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Pragmatic Utilization of Theoretical Tensions

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Résumé de l'article

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the foundation of critical literacy. I claim that critical literacy should be conceived as praxis rather than a unified theory. This is because the foundation of critical literacy includes diverse philosophical positions with some disagreements between them. When critical literacy is treated as a unified theory, such internal contradictions implode the theory. Instead, by conceiving it as praxis, even those theoretical tensions can be rendered generative for insatiable reading of the wor(l)d. To demonstrate this, I juxtapose Marxist/Freirean approach and Foucauldian approach to critical literacy. The former approach promotes solidarity among the oppressed by "naming" the wrongs of the world, while the latter dissipates such identification by inserting divergence and discontinuity into the narratives. I discuss the kinds of critical literacy questions these two approaches enable us to ask and generate new questions that emerge from the theoretical tensions.

Critical Literacy as Praxis

The aim of this paper is to re-examine the foundation of critical literacy. Although scholars are in consensus that the work of Paulo Freire (1970) is the central piece of critical literacy, many of them have acknowledged the diverse theories that also constitute its foundation. Morrell (2008), for example, claims that work of critical literacy has its roots in ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Plato. In Morrell's (2008) account, we find a wide range of work from the Enlightenment, modern, postmodern, and postcolonial theorists and he surveys the utility of those theories for critical literacy. Similarly, Luke (2012) lists a set of scholarly work that contributed to the construction of critical literacy, which includes: Voloshinov's work on speech genres, Brecht's experiments with political drama, postwar British cultural studies by Hoggart and Williams, and the poststructuralist theories of Foucault and Derrida (p. 6).

If critical literacy is treated as an unified theory, these rich theoretical roots become problematic, because there are some contradictions between them and such internal inconsistencies implode the theory. For instance, the ways in which power functions in society are conceptualized differently between the Marxist/Freirean approach and the Foucauldian approach.[1] Hence, instead of framing it as a theory, critical literacy must be considered as praxis—a cyclical process of "reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (Freire, 1970, p. 33). Here, I consider a theory as a tool for reading and rewriting, and an action as an actualization and enactment of reading and rewriting–in a broad sense of interpreting and transforming the wor(l)d. I am aware that such an abstract conception of action risks undermining the primacy of materiality in the way action is generally conceived, however, given that social transformations are in large part discursive transformations and how material distributions are conditioned by discourses, I consider reading and (re)writing as vital forms of action.

In praxis, theoretical limitations manifested in action are recognized through reflection in order to theorize and act again, hopefully in a refined fashion. For this, critical literacy takes a pragmatist posture in which theories are treated as instruments, not as answers (James, 1963), for the "use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). Praxis of critical literacy demands what Richard Rorty (1989) calls a "liberal ironist" posture that "think[s] of the relation between writers on autonomy [e.g., Nietzsche, Foucault] and writers on justice [e.g., Marx, Habermas] as being like the relation between two kinds of tools—as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars" (p. xiv). None of the theories that constitute the foundation of critical literacy are treated as sole provider of Truth or a "framework" into which one inset texts, but as tools that are utilized to lay bare the multiplicity of meanings from texts for the broader project of reducing cruelty and injustice from the world. In this sense, my argument below contributes to the discussion of "critical pragmatism" (Cherryholmes, 1999; Kadlec, 2007).

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[1] Although I am highlighting elements of Marxist ideas in Freire's philosophy in this paper, it is important to note that Freire's work also contains elements that are critical of Marxism. Freire melds phenomenology, existentialism, and liberation theology with Marxism, and he later approaches postmodern ideas (see Freire, 1994). For this reason, Allan Luke (2018, p. 217) describes Freire as a "pre-poststructuralist" thinker.

This does not mean, however, theories that constitute the foundation should be conflated without rigor and theoretical tensions be overlooked. On the contrary, as Luke (2013) stated, the theoretical tensions within the foundation are "*the* central practical pivot for approaches to critical literacy" (p. 139), we must highlight and use the gaps and the contradictions for the critical reading of the wor(l)d. One may consider this paper as a footnote to Luke's argument through which I make explicit those tensions and generate questions that emerge from the gaps.

