

## **Autoethnography as Pragmatic Scholarship: Moving Critical Communication Pedagogy from Ideology to Praxis**

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Instructors are often unaware of the negative impact that their own pedagogical practices can have on their students—practices that can lead to student subjugation. I contend that, for instructors to move from Freire's (1970) notion of the traditional banking concept of education that fosters hegemony to critical communication pedagogy, instructors must first reflexively examine the ways in which they may be subjugating their students. To do so, I advocate that instructors engage in autoethnographic writing about their own teaching to gain knowledge necessary to move toward implementation of critical communication pedagogy. In sum, I argue for the advancement of autoethnography as pragmatic scholarship that can potentially bridge the gap from critical communication pedagogy as ideology to critical communication pedagogy as praxis.

### **Need for a Critical Approach to Study Communication Pedagogy**

Instructors are often not cognizant of the negative impact that their pedagogical practices can have on their students. Specifically, many instructors may not realize that their teaching practices can serve to foster hegemony and subjugate students, because instructors have not examined the presence of power in their own classrooms. Thus, the effect of hegemony in university classrooms is often overlooked. Of this problem, Berlak asks:

How is it possible for many white students and students of color to be present in a university classroom where they read about, see videos documenting, and engage in activities that demonstrate the pervasive and ubiquitous realities and effects of institutional and personal racism, and yet fail to become engaged with racism at a deep emotional and analytical level? (2005, p. 123)

I contend that the effect of hegemony is overlooked, in part, because of a result of the traditional means in which most instructional communication and educational research is conducted. Most research regarding education derives from the functionalist paradigm (Sprague, 1992). Some instructional

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communication and education scholars criticize this quantitative, objective approach to the study of pedagogy, because it does not examine the roles that hegemony, white privilege, injustice, differences, lived experience, racism, gender, and social and economic inequities play in the classroom. Traditionally, scholarship in education and instructional communication has isolated specific aspects of classroom behavior, which ignores the sociocultural settings in which education takes place. Sprague criticizes the objectivist bias in the field of instructional communication, saying:

Our discipline's primary interest in instructors as communicators has centered on matters of technique that are relatively independent of the intellectual processes of teaching . . . research, for example, has featured the use of humor and of nonverbal and verbal immediacy behaviors, such as smiling, standing close to students, touching them, using vocal variety, referring to students by name, using inclusive pronouns such as "our class." (ibid., pp. 7–8)

Fassett and Warren argue that, while research in these areas has been beneficial to understanding classroom communication, this "decontextualized, dispassionate approach" that exhibits "relative dominance over instructional communication contexts has left us with an impoverished sense of how communication constitutes identity, power, and culture" (2007, p. 39).

To address this lack of educational and instructional communication research regarding power in the classroom, Sprague (1992) argues for instructors to act as what Giroux (1988) calls a transformative intellectual. A transformative intellectual instructor is someone who "is not merely concerned with giving students the knowledge and skills they need for economic and social mobility, but with helping them discover the moral and political dimensions of a just society and the means to create it" (Sprague, 1992, pp. 8–9). Such an instructor incorporates critical scholarship into the study of pedagogy and allows the lens to be widened to take into account "a number of important questions about how communication works in conjunction with the social and political forces that constraint it and define it" (ibid., p. 5).

I contend that, while creating pedagogical change is appealing ideologically, doing so is difficult pragmatically. Thus, in this paper, I advance autoethnography as a pragmatic scholarship to be used by instructors as a means to move toward critical communication pedagogy as praxis. I first argue that, for instructors and students to have meaningful dialogue about issues of power in their classrooms, instructors need to become aware of their own hidden prejudices and hegemonic pedagogical acts. Instructors can gain awareness by engaging in autoethnographic writing about their own classroom practices and experiences. Second, I discuss how instructors can use their autoethnographic writing pragmatically to facilitate critical communication pedagogy. In sum, instructors should engage in two steps to transform their classrooms: 1) naming and critically reflecting on the problem(s) (autoethnography), and 2) acting to create change (critical pedagogy).

### **Description of Autoethnography**

One means of gaining awareness of the sociocultural setting in the classroom comes through the application of autoethnographic writing. Autoethnography, a form of transformational scholarship, "is a reflexive accounting, one that asks us to slow down, to subject our experiences to critical examination, to

expose life's mundane qualities for how they illustrate our participation in power" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 103). Denzin adds that autoethnography is the "turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur" (1997, p. 227). Thus, autoethnography encourages instructors to engage in intrapersonal communication, uncovering hegemonic practices in their own classrooms.

