



# **Mobilizing ‘Implicit Activisms’ in Schools Through Critical Pedagogies of Emotion**

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# Point of departure

- ‘Posttraumatic’ cultural moments (Worsham, 2006)—new forms of racisms, nationalisms, wars and conflicts around the world
- The challenge and the opportunity to think more deeply about the complex *emotional* implications of critical pedagogy
- Critical theory and pedagogy in posttraumatic contexts is severely limited for making sense of *troubled knowledge* (Jansen, 2009)
- What does the notion ‘teaching to disrupt’ mean in the context of working through troubled knowledge in traumatic and post-traumatic emotional landscapes?



# Main argument

- Challenging attitudes, emotions, and actions to combat racism, nationalism, prejudice, discrimination and the like will more likely fail, if we overlook or downplay the strong emotional investments of troubled knowledge
- We should **foreground** rather than background the complexity of difficult emotional knowledge and its pedagogical implications in fighting prejudice and discrimination
- I want to focus specifically on how promoting **critical emotional reflexivity** in the classroom can mobilize what ‘**implicit activism**s’ (Horton and Kraftl, 2009)



# Structure of talk

1. Revisit some ideas about critical pedagogy and show some of its problematic assumptions and the need to revise its theorization and implementation in posttraumatic contexts.
2. Talk about how critical emotional reflexivity creates spaces for implicit activism in the classroom.
3. Outline some of the tasks of critical pedagogy in posttraumatic contexts in response to demands for challenging attitudes, emotions and actions for a diverse society.



# Revisiting critical pedagogy in posttraumatic contexts

- **Critical pedagogy** (Giroux, 2004; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2003)
- We should be more careful when we examine the affective dimensions of critical pedagogy discourse (Yoon, 2005; Amsler, 2011)
- Some assumptions in critical pedagogy may overlook the complexity of students' emotional investments in particular social positions and discourses
- The importance of delving deeper into understanding the implications when students carry a traumatized past



## A more nuanced understanding...

1. The recognition that the work of dominant pedagogies of emotion in society and in schools has a powerful negative impact on the affective struggle for empowerment and resistance  
(Worsham, 2001)
2. There are many emotional manifestations of disempowerment and lack of resistance. A form of critical pedagogy that does not apprehend its own limitations of the complex discourses and practices of emotion that are embedded in posttraumatic situations is less likely to acknowledge emotion as a crucial aspect of political struggle for change



# Implicit activisms

- Activisms which are politicized, affirmative and potentially transformative, but which are modest and proceed with little fanfare (Horton & Kraftl, 2009)
- The acknowledgment that there are multiple ways with which everyday actions foster emotional bonds that are necessary toward the struggle for social justice and change
- One example of a space or resource that is hailed as especially valuable in sustaining the emotional bonds that are necessary for activism is the notion of '**critical emotional reflexivity**'



# Critical emotional reflexivity

- Critical emotional reflexivity is utilized as a concept and praxis that not only acknowledges how reflexive processes are deeply emotional, but also emphasizes the importance of interrogating how emotion discourses establish, reinforce or challenge power relations
- As a pedagogical approach, critical emotional reflexivity provides spaces for teachers and students to navigate the emotions of implicit activism at the school level



# The Tasks of Critical Pedagogy in Posttraumatic Contexts

- (1) the significance of pedagogic discomfort;
- (2) the pedagogical principle of mutual vulnerability; and,
- (3) the value of compassion and strategic empathy.



# The significance of pedagogic discomfort

- ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Boler, 1999, 2004a; Boler & Zembylas, 2003, Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012, Zembylas, Charalambous & Charalambous, 2012)
- Challenging students and teachers beyond their ‘comfort zones’ and pushing them to deconstruct the ways in which they have learned to see, feel and act constitutes a valuable pedagogic approach in social justice, citizenship, human rights, and anti-racist education
- The value of pedagogic discomfort in posttraumatic contexts cannot be overstated though.



# The pedagogical principle of mutual vulnerability

- Grounded in the idea that there is interdependence between human beings and that the recognition of all people as ‘vulnerable’ has important pedagogical consequences concerning the possibility of assuming critical responsibility towards one’s own life and the lives of others in a community
- Judith Butler(2004):‘Violence, Mourning, Politics’
- The notion of vulnerability has important pedagogical consequences because the mutual experience of loss and mourning reveals the possibility of an alternative moral responsibility and sense of community (Vlieghe, 2010)



## The value of compassion and strategic empathy

- Jansen (2009): first, the acknowledgment of brokenness by all sides; second, pedagogical reciprocity is also required
- Strategic empathy is essentially the use of empathetic emotions in both critical and strategic ways (Lindquist, 2004)



# Conclusion

*Without a fundamental revision of our thinking about troubled knowledge and its consequences, the radical potential of critical pedagogy to reconstitute the emotional connections of traumatized students and teachers may be compromised, in spite of our best intentions*