It has been nearly 30 years since the publication of *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis, and the Postmodern*, in which editors of the book, Colin Lankshear and Peter L. McLaren (1993) set forth the "postmodern turn" of critical literacy. Today, there are calls for posthumanist turn (Janks, 2017; Lenters & McDermott, 2020) and affective turn (Anwarrudin, 2016) of critical literacy. Both could be a major turn for the field. However, the purpose of this conceptual paper is not to look upward for the incorporation of new theories, but downwards—a move often discouraged in the academic culture—in order to solidify the foundation.

In what follows, I discuss two major theoretical perspectives within the foundation of critical literacy—the Marxists perspective and the Foucauldian perspective—where, I argue, the biggest theoretical tensions lie. I first delineate and juxtapose the key aspects of these theories and present critiques to each theory. After that, I discuss the ways in which these theories shape the praxis of critical literacy and generate some questions emerging from the theoretical tensions. The important point is *not* to reconcile the contradictions, but to use the contradictions to generate productive energy for the critical literacy praxis.

Marxism, Dialectic Materialism, Ideology

Marxism is often described as the dialectical materialism. Because of its philosophical roots in the Hegelian school of thought, Marx and his followers consider the progress of human thought and world as a dialectical process—the contradiction between thesis (Being) and antithesis (nothing) is overcome by reaching synthesis (becoming) (Hegel, 1807/1977). For Hegel, history is a process in which the Sprit attains higher form of consciousness. Hegel (1837/1975) states, "world history is the expression of the divine and absolute process of the spirit in its highest forms, of the progression whereby it discovers its true nature and becomes conscious of itself" (p. 65). Through its dialectic journey, Sprit will eventually arrive at the state of Absolute where everyone becomes free: "the end of the world spirit is realized in substance through the freedom of each individual" (Hegel, 1975, p. 55).

Marx and Engels (1867/1970) critique Hegel for confining his dialectic to the progress of the concept only, and "thus the whole body of materialist elements has been eliminated from history" (p. 58). They argue,

> [the] transformation of history into world history is not indeed a mere abstract act on the part of the "self-consciousness," the world spirit, or of any other metaphysical spectre, but a quite material, empirically verifiable act, an act the proof of which every individual furnishes as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself [*sic*] (p. 172).

While they incorporate Hegel's dialectics as their method of thinking, they shift the focus from abstract concepts to concrete material and economic conditions. Witnessing the pervasive material inequality and unfreedom of individuals in the capitalist society, Marx and Engels (1970) delineate a blueprint for revolution: the ruling class bourgeoisie (thesis) is countered by the revolutionary

class proletariat (antithesis) which results in the communist revolution (synthesis). This dialectical paradigm is clearly manifested in Freire's (1970) mode of thinking as well. Freire (1970) considers the system of oppression (thesis) dehumanizing to both oppressor and oppressed, and it is only through the antithetic work of the oppressed that emancipation/humanization of both oppressor and oppressed (synthesis) can be achieved.

Another key aspect of Marxism is its conceptualization of ideology. In Marxism, ideology is considered as false consciousness, which conditions our perception of reality "from a particular social class but constructed as a world-view" (Holborow, 2012, p. 29). Marx and Engels (1970) posit that the ruling class is not only "the ruling material force" but also "the ruling intellectual force" (p. 64). According to them, the ruling class possesses the production and distribution power over ideas in the society, thereby holds the "means of mental production" (p. 64). In other words, ideology is a limited frame of reality that functions to benefit the ruling class, and its partiality is camouflaged as common sense. From Marxist perspective, for instance, the idea of meritocracy (i.e., distribution of capital is determined by individual's ability) is one form of manifestations of neoliberal ideology that serves the interests of those who hold power in this global capitalist society. Meritocracy conceals the systemic inequality based, for example, on race, gender, socio-economic status, and produces an idea that success and failure depend on individuals' skills and efforts.

The Frankfurt School Critical Theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno (1944/2002) and Marcuse (1964) expand their critical scholarly work to cultural critique. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) succinctly point out the ways in which popular culture functions as a system of mass deception so that working-class people's revolutionary desire to change the status quo is tranquillized. They stated, "entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labour process so that they can cope with it again" (p. 109). Similarly, Marcuse (1964, p. 7) points out the "false needs," created by popular culture: he says, "most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs." Thus, one of the important tasks of Marxists is to reveal and critique the capitalist ideology and awake working class people from the false consciousness. For this task, the Freirean approach to critical literacy is indispensable.