Autoethnography can follow an instructor's experiences of one day (Pelias, 2000), one week, one semester, or an undefined period of time (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Autoethnography can be written in a style of "an academic report (a research-based proposition supported by evidence and reasoning)," or in the style of "an auto/ethnographic narrative (a research-based story that includes plot, character/s, and dramatic tension)" (Tillman, 2009, p. 95). While merit exists for both approaches to autoethnographic writing, I advocate the use of an artistic, narrative approach when the technique is applied to the classroom. An artistic approach to autoethnographic writing about how power functions in one's classroom "privileges the exploration of a self *in response to questions that can only be answered that way*, through the textual construction of, and thoughtful reflection about, the *lived experiences of that self*" (Goodall, 2000, p. 191). Additionally, such an approach can help instructors to explore how they (often unknowingly) reproduce power structures in their classrooms.

Although autoethnography is an individual process, general principles do exist to help authors focus their writing. Engstrom (2008) outlines five general principles of writing autoethnographically. Applied to an instructional setting, autoethnographic writing involves the following steps: 1) critically reflecting upon prejudices that one brings to a situation (e.g., a classroom), 2) examining the effect an instructor has on students, 3) evaluating the role that ethics plays in one's writing and interactions, 4) discussing the impact that the writing has on oneself and students, and 5) reflecting on one's overall learning about power in society through their interactions with students.

Engstrom's (ibid.) five general principles of autoethnographic writing are reflexive acts. Reflexivity is "an important motion, back and forth, between one's actions and how those implicate one in social phenomena" (Denzin, 1997, p. 48). Reflexivity can "effectively illuminate how the author is both product and producer of culture, how the author's very (in)actions create and sustain complex social phenomena, including how s/he understands identity, power, and culture" (p. 47). Reflexivity is not synonymous with simply being reflective. Reflection, the type of writing done in a journal or diary, merely "suggests a mirroring or accounting of the past" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 48). Alternately, reflexivity requires one to consider how past actions will affect future events. Such reflexivity, not simple reflection, is necessary for instructors who wish to attempt to transform their classrooms—the goal of critical communication pedagogy.

Reflexivity is the characteristic that distinguishes autoethnography from a traditional teaching journal. Teaching journals are designed simply to help an instructor "keep track of what happened in class and make note of both his and his students' reactions to curriculum and exercises" (Boyd & Boyd, 2005, p. 110). Also, teaching journals are designed for instructors to engage in reflection or revising, "based on what they remember from previous course offerings" (ibid.). Additionally, while teaching journals can

include critical elements, they do not center around questions of hegemony and oppression. Instead, they are designed primarily to help instructors improve their pedagogical practice.

Autoethnographic writing can take many forms. I recommend that instructors utilize a professional notebook with accompanying fieldnotes (Goodall, 2000). A professional notebook allows instructors to “record self-reflection about their own experiences in everyday life,” while instructors can use fieldnotes to “record their observations and analyses of others” (ibid., p. 92). Both of these components of autoethnographic writing are necessary for instructors to use, so that they can 1) begin to recognize their own actions in the classroom, and 2) gain an understanding of how their actions impact others.

### **Critiques of Autoethnography**

I find necessity in discussing the controversies surrounding autoethnography, as well as the positive arguments scholars have presented. Some scholars, such as Shields, criticize autoethnography, arguing that it “exhibits low power in terms of offering an original explanation of how to rid the world of oppressive power” (2000, p. 410). Shields also argues that the method may implode and destroy itself in part, because it does not include the voices of the oppressed, something it desires to do. He states that critical autoethnography aspires “to speak for the anonymous masses, the down-trodden, and the marginalized when, by definition, presenting the critical autoethnographer’s lived experience in academia advantages and privileges *only* the critical autoethnographer” (ibid., p. 413). Thus, in his view, praxis is absent.

However, other scholars advocate for the use of autoethnography as a transformative practice. Jones (2005) directly discusses the praxis of autoethnography, and in citing Denzin (2000), further demonstrates how it has the potential to connect the “personal to the political.” Yep further demonstrates pragmatic application of autoethnography, saying that “autoethnography is an ideal way of knowing and understanding the complexities of cultural identity” (2004, p. 77). Yep argues that understanding one’s social identity through autoethnography can lead to a connection of cultural identity to the social world (ibid.). When autoethnography is used in the social world to make a difference, it not only speaks for marginalized groups, but also can be directly utilized to “constitute social action,” (Jones, 2005, p. 784). Jones further states, “This, I believe, is the future of autoethnography” (ibid.).

The pragmatic function of autoethnography to create change is the focus of the current work. By applying autoethnographic writing pragmatically, it no longer privileges only the autoethnographer. Instead, this work demonstrates that, when working to create pedagogical change, autoethnography must first privilege the autoethnographer so that he or she can then also privilege the students. To further understand the pragmatic application of autoethnography to the classroom, necessity exists in understanding what it can help to accomplish—critical communication pedagogy.

