



FEATURE

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Turangawaewae, noetic spaces and revalorisation: alternative principles of agentive education

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Synopsis

This feature will address the question of how we might conceptualize an educational process that would allow Indigenous peoples to engage in a truly endogenous development, in which the elements of their ways of life that are most important and central to them are preserved and developed through their own agency and resistance, while the elements they think worthwhile of the hegemonic system which attempts to assimilate them, often destructively, through its development models, especially its associated educational models, may be selectively incorporated into their society on indigenous terms and subordinated to their own endogenous development agenda. This article redresses reconciliation through education in the Canadian context, and explores alternative principles of agentive development, through an inductive, qualitative, and comparative study of three cases: the Karretjiemense of the Great Karoo of South Africa, the Maori people of New Zealand, and the comprehensive policy of the Bolivian government (“plurinationalism”). By researching and discussing these three cases, the key features of turangawaewae, noetic spaces, revalorization, and the middle ground as educational processes consistent with a truly endogenous development with clear objectives and operational guidelines is formulated. The formulation of these educational principles represents an essential contribution to the development of Indigenous educational programs that seek to promote agency, inclusive practices, social sustainability, and ontological justice.

Keywords: Education, Indigenous, Turangawaewae, Noetic Space, Revalorization

Introduction

Indigenous communities in the Arctic, like indigenous communities globally, are attempting to decolonize indigenous practices, intelligibilities, and ways of knowing and doing (Chilisa, 2012; Geniusz, 2009; Smith, 1999). This article supports the intellectual basis of these interests, the basis of promoting cultural viability, reclaiming ontologies, and ensuring diversity. But, historically, these conceptions have been difficult, if not impossible to operationalize in a viable and sustainable way. This article outlines current attempts to address reconciliation within the Canadian context, we then propose pragmatic principles of Indigenous education, distilled from an inductive, qualitative, and comparative study of three cases, which would allow for cultural change while maintaining cultural viability. The educational principles emerging from our research may conflict with many contemporary

policies that expound literacy and numeracy, but, pursuing a transformative education, such as our research suggests, would allow Indigenous peoples in the Arctic, and elsewhere, to determine to a greater degree the paths of community development they wish to explore.

Contextualizing the Problem

Education takes place within nuanced socio-economic and cultural contexts that embody assertions of ideology, culture and power (Wals, 2007). These assertions form political relationships of learning that take place at the level of individual, communal, cultural, and even non-human world. Education within these relations and in defining these relations is set against the horizon of each culture's ontological perspective or cultural worldview. For each culture, and context, this symbiotic relational response constitutes a particular vision of reality (Harman, 1988). The function of each culture's worldview promotes and perpetuates a contextual perspective through which their symbiotic relations can be predictably and continuously maintained. However, a conceptual and cultural dysfunction emerges if an "incoherence develops between worldview and world" (Bohm, 1992 p. 66).

In many respects the universal and normative values of the West have become dysfunctional, and the incoherence of this dysfunction is evident in emergent global socio-economic, cultural, and environmental crises (Trainer, 1989). Bateson (1972) suggests that the West's worldview is founded "upon an epistemological error" (p.463). This epistemological error, which is embodied in the West's relations to the human and natural world, is the perception and belief in separateness of the individual both from other humans and from nature, which stands in stark contrast to holistic approaches embodied in more symbiotic relational perspectives. This Western epistemological error of separateness has resulted in the creation of, and missionizing for, a hegemonic socio-economic and intellectual dysfunctional global structure that is resulting in a catastrophic accumulation of threats to humanity and our ecological systems (Bateson, 1972). Willis (2011) ratifies this perspective when she states that the "dominant societal discourses (such as those which separate culture from nature and which reduce all that is not-human made to the category of resource) . . . have led to the environmental crises we face today" (p. 1). We would add to this that it results in a cultural crisis as well.

