyone wants inclusion into a dominant system. A neutral and universal position of the critic is assumed as a point of departure.

There are naming critiques that trace the construction of what is perceived as normal and natural, showing the "aporias" (the hidden metaphysical choices) of (dominant) discourses and practices. They show that dominant notions of beauty, of reality, of goodness, and of the way forward are socially, culturally, and historically situated and that their social production and mobilization are mediated by relations of power and the erasure of alternatives. These critiques problematize the relationship between representation and reality; however they do it to different extents and with different purposes.

For example, there are types of critique that selectively choose what needs to be deconstructed and often propose ways forward that substitute dominant assumptions about what is real and ideal with assumptions that do not problematize the relationship between representation and reality. Some aim to emancipate subjects by affording agency to representation, often relying on a fixed conceptualization of subjectivity as conscious, transparent, and stable. Other types of naming critique propose that deconstruction should be applied not only to the critique of dominant discourses but to all discourses, particularly discourses proposing alternatives to what is taken to be dominant. This type of naming critique questions the centrality of agency, the stability of subjectivities, and the possibility of representation. Naming critiques do not assume the neutrality of the critic, but do not necessarily open themselves to self-reflexive criticism either.

There are questions as to whether vomiting critiques can actually be performed through logic alone. This kind of critique works beyond the realm of consciousness and logical and rational intelligibility; therefore, if its purpose is to shatter existing frames of reference and not to substitute them with alternatives, it cannot simply work through established referents. In this sense, it shows that naming critiques that rely on logic alone are generally circular: critics have to use the very referents they criticize to make the points they want to make (working within the realm of what is intelligible). However, this limitation is extremely important as it invites readers beyond it, by showing the insufficiency and indispensability of both art and logic, as is illustrated in the next sections.

Different Types of Postcolonial Studies

Postcolonial studies are an interdisciplinary field that originally emerged in literary, cultural, and area studies. It focuses on analyses of and resistance to different past and ongoing forms of colonialism and imperialism deeply embedded in normalized imaginaries and modern institutions. The field does not offer a unified and coherent

theory as such, but a set of questions (Gandhi 1998) formulated to constantly unsettle systemic processes that create and sustain cultural hierarchies, racialized borders, unequal divisions of resources and labor, as well as the definitions of value and merit of cultures and forms of identities and subjectivities. Postcolonialism challenges discourses of assimilation and the ethics of care and responsibility "for the Other" at work in liberal humanist discourses, proposing, instead an ethic of answerability that emphasizes the importance of keeping past and present injustices firmly in view. However, analyses and proposals for how that should happen take different forms. A distinction between two different orientations within postcolonial studies is useful for identifying different types of naming critique in practice.

A Marxist/neo-Marxist orientation deconstructs the production of subjectivities by dominant/hegemonic colonial discourses perceived as a form of false consciousness that affect both colonizers (who believe in the illusion of their supremacy and use it to justify unequal power and distribution) and the colonized (who internalize their oppression by believing in their inferiority). Through structural analyses, power is conceptualized as something that is exercised as force and coercion over less powerful and exploited populations. Liberation (from false consciousness) is equated with historical agency, self-representation, and decolonization as the right to have one's voice heard in democratic processes. Therefore, through human rational agency, and the pursuit of truth, the oppressed should be able to counter and transcend oppressive forces and achieve a larger and decolonized humanist utopia of freedom and expression through the resistance to and subversion of colonial forces, discourses, and institutions. In this sense, this orientation aims to transform the Eurocentrism of Western humanism to include the marginalized, oppressed, and excluded through their emancipation, empowerment, voice, and agency. The role of the critic is to launch an intellectually normative analysis that reveals the structural injustices of the dominant system that can be corrected through a commitment to creating spaces where the oppressed can speak and be heard in order to be genuinely included in the dominant system. The works of Young (2003), Guha (1997), and Parry (2015) take this direction.