### **Description of Critical Communication Pedagogy**

Freire criticizes the traditional educational system, deeming it the “banking concept of education” (1970, p. 72). He derides hegemonic systems in which instructors exercise power over students by

depositing information. In this practice, students are seen as a *tabula rasa*, and thus, education functions to “uniformize” society (Puiggrós, 1994, p. 171). Freire describes the banking concept of education:

Education . . . becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the instructor is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the instructor issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. The scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (1970, p. 72)

Instructors who follow such a functionalist approach facilitate the continuation of the social order and prevent students from learning from their own lived experiences. In contrast to the banking concept, Freire (*ibid.*) advocates a critical pedagogy. Puiggrós describes Freire’s desire for “dialogical education”: the “possibility of a pedagogical discourse emerging from articulation of *differences*,” not a forced similarity (1994, p. 171). Freire (1973) describes the communication processes of two types of pedagogy. He equates oppressive pedagogy with vertical communication, and equates liberating pedagogy with horizontal communication. Freire equates vertical pedagogy with anti-dialogue. In this system, the all-knowing instructor talks “down to” or “over” students to grant them knowledge that only the instructor possesses. Alternately, Freire equates horizontal pedagogy with dialogue. In this model, instructors communicate “with” students to collaboratively gain knowledge. When applied to the discipline of communication, “Critical communication pedagogy takes as a central principle a commitment to questioning taken-for-granted, sedimented ways of seeing and thinking” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 100). As the study of communication is the study of the meaning of messages, critical communication pedagogy is especially appropriate for the field, as its goal is to specifically examine the meaning and impact of verbal and nonverbal messages that create hegemony in the communication classroom.

### **Step 1: Conducting Autoethnography**

A myriad of sociocultural problems exist in the classroom that instructors could potentially name and critically reflect upon. Instructors should determine the sociocultural problems that exist in their classrooms that create hegemony.

#### *Considering Social Location*

I contend that an important step for instructors in preparing for autoethnographic writing is to identify their own social locations, which include race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Hafen, 2004; Yep, 2004), and I encourage instructors to consider this social location when they engage in autoethnographic writing about classroom hegemony. Doing so can have a positive effect on understanding their perceptions and how they influence their classrooms.

Specifically, instructors who are male, white, American, middle class, and heterosexually identified must be aware that they will encounter more difficulty reflecting upon how they may create situations of hegemony than instructors who are, for example, female, non-white, and/or homosexually identified. Privileged instructors’ standpoints do not allow them to see hegemony as clearly as instructors

who may come from underprivileged backgrounds. Addressing the problem of the white standpoint, Landsman states:

We pretend that racial differences do not exist; we are all alike under the skin, aren't we? Thus, we do not acknowledge the experiences of people of color, precisely *because* of their skin—black, brown, yellow, or white, dark or light. (2001, p. xi)

After instructors have considered their own social location, they can begin the process of conducting autoethnography. Instructors should recognize that no one correct way exists to conduct autoethnography. However, in an attempt to show instructors how to conduct autoethnography, this section will provide two examples that demonstrate how instructors can name and critically reflect upon potential classroom problems. The two sociocultural examples that I will discuss are racism perpetuated by whiteness and the oppression and marginalization of women.

#### *Racism Perpetuated by Whiteness*

McLaren discusses the concept of whiteness, saying:

Whiteness operates by means of its constitution as a universalizing authority by which the hegemonic, white, bourgeois subject appropriates the right to speak on behalf of everyone who is nonwhite while denying voice and agency to these others in the name of civilized humankind. Whiteness constitutes and demarcates ideas, feelings, knowledge, social practices, cultural formations, and systems of intelligibility . . . Whiteness is also a refusal to acknowledge how white people are implicated in certain relations of privilege and relations of domination and subordination. (1997, p. 267)

For instructors to act reflexively on how whiteness can serve to perpetuate racism in the classroom, instructors' autoethnographic writing must focus on locating how whiteness functions in their classrooms (Orbe, Groscurth, Jeffries, & Prater, 2007). One means for instructors to understand the impact of whiteness is to examine their classrooms through the lens of standpoint theory. Standpoint theory posits that members of cultural groups experience life differently (Orbe et al.), and that marginalized groups have a more objective view of society than dominant groups, because those in power wish to ignore minority voices in order to maintain their power (Pohlhaus, 2002). Dyer furthers this idea by stating:

There is no more powerful position than that of being "just" human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that—they can only speak for their race. But [whites as] non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges, and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world. (1997, p. 2)

Additionally, "those who are privileged within social relations are not led to see the whole within which they stand" (Pohlhaus, 2002, p. 285), and privileged groups' interests are best served if they do not see how society privileges them.

Instructors, especially white instructors, wanting to engage in reflexivity about racism perpetuated by whiteness must be willing to attempt to remove the blinders which prevent them from seeing both how society privileges them, and how it may not privilege their students. The act of acknowledging this fact is an important step toward change. Thus, I advocate that instructors use standpoint theory to guide their autoethnographic writing.