Freire (1970) considers the central task of education to be about *conscientização* (roughly translated as critical-consciousness-raising). Through *conscientização*, individuals come to know their oppressed condition, which is often masked with ideology. Education, therefore, can be either repressive or emancipatory depending on the approach. As it is well-known, Freire (1970, p. 72) problematizes what he calls the "banking" model of education where teachers "deposit" knowledge and the students "patiently receive, memorize, and repeat." This type of education not only benefits those who are in a position of power for their greater social control, but also dehumanizes the learners by treating them as mere "containers" and "receptacles." (p. 72). Hence, Freire's critique of banking model of education is not only pedagogical, but also ontological (Rocha, 2018). Freire states, "the more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them" (p. 73). Freire thinks all knowledge is interested, thus, filling up the "container" (p. 72) with such knowledge results in "submersion of consciousness" (p. 81) where ideology (i.e., fragmented view of reality) comes to be treated as the entirety of the world.

In order to bring people into awareness about the system of oppression, Freire proposes the "problem-posing education" (p. 79), in which teacher and students are positioned in a truly dialogical relationship as cognitive human subjects. Here, the teacher and students work as "co-investigators" (Freire, 1970, p. 106) to collaboratively "read and write the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 34). Problem-posing education presents "reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83), and students are invited to co-investigate and co-construct the reality. Hence, in Freirean approach, the boundaries between education, investigation, and political praxis are obscured. Freire stated,

> Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from emergence, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence. (p. 109)

Critique of Marxism

One of the major critiques of Marxism is its tendency to frame the social and political struggle in binary terms such as oppressor and oppressed (Pennycook, 2001). While such an approach encourages solidarity of the oppressed to fight back against the system of oppression, in a society where different kinds of privileges and modes of production (both material and intellectual) are distributed in a complex manner, simple dichotomization of oppressor and oppressed does not seem to adequately illustrate the reality. Due to the increased level of complexity of the society, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) state, "the contemporary world is largely unintelligible without a poststructuralist perspective" (p. 388). Some of the less privileged people might even resist being labeled as the oppressed for various reasons.

Especially with the birth of the Web 2.0 environment where users not only have access to the ocean of information but also have the ability to raise their voices using multimodal texts, the ruling class is no longer the sole owner of the modes of production and distribution of goods and knowledge. This, of course, does not negate the fact that access to technology and skills are unequally distributed. However, as Harari (2016, p. 388) states, "In ancient times having power meant having access to data. Today having power means knowing what to ignore," an investigation into the relationship between haves and have-nots requires complex analytic framing in order to adequately critique a knowledge-based economy.

Another critique of Marxism relates to its philosophical roots in Hegelian dialectics. This critique is discussed in relation to the Foucauldian approach to critical literacy below.

Foucault, Genealogy, Discourses

While Marxists tackle reality and knowledge in a Hegelian dialectical approach, Foucault draws on Nietzschean genealogical approach. As discussed above, Hegelian dialectic presupposes the idea of progress—through the contestation between thesis and antithesis, overcome by reaching the synthesis. Genealogy, on the contrary, does not treat history as stories of progress. According to Bevir (2008), genealogy "reject[s] both appeals to transcendental truths and principles of unity or progress in history, and embrac[es] nominalism, contingency, and contestability" (p. 263). Foucault (1984, p. 88), in his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, says the "effective" history provides "discontinuity into our very being." Foucault is against cohesive and polished historical narratives that claim to be objective and natural. Foucault (1984) states:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. (p. 81)

In the traditional approach, historians claim objectivity, accuracy and permanency of the historical accounts. Such an approach creates an illusion that the present is a natural consequence of the past events, thereby conceals the messiness and chaos of the lived reality and suppresses the possibility to imagine the alternative present. The world we know, Foucault (1984, p. 89) says, is not a "simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value," but "a profusion of entangled events."

A claim of objectivity not only bleaches out the complex reality from the history, but also dehumanizes those who study history. In the traditional approach, historians make tremendous effort to erase their subjectivity from the historical narratives, "to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead, to adapt a faceless anonymity" (Foucault, 1984, p. 91). On the contrary, Foucault (1984) thinks knowledge is inseparable from the perspective of the producer of the knowledge. Knowledge is produced by human subjects within a particular epistemological field, or the *épistème* of certain time and place, "in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility" (Foucault, 1966, pp. xxiii-xxiv). The *épistème* is a ground for knowledge production that is shaped by and through discourses. Discourse is defined as

> ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1997, p. 108).