The promotion of this Western epistemological error inordinately benefits those who profit from the maintenance of the socio-economic hierarchy, and it is this imposition of the West's epistemological error that constitutes the greatest threat to cultural and environmental diversity. This imposition is most acutely articulated through formal education systems that arise from and are modelled on the hegemonic intellectual and cultural institutions endemic to the West. The "banking model" of education that these institutions produce through their industrial focus on efficiency and productivity, also produce "human capital" essential to the economy (Freire, 1968; Luykx 1999). This actualization of humans as a dehumanized form of

capital lies in contrast to a transformative education that envisages or enables humanity to actualize as creative heuristic problem solvers, that can act as subjects in the world through their critique of the structures that inhibit their agency. But, as Althusser's maxim declares, "a technically competent but politically insubordinate labour force is no labour force at all for capital" (Luykx, 1999 p.306). This maxim underscores the correlation between the traditional banking model of education and institutional and intellectual subservience. We believe that it is this Western form of education—elevated before the world's majority populations as the pinnacle of educational understanding, design and policy—that in reality results in an imposition of the Western epistemological error regardless of what the promoters say about their altruistic motivations or intentions.

Resistance to the imposition of this epistemological error is perhaps the most urgent, yet least challenged, and under assessed, threat to humanity. Humanity's future is intrinsically linked to the ecological well-being of the planet, as the ecological and evolutionary future of the planet has now become intrinsically linked to the future of humanity (Glasser, 2007). This understanding is not new, but, it is becoming increasingly more urgent. It is made all the more urgent because alternative contexts, ecologies, and ontologies are being subsumed within the normalizing hegemonic epistemological error articulated and perpetuated through the institutions of the West. This is resulting in the reification of a Western hegemonic vision that does not adequately address symbiosis and relationality (Willis, 2011). The added challenge that comes with resisting the West's hegemonic narrative lies in supporting and exploring alternative understandings and practices, especially those that can form the basis of a radically alternative basis for education.

These alternatives are the embodiment of previously, and currently, marginalised epistemologies, ontologies, contexts and values which are essential to sustaining and perpetuating diversity, and "relationships between people and the more-than-human world." (Willis, 2011 p. 1). To encounter stories outside the realm of reified and homogenizing Western narratives requires that there be those willing to speak of alternatives as narrators of a competing vision; as, in fact, through the forceful agency of storytelling. Bosman (2000) suggests that the storytellers require a context, an audience, and a legitimized narrative characterized in his example as "know[ing] just at what moment you must knock your pipe on your veldskoel" or "nod your head wisely". Alternatively, or perhaps in addition to this, McKenzie (2007) suggests that an understanding of agency is required. The articulation of agency McKenzie (2007) posits is the capacity to deconstruct and construct our identities through alternative narratives and perspectives as a critical response to dominant discourses with the goal of articulating a more responsive and contextually and personally analogous socio-ecological activism. (McKenzie, 2007). This agency could be manifest in the process by which we "become aware of ourselves as questioners, as makers of meaning, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, and we may be

able to communicate to [through our relations] the notion that reality depends on perspective, that its construction is never complete, and that there is always more” (Greene, 1995 p. 381).

Addressing and Redressing Reconciliation in the Canadian Context

Assertions of ideology, culture and power and the processes of decolonizing education in a Canadian context are embodied in the report *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. We are especially interested in the sections on Education, Language and Culture, and Education for Reconciliation, which seem to us to call for a strong critical review, especially of the so-called “calls to action”. We have reproduced the following excerpts for the purposes of our discussion:

- 10.i Providing sufficient funding to close identified **educational achievement gaps** within one generation.
 - 10.iii Developing culturally appropriate curricula [**without specifying context and process**].
 - 10. vii Respecting and honouring Treaty Relationships.
 - 13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal **rights** include Aboriginal language **rights**.
 - 62. ii Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary **institutions** to educate teachers on how to **integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms**.
 - 62. iv Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal **content** in education.
- [own emphases, in bold]