*Ideas for reflexivity.* For instructors to act reflexively about whiteness, they should focus attention on how their own actions may serve to delegitimize minority voices in their classrooms. Following standpoint theory, instructors should realize that, although most do not purposefully promote racism in their classes, they must focus on the mundane pedagogical practices that exist (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Specifically, instructors can reflect upon their lectures, discussions, and assignments. When preparing and teaching lessons, instructors can examine how their interactions with students may unknowingly reinforce racism.

For example, Pennington (2007), in her autoethnographic account, examines her own interactions with underprivileged minority students in an elementary school. Recognizing that she had been teaching from a white position of power, she reflects:

We felt the children's lives at home were inadequate and we must fill in the missing spaces. We intervened and tried to repair and replace their lives with what we perceived they needed. Our identities as privileged teachers, did not force us to explore the role we played in the institution of the school that mimicked the roles we played in the larger society. Roles designed to maintain our position or power that lacked any mechanism for empowerment of the families and children. Their role was to have heartbreaking lives and our role was to save them from those lives. (ibid., p. 99)

Pennington provides a useful example of how instructors should critically reflect upon the messages that their lessons and discussions have on students. In doing so, instructors act reflexively on what they are doing and how their actions affect others (Goodall, 2000). Finally, instructors may reflect upon where they obtained such examples, whether from the media (Zhang, 2010) or through other means. Although instructors may only marginalize minority groups in minimal ways, isolating mundane instances of racist pedagogy can help to stop such instances from growing into larger social structures (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Overall, following standpoint theory, instructors must reflect on their dominant standpoint and also dialogue with students to discern if students do possess a more objective standpoint of covert racism in the classroom.

#### *Oppression and Marginalization of Women*

Female students may also face oppression in the classroom. Throughout the history of schooling, education has provided males with more educational benefits and has reproduced gender inequalities. For example, curriculum has traditionally placed preference on subjects that males prefer and downplayed the

importance of subjects that are of interest to women. Specifically, in "the school subjects which emphasize the rational and impersonal, autonomy, predictability and control are much more highly valued than those associated with the artistic and emotional, the intersubjective and interpersonal or those associated with physicality" (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p. 141). Thus, these innocuous practices in traditional education have served to reproduce inequalities between genders. The primary effect of such pedagogy is that, like the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970), it positions "girls as passive recipients of others' knowledge, thus still denying them a sense of agency" (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p. 143).

In order for instructors to address these issues that face females in traditional education, instructors must be cognizant of ways to recognize these hegemonic practices in their own classrooms. One means for instructors to understand the impact of female oppression is to examine their classrooms through the lens of muted group theory. Edwin and Shirley Ardener's (1975) muted group theory explains why some groups in society become muted, or silenced by the majority. Some groups become "muted" because the language that society uses does not function in the same way for all people:

Muted Group Theory includes the question whether everyone in society has participated equally in the generation of ideas and their encoding into discourse. Have groups developed separate realities, or systems or values that do not get adequate recognition in the dominant representations of society? (S. Ardener, 2005, p. 51)

Because women are muted in society, males dominate discourse. Therefore, many scholars argue that, in order for women to participate in discourse, they have to adapt to dominant communication patterns to even be recognized (Orbe, 2005). Thus, in order for instructors, especially white male instructors, to act reflexively about the oppression and marginalization of women in their classrooms, they should use muted group theory to guide their reflexivity.

*Ideas for reflexivity.* When writing autoethnographically about oppression of women, instructors may experience difficulty in determining how their actions impact students, especially how male instructors' actions affect female students. Thus, I advise instructors to view the marginalization of female students through the lens of muted group theory. Muted group theory can be used as a pragmatic tool because it operationalizes power for instructors and offers them the potential of working toward emancipatory change. For example, male instructors may reflect upon ways that they mute and censor female students' ideas, discussions, and suggestions in class.

Female instructors may focus on how they, themselves, participate in male-dominated discourse and project such participation onto female students instead of helping them to communicate their own thoughts that are not controlled by the dominant communicative system. In her autoethnographic account, Autrey reflects on how she perpetuates the dominant communicative system in her classroom with female students: "The trouble with some girls in my elementary classroom was they were no trouble" (2003, p. 26). She asks:

How is the good schoolgirl reproduced? How do I understand her in the context of the losses of confidence and self-esteem some girls will experience during adolescence?



Because these girls always did their work, I felt I was "teaching" them. One way the good girl is reproduced is through me, the teacher. (ibid., p. 27)

Her account illustrates how girls became muted in her classroom. Thus, understanding muted group theory can help female instructors "to create meaning through their own language while acknowledging that they must do so because they are muted" (Burnett et al., 2009, p. 469). As female instructors work toward this goal, they can help students to do the same.