The orientation informed by poststructuralism and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis complexifies the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized by focusing on the intricate relationship between knowledge, power, representation, and claims of truth. Its starting point is the impossibility of decolonizing humanism, as humanist tenets are traced back to a modern grammar that cannot be disentangled from the ongoing violences of colonialism and imperialism. This orientation exposes aporias at work in any discourse, including hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses, emphasizing the impossibility of launching a critique without being implicated in it. This emphasis on the complicity of the critic in that which is critiqued forces the critic to create other languages and subject positions to work with paradoxical relations. As emancipation, agency, and essentialism are problematized and an uncontaminated resistance becomes impossible in this orientation, the imagined way forward is the opening of new possibilities toward what is unimaginable from the "edge" of normalized imaginaries. An illustration of this is the idea of "an uncoercive relationship towards the Other of Western humanism" (Gandhi 1998) that requires an ethical stance of (not) knowing for an ethical imperative toward the Other to emerge, before will (Spivak 2004). This implies a willingness to work through double binds and a hyper-self-reflexive deconstructive stance of learning to learn/work without guarantees or the affirmation of one's innocence (ibid) and the opening of the imagination to a form of ethical imperative that precedes rational thought and intellectual choice. This orientation emphasizes the difficulties of transforming inequalities while inhabiting and being conditioned by modern systems, discourses, and institutions that conceal the violences that subsidize their very existence. Authors that take this direction, like Spivak (1999), Bhabha (1994), and Said (1993), also contingently make use of Marxist critiques while being critical of aspects of it.

Different Types of Critical Education

The way one defines critical education depends on the way one defines the problem to be critiqued. The fact that "critical thinking" has become an all-encompassing term also complicates discussions, as educators may believe that because they are using similar terms, they are talking about the same thing. In order to clarify different uses, a distinction between three problem spaces of critique is proposed in this entry: soft reform of modernity, radical reform of modernity, and modernity beyond reform.

The "soft reform of modernity" problem space sees modernity as inherently benevolent and sustainable in its overall direction of engineering a world grounded on science and technology that can work for everyone's well-being. Problems of inequality are perceived as emerging from a lack of modernity found in social groups considered to be behind in terms of human evolution, national progress, or international development. Therefore more modernity is prescribed, often through education, as a cure for these perceived problems. Since modernity is portrayed as a universal critical project that is constantly moving forward, when critical education is evoked as a prescribed strategy within this problem space, it often refers to problem-solving geared toward liberal humanist ideals of assimilation and social mobility/insertion within modern societies perceived as inherently benevolent and desirable.

The "radical reform of modernity" problem space sees modernity as severely limited in its capacity to fulfill its promise of universal well-being, but still recuperable/fixable if more voices are included in deliberations and if excluded people can exercise their agency in democratic processes. Problems of inequality are perceived as emerging in the imperialistic and colonial historical roots of modernity and in ongoing Eurocentric practices of modern institutions and relationships. Therefore, a radical transformation of modernity is necessary to counter historical legacies and persistent hegemonic tendencies. Critical education is perceived as the means through which this transformation is to be achieved. Criticality is conceptualized as an awareness of the social and historical mechanisms that create inequalities in power, representation, voice, participation, and access to social mobility. Humanism, grounded on a Eurocentric notion of the human, is perceived to be unjust and may be corrected through the inclusion of previously excluded humans. Critical self-reflection and the notion of praxis are used to emphasize the need for self-transformation and the dynamic complementarity of theory and practice.

The "modernity beyond reform" problem space characterizes modernity as inherently harmful, unsustainable, and irresponsible in its illusionary promises as its expansion is inevitably subsidized by "outsourced" violence and exploitation, e.g., having most people in the planet join the middle class would exceed the capacity of the planet to sustain already stretched levels of consumption and pollution. From this analysis of the problem, a few competing possibilities emerge. Some of these possibilities include walking out from dominant systems and institutions (e.g., the deschooling movement), investing in the creation of alternatives (e.g., Gaia education), hacking the system from within, or hospicing the system in order to learn from its mistakes and make only different mistakes in the future (see Andreotti et al. 2015). Critical education within this problem space generally focuses either on delinking from modernity and creating/finding more sustainable alternatives and/or learning from modernity's mistakes. Criticality is associated with challenging overconsumption, exploitation, environmental destruction, and the quest for status, prestige, identity, influence, and affluence as a universal goal for existence.

Soft reform attributes positivity and universality to the dominant knowledge system, and the same positivity is denied to anything deemed to be outside of this system. Radical reform attributes a level of negativity to the dominant system and positivity to what was excluded and proposes to replace the system's negativity with the positivity of what was previously excluded. Beyond reform either attributes negativity to the dominant system and positivity to what is Other to it or refuses to work with the positive/negative binary attributing positivity to this refusal and seeing it as a

productive space. In this sense, soft reform sustains a form of hope for the continuation of the current system as it is. Radical reform sustains a form of hope for the expansion and adjustment of the current system. Finally, beyond reform sustains either paralyzing hopelessness, evangelical hope placed in an articulated solution, messianic hope of something inevitable to come, or hope beyond hope of something new that cannot be defined a priory.

