Challenging Traditional Assumptions

in Social Education

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Abstract

Social education is interested in empowering the disempowered, so that education and
schooling should be about addressing societal issues tied to race, ethnicity, gender, age,
and orientation. Critical qualitative research informs social education through a lens that
ensures the investigation of issues in education tied to power and privilege, ultimately
leading to advocacy and activism. This article posits the melding of social education and
critical qualitative research in order to challenge traditional assumption in education and
research.

<div align="center">**Challenging Traditional Research Assumptions:**</div>

<div align="center">**Critical Qualitative Research in Social Education**</div>

Social Education (a working description)- Addressing economic, social, political, environmental and equity issues in education in a local to global context connected to ethnicity, race, class, gender, age, ability, orientation, and culture leading to critical consciousness and civic engagement.

Introduction

The idea of social studies brings all kinds of thoughts and memories to our minds. A rethinking and redoing need be engaged regarding the social studies as past and present applications of social studies often do much more harm than good (Zinn, 2005; Loewen, 2007). Social studies often entails teacher centered, passive, regurgitation of information – decontextualized to the point of meaninglessness except to ensure non-thinking, traditional and passive endeavors. The world demands so much more – humanity requires so much more – the future is so much more. Research tied to the social studies also often perpetuates the status quo in that the human endeavor and progress, and the issues tied to societal problems are often ignored (Kincheloe (2005).

As a result, in order to problematize and criticalize the concept of social studies, a "new" concept for rethinking and redoing is posited - social education. Social education is a much broader concept challenging us to move beyond compartmentalization and answers. Social education encompasses many things – critical pedagogy, social studies, media / cultural studies, social justice…The idea, nevertheless, is to offer perspectives, rather than truths, questions, rather than answers, action, rather than passivity. Social education moves us from a war mentality to a peace mentality, from a cynical mindset to

one of opportunity. And critical qualitative research in social education challenges traditional teaching, learning, assessment, context and connections beyond the school.

While "defining" social education can elicit contradictory claims, social education starts with emphasizing three areas of study: critical pedagogy, cultural/media studies, and social studies education; stressing that education, interpreted broadly, has the potential to advance social justice. Thus emerges social education… a lifelong journey – to question, to challenge, to do, and to create. Connecting present and past, merging current issues with traditional curriculum, integrating alternative texts and perspectives, empowering and emancipating kids and educators, and transforming schools and society – the transgressions of social education scream out. Freire (1970), Kincheloe (2008), Zinn (2005), Giroux (2004), Apple (1990), hooks (1994), McLaren (2003), Loewen (2007), Gay (2010), and critical qualitative research can be the method for investigation and exploration of this world.

Social education challenges at its very core, hopefully problematizing social studies and its world. Transformation and transcendence are the essence of social education – connecting all of humanity to the big picture of social justice. Social education sees no walls, no "no's" and promotes the idea of possibility for all human endeavor. And calls for critical qualitative research.

There are several possibilities to explore in considering the direction of social education. Social education encompasses social studies education, cultural studies, critical theory / critical pedagogy, social justice / democracy education, and community connections such as partnerships and service learning. In this time of neoliberalism,

standardization, essentialism, and accountability it is vital that social education offer

critical inquiry in education and thus a critical qualitative research focus.

Context

  Social education is interested in empowering the disempowered, so that education

and schooling should be about addressing societal issues tied to race, ethnicity, gender,

age, and orientation. When we have a society that continues to struggle with mass

incarceration, gun violence, lack of voting rights, 19th century immigration policy,

entitlements to the military, corporations, and the rich, perpetual war, and non-stop

imperialism, then societal transformation can be the only goal. In other words, a

particular critique made by social educators is that humanity and efficacy have been

divorced from education.