Another means of allowing muted group theory to fulfill its emancipatory potential is to utilize student voice to help the instructor discern how students experience instruction. Instructors take student voice into account when they give students, those who actually experience instruction, the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and opinions about their own educational experiences (Fletcher, 2005). Doing so can be a useful means of uncovering oppressive forces that instructors may not realize they are fostering. Giving students voice provides them with the power to create change (Durrant, 2005). By providing students, especially female students, a venue to openly discuss their experiences, instructors will find that students possess valuable insight that they previously may not have felt comfortable expressing. Muted group theory supports this by saying that students may have felt that they would have faced negative repercussions if they expressed their true feelings.

Holdsworth (2005) links student voice and the idea of taking action. Thus, when female students are given the opportunity to discuss how they perceive and experience oppression, they can provide valuable insight into how hegemony can be reduced in the classroom. Through such discovery, instructors can work to enact change by including "the perspectives of subordinate group members" in their teaching and scholarly writing (Orbe, Groscurth, Jeffries, & Prater, 2007, p. 29). When examining students' perspectives, instructors must recognize that reflexivity is not a one-time exercise. Instead, instructors must be willing to re-examine their teaching, because a single examination of their teaching only captures one period of time. As instructors change, so do their thoughts, actions, and pedagogical behaviors toward students. Thus, ongoing examination is necessary for instructors to learn more about themselves and their communication with students.

### **Step 2: Connecting Autoethnography with Critical Communication Pedagogy**

After instructors have conducted autoethnographic writing about their teaching, they also must be willing to accept the challenge of applying their knowledge to create change. Instructors cannot simply be satisfied to act reflexively to uncover hegemonic practices in their classrooms; they need to take action to change their practice. To do so, instructors should begin step two: acting to create change (critical communication pedagogy).

The movement from step one (autoethnography) to step two (critical communication pedagogy) allows instructors to connect autoethnography to critical communication pedagogy. Instructors who have reflected critically must find a way to use their autoethnography as praxis. At such a turning point, instructors should not simply use autoethnography as a means of learning about themselves. Instead, I advocate a pragmatic use of autoethnography; instructors must put their knowledge into practice. Fassett and Warren describe this process as finding moments in the classroom where "reflection and action

intertwine" (2007, p. 111). Without putting reflection into practice, the knowledge that instructors have gained is useless. In fact, such inaction could be viewed as a form of oppression, because instructors have learned how they exert power over their students, but make no attempt to change the situation. Instead, instructors must understand that, when they come to realizations about power in their classrooms, they must also work to implement the change that they realize is necessary. Autoethnographic writing about classroom hegemony, such as the examples of racism and the marginalization of women, can work toward the goal of creating a classroom environment that can become a place for discussion and critical thought (Dewey, 1927).

In order to facilitate such a change, instructors must learn how to use their writings to reframe their habitual ways of teaching. While no single correct means of interpreting autoethnographic writing exists, general guidelines do. Viewing autoethnographic interpretation as an iterative process, instructors can 1) review their data by reading it thoroughly, 2) begin to thematize the data, examining it for recurring themes that may provide insight into potential hegemonic practices, and 3) organize individual instances into the themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

After instructors have derived detailed examples of their hegemonic pedagogical practices, they should begin the process of examining how they can apply their new knowledge in their classrooms. As instructors become aware of their own practices, they become more willing to embrace new practices. Thus, the possibility exists to create a classroom that "is characterized by pedagogical interactions based on the belief that every voice (or perspective) deserves a hearing" (Yep, 2007, p. 95). At such a point of transformation, instructors begin to use the results of their autoethnography as a tool to transform critical communication pedagogy from an ideology to praxis.

#### *Implementing Critical Communication Pedagogy*

*Considering social location.* To begin the transition from ideology to praxis, I contend that instructors must, again, reflect upon their social location. I encourage instructors to consider the ways their social location may impact how students respond to their discussions of classroom hegemony. Instructors must realize that they will be perceived differently based on their social location. For example, because of the inherent power usually given to white male instructors, white students of white male instructors may be more receptive to their discussion of racism and whiteness than the same students would be if an African American female instructor were to discuss the same issue. However, a white male instructor may be perceived quite differently if he were to discuss the same subject with a class comprised of minority students. Thus, once again, instructors' social location plays a large role in both the examination of hegemony and the implementation of autoethnography to foster critical communication pedagogy.

After instructors have reflected on social location, they should develop a plan regarding how they will communicate their new knowledge with their classes, and how their classes will help them to make changes in the classroom. While no one correct means of implementation of critical communication pedagogy exists, I offer the following plan, which consists of three steps. The first two steps involve the process of implementation of critical communication pedagogy, while the third step involves a movement toward the product.

*Sharing.* The first step involves the sharing of the instructors' goals. Instructors should discuss their autoethnographic undertaking, sharing their goals of the project with students. Instructors sharing their knowledge with students—those directly impacted by the writing—is important and necessary, because students need to know why change will be taking place in the classroom. The sharing could be done in a variety of ways. For example, instructors could read their writing to students, or instructors could share general themes or ideas from the writing.