As this definition succinctly captures, discourses, in Foucauldian sense, not only structure and organize the meaning within society, but also constitute our conscious and unconscious ways of being as subjects. We as human subjects constitute discourses, but our subjectivities are constituted by discourses we inhabit (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993). Crucial to Foucault's notion of discourse is the power relations that produce and are produced through discourses.

Foucault's conceptualization of power differs from that of Marxists. The Marxist notion of power is tied to the material conditions (i.e., ownership of property and mode of production) and ideology. From the Marxist perspective, power functions "negatively" through the dominant ideology (i.e., false consciousness) that masks and conceals the reality that is inconvenient for the ruling class. In this view, power is evil and the goal of critical work is to dissolve it. On the contrary, Foucault conceptualizes "power as positive: that power produces, makes, and shapes rather than masks, represses, and blocks" (Wandel, 2001, p. 369). For Foucault (1982), "the definition of the exercise of power" is "a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions," and "to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible—and in fact ongoing" (p. 791). Thus, Foucault (1997, p. 298) calls dissipation of power in human society a "utopian" ideal; power in and of itself is not evil. He argues that it is important

to make distinctions between the "power relations" and "states of domination" (1997, p. 299). According to Foucault (1997) power relations are mobile in the sense that they dynamically shift within social fields. States of domination exist where power relations are "blocked" or "frozen" by "economic, political, or military means." (Foucault, 1997, p. 283). While the latter is certainly a situation we need to make efforts to avoid, the former is an inevitable condition for humans to live socially. Power, in the Foucauldian sense, is not something people possess as they own artifacts, but it is like energy that is generated and exercised within human relationships. It is through power relations that truth and knowledge are produced and distributed.

In Hegelian dialectics, the truth must be claimed through a presentation of antithetic truer truths. This, for Foucault, has a danger of homogenizing and objectifying the knowledge. Instead, Foucault (1997) introduces his concept of "games of truth" (p. 296): "a set of rules by which truth is produced" (p. 297). Within the games of truth, certain forms of truth are considered more legitimate than others. For example, since the sixteenth century, Foucault (1972, p. 218) says, "observable, measurable, and classifiable" forms of knowledge have gained privilege over others and this structure was supported and distributed by institutions such as hospitals, schools, and publishers. Accumulation of the privileged truth claims functions to homogenize and dominate the discourses, and subjects who are subjected to those discourses are governed ever more efficiently. To resist this, Foucault proposed a different approach to Marxism.

Foucault resisted convergence, continuity, and conformity, and encouraged divergence, discontinuity, and transgression. His form of critical praxis manifests in his genealogical approach to the study of history. Foucault highlighted the fragments of ignored historical events in order to disrupt the continuous and cohesive historical narratives. Knowledge, for Foucault (1984), "is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (p. 88).

Foucault (1997) thinks the fight against the domination of the truth cannot be done by playing a totally different game from the game of truth, but by "playing the same game differently" (p. 295). As a means of liberating people from the state of domination, Foucault (1997) discussed a seemingly similar idea to Freire's notion of *conscientização*:

> one can only do so by playing a certain game of truth, by showing its consequences, by pointing out that there are other reasonable options, by teaching people what they don't know about their own situation, their working conditions, and their exploitation. (p. 296)

Through producing discourses of the alternative options, people become able to envision different lives. However, what is crucially important here is that Foucault did not think liberation itself was sufficient for people to practice freedom. Here, he discusses what is seemingly a critique to Marxists. The notion of liberation, "if it is not treated with precaution," says Foucault (1997, p. 282),

> runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression.

Such a proposition leads to a false idea that simply by eliminating "repressive deadlocks," people will be reconciled with themselves and reestablish a full and positive relationship with themselves (Foucault, 1997, p. 282). In order for the liberated people to live happily, they need "to be able to define admissible and acceptable form of existence or political society" (Foucault,

1997, p. 283). Freedom, for Foucault, is not the ultimate goal point people eventually arrive at, but rather, it is an ongoing practice.

The key for the practice of freedom is what Foucault (1997, p. 285) calls the "care of the self," which is to know "a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions." As discussed above, discourses constitute our way of thinking and doing. This means that "subjectivity is the point of contact, a site of articulation, between self and power" (Ball, 2016, p. 40). Thus, to know oneself is to know how power is exercised over oneself and redefine one's mode of life. In this sense, self-reflexivity is a key for practice of freedom.