  Critical qualitative research informs social education through a lens that ensures

the investigation of issues in education tied to power and privilege, ultimately leading to

advocacy and activism. The concept of critical is increasingly challenged in this age of

neoliberal reform; nevertheless, critical implies questioning, investigating and

challenging in terms of equity and social justice, leading to critical consciousness (Freire,

1970). A social education take on critical qualitative research thus suggests multiple

truths and perspectives and focuses on questions rather than answers. Social education

researchers make the process and investigation their own and adapt questions,

procedures, methods, and strategies throughout the experience, thus engaging in self-

study. This reflects an ever-changing criticality in the bricolage of the research

(Steinberg, 2011). This is intended to challenge traditional assumptions in research

including quantifying the human endeavor, myths of objectivity and generalizability, neoliberal and corporatization of education, and deficit approaches to equity and social justice.

As Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2012) state, a form of social or cultural criticism is the basis of such research. They go on to suggest seven assumptions in critical qualitative research in social education:

1. Social and historically constructed power issues affect all human endeavor;

2. Ideology and value judgments;

3. Knowledge, skills, and dispositions from a local to global perspective;

4. Capitalism affects the construction of individual and group process / products;

5. Objectivity is a myth and that language and culture necessitate subjectivity;

6. Privilege and oppression are rampant and critical consciousness is a primary focus;

7. Traditional and mainstream practice contribute to reproduction of issues tied to equity and social justice.

Critical qualitative research in social education intentionally challenges assumptions linked to quantitative methodology. Loughran (2005) states the important guidelines for critical approaches in qualitative studies that demonstrate these challenges:

1. Critical qualitative research is aimed and problems and issues encountered by the researcher, participants, and society in general in investigating their equity and social justice in teaching and learning.

2. Critical qualitative research challenges traditional quantitative research, teaching and learning by encouraging a variety of interactions, including a focus on critical theory as a foundation.

3. Critical qualitative research employs a variety of qualitative methods to enhance triangulation, but also allowing for the evolution of the study (questions, themes, issues).

4. Critical qualitative research facilitates a broader understanding of research particularly tied to the human endeavor.

Nevertheless, the argument herein is that all education is or should be social education. We are all social "human" beings struggling to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions through lifelong education, both in and out of "school" in order to make the best of life, hopefully for ourselves and others. Any research therefore, must also include the story, questioning, and challenges to power and privilege through critical qualitative research.

Aim/Objectives/Questions

How does critical qualitative research impact and inform social education?

How does the inclusion of critical qualitative research impact the researcher, participants, and society in a social education context?

The objective is to determine the impact of critical qualitative research in social education research and to challenge traditional assumptions in education research.

Rationale / Purpose

A key in social education critical research is that the researcher address issues of equity and social justice within the framing of the researcher themselves, the participants, and ultimately society as a whole; thus able to challenge traditional research assumptions by adapting questions and methods as the research progresses. A primary goal is to explore phenomena critically with the hope of ultimate transformation for social justice, using questions, problems and issues as a foundation. Much of the literature regarding critical qualitative research in education questions basic assumptions regarding a non-problematic transition from teacher to teacher educator, issues of bias, generalizability, and addressing issues of power and privilege (Berry, 2007).

One begins with structure in the sense of general research questions and intended methodology and participants / phenomena, but with the understanding that all is open-ended, flexible, and dependent on the ongoing process, synthesis and analysis of reading, experiences and findings. Discovering themes / topics through coding is vital at all stages of the process. According to Kincheloe (2005), such research seeks historical contextualization, multiple, theoretical groundings, and a diversity of knowledge by integrating a variety of methodologies.

Social education requires a personal connection in one's research, therefore an initial self study / narrative is vital for research context. The self-study provides the personal story that leads to the initial rationale and questions for the research. This story might then transition to a more formal framing describing the rationale questions and issues. Methods employed throughout include journaling, self-analysis, collaborative self -study with other dissertation cohort members, and individual and focus group interviewing. The key is the researcher (doctoral student) studying their own role within

the practice (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Again, all is within the context of understanding that subjectivity is a human characteristic; and that the research isn't intended to tell the whole story, but the story as it is at the time, with additional questions, ideas, and issues emerging throughout the experience

Any research project requires a review of literature and relevant research. The focus in critical qualitative research in social education is to determine the seminal themes relevant to the research. All of this is made relevant through connections to the self, participants and societal contexts. Again, methodology must be "written" through focusing on the rationale, questions, and adapted methods appropriate for the critical investigation. It is vital here to develop one's own social education research persona (self-study), for adapting the methodology to meet the developing needs of the project. Documenting this process is part of the reporting of the methodology, as is the philosophical review of critical research in social education. Critical qualitative research of recent and current dissertations research projects will be coded for themes and issues tied the process and to particular critical themes in social education. Additionally, individual and group interviews will be coded regarding the research questions of the study.