*Dialogue.* The second step involves dialogue. After the initial sharing of the autoethnographic writing, importance exists in dialoguing with students about hegemony. Discussions should center on how the students feel about the work, allowing them to share their thoughts, fears, and ideas. These discussions about autoethnography are a fruitful and necessary exercise because they allow instructors to gain feedback from their students regarding the writing. Importance exists at this phase in allowing all students to share how change could be facilitated. The following examples illustrate methods to help foster a participatory classroom, in which students are able to share their voices and express opinions: Instructors may ask students to journal about classroom oppression that they feel; students may be afforded the opportunity to meet one-on-one with the instructor to discuss ways to improve equality in the classroom; or students and the instructor may engage in a computer-mediated group decision center in which thoughts can be shared but identities are concealed.

Thus, a vital aspect of implementing critical communication pedagogy is for instructors to allow students to be open with their thoughts and feelings—which will lead to change in the classroom. Instructors who have taken the opportunity to reduce hegemonic forces in their classrooms can facilitate discussions in which students feel “psychological safety, freedom to speak, and feelings of inclusiveness” (Yep, 2007, p. 96).

*Action.* The third step involves action. If instructors are to use autoethnography to foster critical communication pedagogy, students' voices must help in creating change. Thus, instructors should involve students in developing a classroom environment that ameliorates racism, marginalization, and oppression. Following critical communication pedagogy, group communication is necessary, because knowledge and understanding is developed through collaboration (Brydon-Miller, 2008). Therefore, instructors and students can use their knowledge from the sharing and dialogue steps to discuss how change will occur. In that way, the students' ideas and input facilitate a move to the product of pragmatic autoethnography. Instructors should inform students that, because hegemony is a communicative act, a series of subtle verbal and nonverbal actions, hegemony can also be reduced through communication between instructors and students. Thus, instructors and students can then collectively decide how this communicative change will occur.

Throughout this process, instructors and students can begin to make changes regarding class assignments, class discussion, and the overall communicative atmosphere in the classroom. As instructors become more aware of the hegemony they foster in their teaching, they can slowly break down the barriers between instructor and student, working toward the goal of an oppression-free learning environment. In doing so, students can become more comfortable with instructors, with each other, and with themselves in their own classrooms. The next step of pragmatic application is to link change at the

classroom level to change in the larger educational system. The next section will discuss this potential linkage.

*Linking micro-level interactions with macro-level structures.* When instructors work to create change in their classrooms, to expand the transformative potential of critical communication pedagogy, they must be cognizant of the connection between micro and macro levels of interaction. Micro levels of interaction involve transforming the hegemonic hierarchies in the classroom, and macro levels of interaction involve transforming the hegemonic social hierarchies in educational agencies of society.

The previous section regarding the implementation of critical communication pedagogy discussed ways instructors can work on a micro level to act reflexively about their specific class(es) and communicate with students about the hegemony that they now recognize and want to change. Thus, micro levels of interaction involve fostering critical communication pedagogy in specific learning environments. However, in order to more fully realize the potential of critical communication pedagogy, instructors and students must work toward linking micro and macro levels of interaction. Freire (1970) discusses the need for such linkages by demonstrating how micro levels, or personal experiences, are connected to dominant structures, the macro levels. Thus, understanding linkages between social structures is crucial in order to transform them. To accomplish such a transformation, Freire advocates a bottom-up approach to societal change (ibid.).

Because instructors and students have become aware of how society fosters oppression on a smaller scale in the classroom (the micro level), they can and should take their message to larger educational entities, such as university leaders, school boards, and school district leaders (the macro level). Additionally, instructors can move beyond the micro level of the classroom by sharing their autoethnographic writing and experiences with colleagues in their learning institutions through conference presentations and publication.

I have witnessed the power of Freire's (1970) bottom-up approach to creating societal change by linking micro and macro structures. As a member of a research team working to assist African women refugees, the team and I collaborated with the women to understand the problems they faced after relocating to the United States. After assisting them at this micro level, our team and the African women refugees presented our findings jointly at a forum to community leaders. As a result of this open dialogue with the dominant forces in the community, the African women, the research team, and the community leaders worked collaboratively to create programs to help these women better acculturate into the community (DeWitt, Pearson, Tyma, Wolf, & Kahl, 2007). Thus, I argue that, for critical communication pedagogy to fulfill its pragmatic potential, instructors should complete the final step with students to link micro-level change to macro-level change. Only then is the transformative potential of critical communication pedagogy realized.