While soft reform critical education can be associated with decorative types of art/critique, radical and beyond reform forms of critical education require "naming" things that the soft reform problem space tends to erase. However, while radical reform naming critiques have epistemological dominance as a priority, and beyond reform critiques have ontological dominance as a priority, it is only "vomiting art" that most effectively exposes pre-ontological/metaphysical dominance (where "ontological" refers to beings that exist, metaphysical refers to what brings beings into existence). Marxist/neo-Marxist orientation of postcolonial studies can be mapped onto radical reform, while the poststructuralist orientation operates at the limits between radical reform and beyond reform.

Implications for Educational Research, Policy, and Practice

The distinctions presented so far have deep implications for research policy and practice. To conclude this entry, an outline of some of the implications of different types of critical education is presented, as seen through a (general) postcolonial critique.

Typical soft reform research questions tend to see the status quo as inherently benevolent and universally desirable, while seeing the Other as deficient or lacking. Questions are formulated in instrumental ways with a view to support modern institutions to provide the Other with access to the dominant system as a remedy for his/her lack. The general orientation for questions is: how can education strategies for the marginalized or excluded be more effective in bringing them up to our standards? In terms of policy, "Education for All" and OECD's initiatives toward a global standardized curriculum are clear illustrations of the attempt to address deficiencies by affirming an unquestioned and unexamined universal norm. As far as practice is concerned, the search for greater efficiency and (economic and entrepreneurial) innovation through the application of (problem-solving) "critical competencies" also attest to the perceived need to prescribe more modernity to the problems that modernity has created.

Typical radical reform research questions aim to bridge the gap between dominant knowledge systems and the knowledge of the excluded. Empowerment is conceptualized as access to dominant modes of education, knowledge production, and participation. Expanding access is also perceived as an opportunity to transform dominant institutions from within. Therefore, the general orientation includes research questions such as: How does the existing system exclude and marginalize Others? How can we transform the existing system to accommodate the marginalized and excluded? Policies aim to question the universality of Eurocentric knowledges and integrate formerly excluded knowledges and perspectives into the mainstream system. In terms of practice, in different ways, ideology critique is prioritized in exposing the injustice of the dominant system and revealing the correction that the system needs to undergo in order to become fairer.

Typical beyond reform research questions aim to experiment with different systems of knowledge production and ways of being. The search for and experimentation with alternatives is perceived as an urgent educational task, including alternative ways to approach alternatives (Sousa Santos 2007). The general orientation includes research questions like: How have our imaginaries been limited by modernity? How can we imagine knowing and being beyond the rationality, logocentrism, and anthropocentrism of modernity? Policies are perceived precisely as a manifestation of modernistic rationality essential to modern institutions; therefore alternatives to policy are also a priority in terms of imagining other forms of relationships, collective

organizing, and knowledge production and distribution. Drawing on postcolonial analyses, one way of imagining critical education is to conceptualize it as involving two processes that are necessary to open up the imagination to something new and undefined. The first process involves constantly provoking ourselves to perceive the limitations of modernist forms of knowing and being, while not rejecting them wholesale. The second process, which happens in parallel to the first, involves decentering and disarming the Western subject and displacing the obsessive need for rationality and control in order to reignite a pre-ontological visceral (hence prerational) sense of horizontal entanglement with everything and everyone in the world that may, existentially, rearrange desires away from the violences of modernity.

In conclusion, there are two different perceptions of the problem that critical education needs to solve. In soft and radical reform orientations, the problem is perceived as ignorance (as a deficit) that can be addressed and compensated with more knowledge of universal worth (however it is defined). In the beyond reform orientation presented here (and this is only one interpretation), the problem is perceived as one of denial of the contradictions and violences of modernity, expressed as an unexamined attachment to its promises, comforts, and perceived securities.

From this perspective, critical education needs to bypass ecological defenses in order to support an uncoercive reorganization of affect away from the modernist tenets of separability between elements, bodies, and modes of existence.

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Query Refs.	Details Required	Author's response
AU1	Please provide "Synonyms," if applicable.	not applicable
AU2	Guha (1993) has been changed to Guha (1997) as per the reference list. Please check if okay.	ok
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correction: line 468 instead of "ecological", it should read "ego-logical"

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Spivak, G. (2004). Righting wrongs. The South Atlantic Quarterly, 103(2/3), 523–581.