Our primary concern, as is evident in the highlighted portions of the above calls to action, is the “ongoing social battle . . . covering every pore of the social body; it is the struggle to impose the space-time of the state, which is that of capitalism” (Zibechi, 2010 p. 65). Normative achievement gaps, rights, institutions, classroom, and the prioritization of content over process are all mechanisms utilized in the reification of the structures of the state. Zibechi argues, with respect to Indigenous history, that “the history of societies without classes is the history of their struggle against the latent state” (Zibechi, 2010 pp. 66-67). We note a previous discussion on this process of constant antistatism through the observation by Kopenawa that Indigenous peoples’ aspirations went beyond the attainment of rights, and strove more determinately toward an assertion of value (Kopenawa, 2013). This point clearly illustrates the institutional impersonal power of the state in its capability to create “the abstract concept of a legal subject, which turns people into bearers of rights” (Zibechi, 2010 p. 95) instead of the more contextually relevant affirmation of the value, and obligation of a community member engaging in dialogue towards consensus. Zibechi (2010) invites us to deepen and expand our thinking about Indigenous negotiations and challenges to institutions and statism, when he states that “Indian reality cannot be understood as pure opposition to the state, but rather as a creation of autonomous spaces or powers within the state, including incumbent desires to become the state” (p. 132). This is a matter of concern, because as Greene (1995) suggests the current manifestations of Indigenous education in the majority of global contexts does not adequately address agency as a matter of positioning within a

discourse as a means to engage opportunities for resistance and change. Instead, the dominant mood in many classrooms where young people find themselves described as “human resources” or “human capital” is “one of passive reception” (p.376). She utilizes Umberto Eco who suggests that there is “a critical need to introduce a critical dimension into such reception” and that it is “more important to focus on the point of reception than the point of transmission” (Greene, 1995 p.376).

Eco’s concerns over the point of transmission substantiate my apprehension over the omission of *process* within the calls to action. If the medium is the message (McLuhan, 1964) and the institutions of education themselves represent the curriculum of hegemonic norms (Apple, 1979), then the omission of the processes by which learning occurs, subtly but completely subverts the supposedly liberating content of the educational curriculum. In fact, the omission of learning processes and other aspects of the now famously termed “hidden curriculum” together form a proactive dynamic for the passive acceptance of the existing hegemonic understandings and norms.

We fully support, and understand the inclusion of the call to action that requires us to respect and honour treaty relationships. However, my concern is how this call to action has been manifest in regional and national contexts. The phrase “we are all treaty people”, and its incitement, is ubiquitous in government documents on reconciliation and education. We are all treaty people is uncomfortably similar to the words “we’re all New Zealanders. We are one people,” spoken by Governor William Hobson at the signing of the treaty of Waitangi in 1840 (Penetito, 2010 p. 180). Penetito goes on to describe how “[f]rom the Maori perspective, the phrase represents the ultimate cultural ‘clobbering machine’. How can two fundamentally different peoples and cultures become one as the result of a treaty? The answer, of course, is that it is not possible, unless Hobson and others who share his sentiments have something else in mind” (p.180). It is worth quoting in greater detail Penetito’s further thoughts on this point:

Early communication between Maori and Pakeha, of which the treaty of Waitangi was the most important, established the logic behind consultative approaches to participatory democratic methodologies. They are founded on notions of ethnocentrism (cultural superiority), racism (white is right), cognito-centrism (priority of individualism) and ideals of improvements through acquisition (property rights) (p. 179).

It is difficult to read, and consider, the aforementioned “Calls to Action” generated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, as constituting a departure from previous hegemonic and assimilative practices. The “calls to action”, as a mediative structure intended to maintain equilibrium between the Canadian state and Canadian Indigenous populations, is intransitive, in that “one of the parties to the mediation is repeatedly placed in the position to acquiesce in order to assure equilibrium . . . There does not have to be a policy or a regulation to maintain this position if ideological mechanisms such as mediating structures

can be relied on to deliver the same result” (Penetito, 2010 p. 16). We maintain that mainstream educational systems lie at the core of this mediating structure.