Overall, fostering critical communication pedagogy can potentially aid instructors in reducing oppression for students by providing a learning environment in which topics of power, race, identity, and culture can be discussed and evaluated at micro and macro levels. Through the implementation of pedagogical practice, we instructors can "explore our own roles in making the social structures that bind

us" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 47). Instructors must realize that this exploration of critical communication pedagogy is not a finite exercise. Instructors cannot be satisfied to reduce hegemony in the classroom in a single act of implementation. To do so would be to reduce hegemony to a force affecting only one group of students for one period of time. Thus, ongoing evaluations are necessary to create lasting change. However, when attempting to create lasting change, instructors should be aware that challenges often arise.

### **Challenges of Implementing Critical Communication Pedagogy**

When instructors attempt to create educational change, especially change that involves uncovering issues of power in society, they often face opposition. Instructors often face opposition from students and society regarding whether examination of power has a place in the classroom. The following section will discuss various challenges that instructors may encounter.

#### *Students Often Resist Change*

When attempting to incorporate positive pedagogical change, instructors can experience difficulty, both internally and externally. Much of this problem is due to the resistance they face from some of those students who are satisfied with the status quo. Instructors may find that students, especially those from the majority, do not wish to engage in the evaluation of hegemony in the classroom or society. Yep (2007) echoes this idea by outlining six common strategies that students use to resist change.

First, students may respond to discussions of white privilege or the marginalization of women with silence. Yep (2007) explains that, by remaining silent, students are engaging in "the production of power" (ibid., p. 98). Second, students may argue that "Times have changed ... things are not like that anymore" (ibid.). This resistance strategy allows students to evade evaluation of real problems by simply pretending that they no longer exist. A third strategy that students may employ is to argue that all cultures demonstrate racism, not only white people. In employing this argument, students attempt to ignore the topic at hand by deflecting the argument. Students may attempt a fourth resistance strategy by asking the question, "Why are these people (African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, etc.) so angry?" (ibid., p. 99). Yep explains that this strategy changes the focus of the discussion by utilizing preexisting stereotypes and the anticipated reactions to these stereotypes. A fifth strategy that students may use is to argue that any discussions of oppression and/or privilege are individual accounts which are not generalizable. Such a strategy discounts any personal experience as non-scientific. Finally, some students display shock at the idea that oppression and hegemony exist. However, their intent in such a response is to end the discussion quickly, and to eliminate the need for much reflection and evaluation.

*Students may fear discussing power and change.* Positively, many students are open to discussions of hegemony in the classroom and willing to participate. Many students do want to evaluate how power functions, both inside and outside the classroom, but do not know how to talk about the issue (Yep, 2007). However, Cooks discusses how fear is not always negative when dealing with such an important issue in the classroom:

Pedagogically, fear is an important starting point for discussing the performance of Whiteness. Many of the White students in my class expressed their fear of not knowing enough about Black culture, of appearing uncool . . . and most of all, a fear of being attacked because they were White. (2003, p. 249)

Much of students' fear of change is due to the fact that they may never have been exposed to critical communication pedagogy in their education. Instead, students are primarily familiar with the banking concept of education. Throughout students' educational lives, they usually have not been afforded the opportunity to examine questions of power in the classroom and society at large.

*The commercialization of higher education.* Additionally, the commercialization of higher education has become a hindrance to critical thought because many modern students view themselves as consumers of higher education, seeking to "'have a degree' rather than 'be learners'" (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009, p. 278). Thus, even though instructors may encourage students to struggle to evaluate ideas, students are often "not particularly receptive to the idea that through immersing themselves in their subject they may change as a person" (ibid., p. 279). The "student as consumer" ideology also encourages students to "reinforce individualism at the expense of community" (McMillan & Cheney, 1996, p. 9), the antithesis of the goals of critical pedagogy. Therefore, the "student as consumer" ideology creates difficulty for instructors wishing to challenge students to evaluate hegemony in society.

Through students' exposure to the traditional banking concept of education (Freire, 1970) and the ideology of "student as consumer," students have been inculcated with the belief that dialogue and examination of power do not have a place in educational settings. Fassett and Warren describe this problem, saying that, often, "such pedagogical initiatives fail to fulfill their promise simply because there is a lack of context, a lack of precedent" (2007, p. 115). Thus, the problems that instructors may face while attempting to implement positive change are largely due to a lack of preparation of the students for critical examination. Therefore, although the process may be difficult, instructors who expose students to questions of power can create a positive difference in the lives of students simply by exposing them to pedagogy that is not based solely on the memorization and depositing of knowledge.

#### *Societal Forces Often Resist Change*

Freire states, "it would be extremely naïve to expect the dominant classes to develop a type of education that would enable subordinate classes to perceive social injustices critically" (1985, p. 102). Thus, society is often resistant to any change—especially change which removes power from those in power and, instead, gives that power to those who are subjugated. In this case, the current educational system does not wish to give up power that could, instead, be shared with students. Apple elaborates on this societal issue, writing that "much of the problem in education is not only about educating the oppressed, but re-educating those who were and are in dominance" (2003, p. 114). Thus, even if individual instructors wish to work toward change, colleagues often do not support their efforts, leading to "emotional isolation" and "burnout" (Yep, 2007, p. 98). Therefore, even if instructors are willing to become reflexive about their teaching, they may face opposition from other instructors and administrators, who may fear that even the smallest step to uncover hegemonic practices that privilege

these dominant groups in education may somehow lead to unwanted change in the school or university's hierarchy of power.