Critique of Foucault

One of the major critiques of Foucault is related to the decentralization of the subject in his theory. As Foucault (1984) states, "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation" (p. 95). Although Foucault aims to dissipate identity as a practice of freedom, it also could function to take away the space for solidarity from those who have been silenced and thereby their identities were made invisible in the history. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1990) states,

> To deny us the process of exploring and reclaiming our subjectivity before we critique it is the critical version of the grandfather clause, the double privileging of categories that happen to be *preconstituted*. Such a position leaves us nowhere, invisible and voiceless in the republic of Western letters. Consider the irony: precisely when we (and other third world peoples) obtain the complex wherewithal to define our black subjectivity in the republic of Western letters, our theoretical colleagues declare that there ain't no such thing as a subject, so why should we be bothered with that? In this way, those of us in feminist criticism or African-American criticism who are engaged in the necessary work of cannon deformation and reformation, confront the skepticism even of those who are allies on other fronts, over the matter of the death of the subject and our own discursive subjectivity. (as cited in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 390)

The discontinuity Foucault promotes cuts the possibility of identity formation by the people whose history and identity that have been interrupted by colonial power. However, for those people to transform the state of domination, forming solidarity may be a necessary first step. Solidarity for Foucault, however, is something to be avoided because he thinks it produces new form of conventionality and conformity. In this sense, Foucault's critical approach has the potential of inhibiting social transformation rather than accelerating it.

Moreover, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) point out, Foucault's rejection of "ontologically and metaphysically secure truth claims" is "seen as at risk of lapsing into an ethical relativism and burgeoning nihilism" (p. 395). By regarding any truth claims as products of discourses and power relations within them, Foucault's theory could eliminate the solid footing for people to confront the inequity. In this sense, Foucault's theory could unwittingly function *not* to make any changes in the existing status quo. For this reason, Habermas accuses "French theories of postmodernism which had their roots in Nietzsche and Heidegger" (e.g., Bataille, Foucault, and Derrida), "were aligned with the counter-Enlightenment, and exhibited disturbing kinship with fascism" (Kellner, 1988, p. 263).

Praxis of Critical Literacy: Pragmatic Utilization of Theoretical Tensions

From what follows, I discuss how two theoretical perspectives illustrated above may shape the praxis of critical literacy. I will do so by following the four key dimensions of the critical literacy identified by Lewison, Flint, and Sluys (2002): (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple view-points, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice. As I stated earlier, my intention here is *not* to bridge the gaps between those two theoretical orientations, but rather to pragmatically utilize the very tensions between these two theories and turn them into propellers for further questioning.

Disrupting the Commonplace

In this dimension, critical literacy is employed to question things that are usually left unquestioned as common sense. Because it is often through the *commonized* sense people's unfreedom is sustained, this skeptical attitude toward the taken-for-granted is a central aspect of both Marxist and Foucauldian orientations.

From Marxist perspective, common sense is a product of ideology, and ideology reflects the worldview of the ruling class. This is because the ruling class not only possesses the means of material production, but also the means of intellectual production (Marx & Engels, 1988). Capitalist ideology, as a false consciousness, disguises the inequality as a consequence of natural selection of meritocratic society. The common sense knowledge is disseminated by the institutional apparatuses like schools (Freire, 1970) and popular culture (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944), and functions to sustain inequality. Hence, the task of critical literacy here is to uncover the reality masked by ideology—read the world through reading words and raise "critical awareness about the oppressive reality" (Kubota & Miller, 2017, p. 142), in order to rename the world (Freire 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

For Foucault, common sense is a convention produced within a discourse. Unlike the Marxist conceptualization of ideology as false consciousness, discourse is a contested field where truths are produced as a result of power relations (Foucault, 1997). Through accumulation of truth claims, certain forms of knowledge and practice are conventionalized and treated as the norm. From this perspective, common sense is not false in a sense that they are opposed to reality, but are aspects of reality that have been constantly recollected and enacted, thereby regularized within a discourse. Therefore, Foucauldian approach to the disruption of the commonplace is done not by presentation of truer version of reality, but by demonstration of different forms of knowledge and practice in order to expand the discourses to make more options available.