A particular highlight emanating from qualitative research is a richness of story in detailing human experiences, and also the critical components of equity, social justice, power, and privilege. The effort at triangulation contributes to the richness of story in that a variety of qualitative methods are adapted to meet the needs of the research (researcher, participants, and society) – questions, story, engagement, and focus. Writing through one's perspective is also vital in critical qualitative research so as to challenge the

assumption that one needs to make grand claims or generalize. A particular goal is to personalize the research by making the process and procedures one's own by continually adapting questions and procedures as more is investigated and discovered. Finally the understanding is that the research is a story in time, hopefully moving humanity forward, but also leading to further questions and next steps for research / investigation.

Additionally interview themes will be documented regarding personal impact of critical qualitative research and its impact on the research process. Analysis of findings will include proposed directions for teaching critical qualitative research and the process for integrating critical qualitative research into social education scholarship. Finally, articulating critical qualitative research design in social education focusing again on equity and social justice will be addressed / analyzed.

21st Century Implications

There are five broad pillars or themes that comprise social education. These include Social Reconstruction / Social Justice, Critical Theory/ Critical Pedagogy, Media / Cultural Studies, Social Studies / History Education, and Culturally Responsive / Multiple Perspectives. Each of these have contributed to a transformation from traditional social studies education approaches to teaching and learning, curriculum and instruction to one that is first critical in the sense that deconstruction and multiple truths are championed with the hope for emancipatory education practice – social education. This is turn will also hopefully lead to challenges to the current neoliberal, privatized and globalized "vision" / direction of much within education. The idea is that the public

sphere remains the place where the true potential for human transformations can take place (Giroux, 2004).

Social Education stems from a social reconstructionist / social justice philosophical foundation. The idea suggests that democracy and capitalism are antithetical and that unbridled capitalism has usurped democratic practice (Apple, 1990). Equity and social justice need be the ultimate goal of any education endeavor focusing on race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, age, and ability when addressing any social issue; and thus should be prevalent in any critical qualitative research. Rethinking, reconceptualizing, and restructuring schooling, education, curriculum and instruction is stressed if we are truly interested in equity and meeting basic human needs (McLaren, 2003). An issue and problem based approach to research is also warranted.

Critical qualitative research and social education are therefore vital for the world of the 21st century. The onslaught of neoliberalism, corporatization, standardization, testing, and the continuing attack on public schools and educators necessitate critical approaches to teaching and learning along with critical qualitative research in social education. Ongoing issues with equity and social justice tied to race, ethnicity, class, orientation, age, and ability linking to schooling, education, teaching and learning must be addressed. The struggle between unbridled capitalism and democracy warrant these investigations in the 21st century, hopefully leading to advocacy and activism.

Empowering and emancipating educators and students requires a redesigning of schooling to demonstrate a truly democratic way of life, to be consistent with the ideals of equity and social justice, to be informed by research that is "educative" (Zeichner, 2009). According to Goodman, Ullrich and Nana (2012), a "triple consciousness' based

on Freire's critical consciousness is much needed for equity and social justice in a teaching and learning context. We must model critical multicultural, social justice education (culturally responsive pedagogy), work to transform perspectives of all education, society and its stakeholders, and engage in critical emancipatory research leading to advocacy and activism.

We must continually challenge the corporatized, unequal, and essentialist framing of education. Education is both a political and ethical endeavor hoping to facilitate critically active students anxious to engage in the world. Linking the process to the community and the world provides the context we all need to understand and advocate for equity and social justice. A critical qualitative research in social education that investigates these hard issues locally and globally can only lead to empowering educators and students as change agents.

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