### *Recognizing White Male Privilege*

Perhaps the most difficult challenge facing instructors who want to enact change in their classrooms is the recognition of white male privilege. White male instructors, by nature of their race and sex, are afforded privileges of which they are often unaware. White people tend to believe that being white is the norm. Therefore, if white viewpoints are the norm, cultural backgrounds become invisible, creating a situation in which whites believe that they can speak for all people (Pearce, 2005). White privilege affords many abilities, including the ability to ignore other cultures without having to worry about the risk of retribution (McIntosh, 1992). Thus, white privilege makes white people believe that their standpoint is the only correct standpoint. In relation to white privilege and making change in the classroom, Landsman contends:

I believe that white people too often want solutions to be quick and easy. They want something they can follow and in a few months, a few years at the most, the problem will be solved. At the same time, I believe people of color have known it will not happen this way. (2001, p. 161)

This belief system becomes problematic, even for white instructors who have acted reflexively and attempted to create an accepting environment that functions to reduce bias in the classroom. White male instructors must be aware that they cannot eliminate bias, but instead, can reduce it. The false perception of a neutral, or bias-free, classroom serves to benefit white instructors, because it suggests an end point or finality to critical communication pedagogy. When instructors incorrectly believe that they have overcome bias, they put themselves back into a position of power, undermining the constant challenge of reflexivity.

Therefore, white instructors must be cognizant of their standpoint, both during the writing of their autoethnographies, and during the implementation of critical communication pedagogy. Because many instructors hold the dominant white standpoint, they must work to shift their lens to attempt to understand how minority groups experience instruction—not only how those from dominant standpoint see it. Admittedly, such a shift is difficult, but the change in thinking that autoethnographic writing affords instructors helps them to adjust their viewpoint. Because autoethnography encourages instructors to shift their standpoint, they become able to see how their actions affect others more clearly.

### *Recognizing the Lifelong Nature of Facilitating Change*

As I have discussed, creating transformative pedagogical change is not a finite exercise. Doing so is a challenge for instructors of both normative and non-normative social locations. The initial exercise in reflexivity is a necessary first step; however, a one-time enactment of one's findings will not have lasting effects. Instead, it is an ongoing challenge. Reflexivity is a lifelong process of understanding and working with students of both normative and non-normative social locations. The more that instructors act reflexively on their experiences in the classroom, the more that they can learn about themselves, their students, and the environment in which the two groups interact.

### Conclusion

When instructors follow the banking concept of education, they continue to exercise power over students by depositing information (Freire, 1970). Shor elaborates:

There is a reassuring simplicity in the old ways of teaching. They may not work very well, but they are a solid tradition to fall back on—the hour-long lesson, the documented lecture, the Socratic discussion, the course outline and sturdy reading list, the separate canon for each academic discipline, the term paper and final exam. It is well organized and very busy. The irony of this order is not simply the static knowledge it produces, but also the alienation it provokes. (1980, p. 122)

Instructors who follow such an approach prevent students from learning from their own lived experiences. In contrast, critically-minded instructors make themselves vulnerable, both by engaging in reflexive writing about their own pedagogical practice, and by sharing their feelings and insecurities with their students. The experience also creates vulnerabilities for students, who are asked to share their own thoughts about hegemony in the classroom. Such an experience is uncomfortable for both parties, because it differs greatly from the hegemonic, yet familiar, “banking concept of education” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). However, only through the discomfort of making oneself vulnerable can an instructor and his or her students transform the classroom and realize the potential of critical communication pedagogy.

If instructors take critical communication pedagogy seriously, desiring to work toward positive change in their classrooms, reflexivity about classroom oppression becomes worth the effort. Shor echoes this idea:

When we think critically about our action, then we can act critically on our thinking. Teaching is the most important social practice of intellectuals, so reflection on pedagogy can do a lot in extraordinarily redesigning the ordinary work of a teacher. (1980, p. 123)

Thus, instructors who desire to create a classroom environment that examines power can follow the two steps advocated in this article: naming and critically reflecting on sociocultural problems (autoethnography), and acting to create change (critical communication pedagogy). This process affords opportunities for instructors to become better facilitators of learning, first by empowering their students, and then by creating change in their classrooms (the micro level), and in the educational agencies of society (the macro level). In sum, this work demonstrates that autoethnographic writing about pedagogical practice can be pragmatic scholarship that bridges the gap from critical communication pedagogy as ideology to critical communication pedagogy as praxis.



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