Both Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives share the value of disrupting the commonplace. However, they take different orientations: Marxist approach focuses more on negation of the falseness of ideology whereas Foucauldian approach aims toward affirmation of divergence. These two orientations allow us to question the common sense differently. From Marxist perspective, we can ask: who produces the common sense, and who benefits from the common sense? From Foucauldian perspective, we may ask: how has the common sense been produced within the games of truth? How can we diverge from and transgress the common sense?

Questions generated from each of these two theoretical perspectives are valuable and depending on the issue, some of the questions may be more useful than the other ones. For instance,

to confront the idea of meritocracy, Marxist orientation may help us to challenge the neoliberal ideology more effectively since the ways in which such common sense function is to disguise the inequitable material distribution as a result of individual's abilities and efforts. On the other hand, Foucauldian orientation may be more instrumental to dissolve the convention to make alternative ways of being possible. For example, by transgressing the traditional gender roles and behaviours, we can expand the boundaries of discourses and make different ways of being thinkable.

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

This dimension of critical literacy is directed to "imagine standing in the shoes of others—to understand experience and texts from our own perspective and the viewpoints of others and to consider these various perspectives concurrently" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383).

From the Marxist point of view, the value of this dimension is to highlight the viewpoints of the oppressed. In this approach, the voices of the marginalized groups are intentionally privileged. Freire (1970) thinks the project of emancipation is only lead by those who are oppressed, because "the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle" (p. 29). Hence, the only way to liberate humans from the system of oppression, in which both oppressor and oppressed are dehumanized, is to raise and amplify the voices of the oppressed for social change.

The Foucauldian approach to this dimension is akin to his genealogical approach to history. Foucault highlighted various historical events that were often dismissed and forgotten for the sake of constructing cohesive and linear historical narratives of progress. This was done to produce "the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's [*sic*] being" (Foucault, 1984, p. 87). As Foucault (1984) states, "the knowledge is made for cutting" (p. 88), a Foucauldian approach to interrogate multiple viewpoints is done to bring about divergence and discontinuity in discourses.

In this dimension, Marxists may ask: how do the oppressed see the world? How can we raise the voices of the oppressed to counter the narratives of the oppressor? Foucauldians may ask: what stories have been omitted from the discourses? How can we bring about discontinuities to the cohesive historical narratives by introducing forgotten stories?

While Marxists confront the system of oppression, Foucault did not presuppose the power relations in binary terms. The gaps between these two perspectives allow us to ask: Whose stories are omitted from the dominant historical narrative? What kind of power relations make such omissions of stories possible? In what ways, do such omissions of stories contribute to sustaining the existing power relations?

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

As Luke (2012) stated, "critical literacy is an overtly political orientation to teaching and learning," sociopolitical issues are the central foci of critical literacy. Critical literacy education does not treat teaching as a neutral practice, but considers it as a situated practice within a complex political, social, and historical contexts. In this dimension, critical literacy is carried out "to step outside of the personal to interrogate how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383).

It is safe to say that Marxist/Freirean approach to critical literacy itself is the political act. Freire (1970) believes that depoliticized subjects are dehumanized subjects. He stated,

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, p. 72)

Both students and knowledge in the banking-model education are lifeless—students are treated as mere containers of the motionless knowledge that are disguised as neutral. Whereas

> in problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (Freire, 1970, p. 83)

For Freire (1970), individuals do not automatically become a human, but they are "humanized" through actively participating in the creation of the world. In other words, being political is a human condition.

One unique aspect of Foucault's approach to sociopolitical issues is his discussion on "governmentality," which is used "to cover the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize, and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other" (Foucault, 1997, p. 300). As discussed above, Foucault's conceptualization of power is positive—that power produces and shapes discourses—and discourses constitute subjectivity. Foucault is interested in how normative discourses were infiltrated into subjects, so that they discipline themselves, which made the power ever more efficient for social control. In this sense, Foucauldian approach investigates sociopolitical issues by analyzing their manifestation on the level of subjectivity. Thus, Ball (2016) succinctly describes, "Foucault seeks to bring power closer to hand, close to home—which also makes it accessible, makes its limits visible, makes its refusal possible" (p. 40). In Foucault's approach, self-reflexivity is not simply an act of self-care but by caring of the self, one can analyze how socio-political issues are manifested within themselves.