Strategies of Decolonization at the Point of Reception

If the point of transmission cannot be relied upon to promote, or generate mediative structures that are transitive in power and understanding, then as Eco suggests, we need to focus on the point of reception. The three principles of Indigenous education of turangawaewae, revalorization, and promoting heuristic thinking through dynamic noetic spaces, which we have distilled through our research, primarily focuses on the point of reception, but can, through collective subjective observance, become reified through time in the objective sense and consequently be embodied in the sources of transmission.

It is important to reiterate that while we have used these three principles to contribute to the dialogue surrounding initiatives in Indigenous education within the Canadian context, these principles can be informative within Indigenous contexts globally. In order to reaffirm this contextual transferability, it would be useful to briefly summarize these principles and their potential application.

Turangawaewae

The contemporary Maori cultural identity constitutes the current manifestation of turangawaewae, and just like land in the nineteenth century constitutes the fulcrum around which much state action, and subsequent Maori resistance is centered. The following principles outlined by Smith (2000), encapsulate the concept of turangawaewae as the agentive manifestation of “a place to put one’s feet”, and opposition to the mechanisms of the state:

1. The principle of self-determination or relative autonomy.
2. The principle of validating and legitimizing cultural aspirations and identity.
3. The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy
4. The principle of mediating socioeconomic and home difficulties.
5. The principle of incorporating cultural structures that emphasize collectively rather than individuality such as the notion of the extended family.
6. The principle of a shared and collective vision and philosophy (Smith, 2000 pp. 66-68).

It is important to acknowledge the caveat of the self-determination/turangawaewae discourse that Rata contextualizes as being manifest within Maori tribal politics when she states, “While indigenous elites operate in the real historical world, those they represent must remain fixed as the people in whose name Indigenous politics can operate. In this way, Indigeneity as a discourse of self-determination becomes complicit in incarcerating ordinary people in a polity that allows no contestation, despite the inequalities of class division” (Rata, 2011 p. 376). In

the enactment and embodiment of *turangawaewae*, it then becomes essential to maintain collective social structures that prioritize collectively rather than individuality.

Toffler (1970) suggests that in the aforementioned context and others where there is an expectation to deal with accelerated change, and the critical need to adapt, agents require the capability to exercise choice, which he advises, requires the ability to comprehend what is being offered and to predict the impacts to the best of their abilities. Thus, the conceptualization and implementation of *Turangawaewae* cannot by itself be considered the panacea for Indigenous education. Instead, we need to explore how cultural noetic spaces can contribute to developing the capacity to comprehend what is being offered and to predict the impacts to the best of their abilities.

A Vibrant Noetic Space

The plaza, within the Bolivian context, as a social context echoes with the mores of social reciprocity and complementarity that has formed a cultural canon for the Aymara since ancestral times. Embedded in this reciprocity is love, and “[t]he metaphor for love is *arishi* (to speak mutually)” (Hardman 1996:25–31). *Arishi* denotes a reciprocal humility that requires each speaker to recognize and affirm the other’s legitimacy.

The widespread collective mechanisms that gave rise to the plaza as a physical and intellectual space arise out of, and reflect the vicissitudes of daily life. They are complimentary and reciprocal and become embodied as the the cultural noetic space of the plaza or marketplace where they have influenced thought and action since ancestral times. It is this noetic space that “serves as a point of interchange of traditional products and is a place in which the spirit of Andean social organization and complementarity survives and flourishes” (Eisenberg, 2013 p. 36). So while Third World cultures are involved in an ever increasing “intercontinental traffic in meaning” (Hannerz 1987 p. 552), it is important to acknowledge that the intracultural traffic in meaning occurs within the noetic space, with its attendant processes and mechanisms. This intracultural traffic in meaning is manifest as communication within the plazas, and, as Zibeche has observed, can amplify and extend agency acting through a broad network of relationships, and can be understood a type of collective education of shared vision and a shared response to problems (2010).

These expanding modes of action result in the broadening of spaces for social expression that is achieved through the rupturing of hegemonic social inertia. In many ways, the broadening of space for social expression is congruent to attempts at state control over Aymara noetic spaces through actions such as fencing off plazas to eradicate, or ameliorate social upheaval. However, in this instance, the Aymara are asserting and expanding their space-time over a broader context with the significant political, economic and social ramifications that this implies.

