The Process is the Outcome
Introducing a Framework for Student "Research as Praxis"

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“What is the role of the librarian in the Freirean vision of critical literacy? ... And what is the librarian’s role as an educator in this process?” (1)


A framework that serves as a starting point for a critical pedagogy of literacy education in academic library settings...
"Ontological stammering...

"We have a chance to [unlearn] in the name of research as praxis...

"... a way to keep moving against tendencies to settle into the various dogmas and reductionisms that await us once we think we have arrived". (2)
"While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind’s central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern. Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization not only as an ontological possibility but an historical reality. And as an individual perceives the extent of dehumanization, he or she may ask if humanization is a viable possibility. Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompletion". (3)
Freire's View of Humanization

As imperfect, unfinished beings we can never become fully human. We can only engage in our ontological and historical purpose of becoming more human.

What makes us human is our ability to "[reflect] and [act] upon the world in order to transform it". (4)
Freirean Ontology

to study of the way we exist in the world

- Through praxis we encounter ourselves and a constructed reality that is always in process and best understood by its contradictions.

- By questioning the world's contradictions we reveal the oppressive structures that interfere with one's right to self-affirmation.

Freirean Dialogue

"to speak a true word is to transform the world" (5)

- One cannot speak with authenticity if one speaks alone. Just as humanity is made in praxis, so praxis is made in dialogue.

- To speak alone is to rob others of their voice.
Literacy
"reading the word and the world"  (6)

- How we read the world, our constructed reality, will shape how we read written texts.

- Literacy as "naming the world" involves the interpretation and writing of knowledge as it relates to one's situated reality.

"... a person is literate to the extent that they are able to use language for social and political reconstruction"  (7)

Reading & Writing
- meaning making processes
- dialogic processes
Critical Literacy

Critical thinking is dialectical thinking

- Systems of education tend to reproduce dominant ideologies.

- Even if students are not the makers of their own social reality, if given space for critical thinking they are able to transcend the dominant discourse and interrogate it.

This is "critical consciousness". Mediated by a "language of possibility", we identify contradictions in the world in a process of reinventing culture and power. (8)
Constructivism  [as epistemology]

Reality is the world of our experiences... a world of constancies from which we construct knowledge and meaning. (9)

"What determines the value of conceptual structures is their experiential adequacy, the goodness of their fit with experience, their viability as a means for the solving of problems..." (10)
Constructivism [informing pedagogy]

Kincheloe argues:
It is the role of the teacher to "introduce [their] students to social and physical world and help them build for themselves an epistemological infrastructure for interpreting the phenomena they confront" (11)

The teacher offers to students:
- an understanding of constructivism as epistemological basis for learning and an ontological basis for 'becoming'.
- a framework for critical thinking.
- space for constructive dialogue.
- affirmation of their creativity. (12)

Space for Praxis
Praxis
[theoretically informed reflection and action for social transformation]

Lather's article, *Research as Praxis* (1986, 2018) ...

“What different politics become possible when [research] projects are put at risk rather than positioned to claim a better vantage point that can ‘emancipate’ some others?” (13)
Praxis [as reciprocity]

Students should be free to question whether theory & pedagogy:

- shed light on lived experience,
- account for human struggle, and
- respect the intellectual capacity of the dispossessed. (14)

For dialogic praxis to be mutually affirming research participants must be given the right to speak for themselves. All participants share the process of testing the usefulness of theory and constructing new meaning.
Praxis [as reciprocity & informing pedagogy]

Pedagogy that accepts:

- Allowing students a voice will always be political.
- Emerging processes are messy experiences involving many "returns and reversals".
- Learning takes place in the social tensions that "structure [praxis] towards the production of new practices", knowledge, and theory.

Makes space for a methodology where:

- Intellectual theory is neither imposed on the student nor used to simplify their lived experience and knowledge.
- The ontology of the student is allowed meaning.
- Critical (dialectical) thinking exposes the contradictions in dominant discourses that fail to serve the interests of the student.
- Students are invited to critique "the [teacher's] account of their worldview".
- The teacher participates in "theoretically guided action". (15)
Voice [as "giving an account of one's life"]

the process of articulating the world from a distinctive embodied position. (17)

More than "speech acts"...

Voice is... (16)
Voice

Social
• Relies on shared resources (i.e. language).
• "Giving an account" as a meaning making process is only possible through the interconnectivity of human narratives.

Reflexive
• Voice is a form of agency.
• Can be conceived of as more than discourse or speech acts because it is connected to the whole of human action, including our past and present selves.

Embodied
• Voice is a unique (and limited) embodied experience.
• We understand our own experiences through sustained attention to a plurality of social narratives.

Material
• Voice requires a form.
• If forms of expression do not belong to the student as something they can "adapt or control" the authenticity of their voice is undermined.
Creating Space for Voice

It cannot be assumed that because we do not ideologically oppose the presence of marginalized voices in the library that we have made space for voice.

We must attend to the ways that power is embedded in and gives shape to narrative spaces. This is especially true for academic libraries where student voices are rarely considered important to literacy processes.

Many "strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusions of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the student/teacher relationship intact". (18)
Voice  [what counts?]

- Whose voices are recognized?
- Who are the "good students"?
- Whose language is considered an acceptable medium to express voice?
- What are the accepted forms?

"Responsibility for the legitimization of voice shifts to the listener" (19)

Listening is always an act of power.
How can the library make space for the voice of the learner, ensuring that it is visible and validated as a meaningful expression alongside the privileged voices of academics, and broader university discourses?
References

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1. This question was first posed in Elmborg (2006) and referenced in Jacobs (2008).
5. For Freire a “true word” is authentic expression, in other words “true” to one’s ontology. (2000).
6. Freire (1987) defines “the world” as one’s reality. For Freire reading the world always precedes reading the word. It is constructed reality.
9. Ernst Von Glaserfeld (2007) argues, the reliability of conceptual information shapes the way we construct knowledge. This includes the reliability of dominant discourses.
11. For Kincheloe, (2005) it is the role of the teacher in the process of learning to introduce an epistemological framework that operates as a space for praxis.
14. Lather (2018) referring to theory that informs and is created from the research process.
15. Lather’s (1986, 2018) view of praxis as reciprocity provides a starting point for breaking down the power dichotomy between teacher and student.
16. Julie McLeod (2011) broadens the concept of “voice”.

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