Every question Marxists ask is political, and these questions can be enormous: how and by whom does the world represented in the texts, and for whose interests does it function to serve? How can we rename the world in order to create more socially just society? On the other hand, the key questions Foucault (1988c) poses are:

> who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? Who is forcing me to live in a particular place when I work in another? How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken? (p. 103)

It is possible to think that these questions from the two theoretical perspectives can supplement each other for the understanding of sociopolitical issues. For example, by gaining the understanding of the self and how power relations are manifested within the self, asking bigger questions of how power relations function in a way to benefit certain groups of people may become more accessible. Gaining the understanding of macro level power relations in turn, helps one to ask deeper questions about the self.

Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

As I emphasized, critical literacy is a praxis—it is simultaneously an action/practice and a reflection/theory. As such, critical awareness gained through reading the wor(l)d must lead to the transformative action. "True reflection," Freire (1970, p. 66) said, "leads to action."

The Marxists' primary concern is the unequal material condition, "in which the working class suffers from dehumanization, alienation, and the inequalities caused by the capitalist mode of production" (Kubota & Miller, 2017, p. 143). Hence the Marxist approach to social justice oriented action is about confronting the material inequality and restoring the humanity by transforming the political and economic system of capitalism. Although the orientation is clear, Freire (1970) eagerly rejects the idea of prescriptively delineating what the action should look like, because he thinks "every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (p. 47). Instead, he envisioned a radically dialogic space where each one of participants' being as subjects who are ceaselessly "in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (p. 84) is taken seriously, so that any form of patronizing manipulations that undermine subjects' conscious being is rejected. In this sense, the dialogue itself is a practice of freedom and a process of humanization. Through dialogue, people form solidarity and collectively rename the world.

Although taking action is a crucial dimension of critical literacy, this is a great weakness of the Foucauldian approach arising from Foucault's ironic stance toward the idea of progress and solidarity. As discussed above, the purpose of Foucault's genealogical work is to counter the dialectic history of progress. Foucault demonstrates that what appears to be the progress of humanity—becoming more humane and rational—is, in actuality, a greater integration of discipline and control in political and social apparatuses (Roth, 1991). Foucault's radical rejection of conventionality and conformity leads to a paralysis to participate in political struggles in any tangible manner. When asked about his position on proposing a form of social action rather than presenting critique of existing structure, Foucault (1988a) said, "my position is that it is not up to us to propose. As soon as one 'proposes'—one proposes a vocabulary, an ideology, which can only have effects of domination" (p. 197). Hence, the act of resistance and the practice of freedom for Foucault is about the "care of the self" (i.e., self-reflexivity) and production of knowledge for divergence and discontinuity.

This is the dimension where the differences between Marxist and Foucauldian approaches manifest most clearly. While Marxists strive to form solidarity for social change, Foucauldians' radical rejection of conformity does not allow them to form solidarity. Utilizing this tension, I propose to ask: how can we form solidarity and mobilize people for social change while remaining internally critical so that conventionality is always challenged and conformity is rejected?

Conclusion

In this paper, I claimed that critical literacy must be conceived as praxis rather than a unified theory, and made a case that theoretical tensions internal to the foundation can in fact be rendered generative to open up different ways of reading. To demonstrate this, I juxtaposed Marxist/Freirean approach and Foucauldian approach to critical literacy, and explored the questions that emerge from the dialectic between the two. While the former debunks ideologies

and enables solidarity among the oppressed for the emancipatory struggle, the latter inserts discontinuities into narratives and promotes transgression against the disciplinary power.

The political relevance of the former is evident as we witness and join the mobilization of oppressed identities, be they economic (e.g., occupy movement), racial (e.g., Black Lives Matter), gender (e.g., #MeToo, pride), and political (e.g., The Arab Spring, Hong Kong pro-democracy protests). At the same time, because all identity works are boundary works, mobilizations of identity cannot escape from the risks of essentialism and exclusionism–potential sources of new oppression. The predicament of human subjectivity is that we come to exist as socially recognizable subjects through subjugation to the discourses (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1982). Thus, the more solid the identity, the more strongly our fields of action are governed. Divergence and transgression promoted by Foucault navigate us out of the deadlock of emancipatory struggle based on identity-based solidarities. The tensions between consolidation and dissolution, narrativization and fragmentation, association with and dissociation from identities are the pivot for propelling the praxis of critical literacy.

As the foundation of critical literacy expands with new theories proposed into the field, examinations of the tensions and disagreements between theories and finding ways to utilize them are a vital task for us to continuously unfold new ways of reading. Since being critical is fundamentally about being outside of the regularized ways of thinking, critical literacy demands us to be in a permanent dialectic.

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