Luykx (2012) perceptively suggests that the “reproduction of ideology need not involve any heavy-handed indoctrination or conspiracies of domination by the powers that be. Rather, she notes, “subjects are produced - and hegemony reproduced - through the gentle tyranny of everyday practice” (Luykx, 2012 p. 125). It is through the noetic spaces of the plaza that the Aymara can monitor, control, evaluate, and critique the traffic of meaning, and negotiate the gentle tyranny of everyday practice. It is in this process and space, which can intellectual, digital or physical, that cultural canons can be maintained, abandoned or revalorized. To understand the processes of revalorization more fully, we turn to the Karretjiemense of the South African Karoo.

Revalorization

The Bushmen of the Kalahari in Southern Africa, as the direct ancestors of the Karretjiemense, were not, as it is often thought, “passive victims of European invasion and Bantu expansion” but, as Gordon (2000) has observed, were one of many Indigenous people operating in a mobile landscape, forming and shifting their political and economic alliances to take advantage of circumstances as they perceived them. Instead of toppling helplessly from foraging to begging, they emerged as hotshot traders in the mercantile world market for Ivory and skins. They were brokers between competing forces and hired guns in the game business. Rather than being victims of pastoralists and traders who depleted the game, they appear as one of many willing agents of this commercial depletion. Instead of being ignorant of metals, true men of The Stone Age, who knew nothing of Iron, they were fierce defenders of rich copper mines that they worked for export and profit (p. 11).

In fact, this capability to smelt metal has been reiterated by Prins and Lewis (1992) who suggest that this metallurgical capacity highlights their mediative position as agents who could produce cultural artifacts (specifically metals) from nature. This point is essential, because the Bushmen throughout history have produced their culture from their environment. They have utilized critical flexibility in determining advantage within their circumstances. This intellectual, physical, and cultural acumen has allowed them to survive for countless centuries. Even with this cultural reflexivity and adaptability Karretjie society has maintained, to a large degree, its cultural integrity and capacity for social reproduction, and has achieved this “protean adaptability” through the inherent flexibility of Karretjie social organization and values, beliefs, and ideas (Guenther, 1996). This capacity for protean adaptability that allows for change that can be subsumed within functional continuity is the essential component to cultural revalorization.

Woodburn (1982) describes how personal autonomy is actualized through a fluid social structure that promotes pragmatic individual choice, and articulation or non-articulation of relations and dependencies with others. This social agency along with a democratic and

accessible culture where the mystical and material elements are available to everyone speaks to the de-institutionalization of power and the structures that typically serve to consolidate and differentiate access to power. It is this de-institutionalization of power that is characteristic of the Karretjie Mense's agency within social-economic structures. This personal autonomy actualized through the processes of de-institutionalization, if we are to use Meiksins Wood's (1999) terms of opportunity and/or imperative as it relates to the agency reflected in choices that the Karretjiemense make when revalorizing the ways in which their cultural cannons might be manifest, suggest that many Karretjiemense adaptations have been born out of the imperative of survival on the one hand, and may be seen as an opportunity to perpetuate their socio-cultural structures on the other.

It is the enactment of the axiological preferences of the Karretjiemense in response to the opportunities and imperatives that constitutes the catalyst for cultural revalorization.

Concluding Remarks

The principles of turangawaewae, noetic space, and cultural revalorization while often implemented in isolation, would be most effective, and are complimentary when brought together into an integrated whole of thought and action. Throughout this article, we have given representative examples of how these principles have been utilized within particular contexts. This presentation in no way precludes alternate manifestations of these principles in heterogeneous particular contexts globally, and may provide guidance to education of Indigenous peoples that facilitates a truly ontologically just education. Furthermore, these principles represent pragmatic mechanisms through which critical responses to reconciliation, within the Canadian context, and decolonizing initiatives globally, may be articulated and enacted for the socio-cultural well-being of all humanity.

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