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Critical Pedagogy and Power Dynamics

In our contemporary society, power relationships exist and, as Joan Wink describes in her book, *Critical Pedagogy*, to examine these relationships is to practice Critical Pedagogy. Through the acknowledgement and inspection of such power dynamics, educators can assist in preventing future silencing, marginalization, and schooling that limits the power of one group, while compelling another group to be dominating.

Hegemony is described by Joan Wink as “the domination of one group over another with the partial consent of the dominated group. It is the control of knowledge and literacy by the dominant group” (45). Wink uses an A Team and B Team analogy to describe this concept, where the two groups consists of an influential, main culture group and a submissive, moderately accepting group, respectively. The B Team accepts the authority of the A Team, a power structure, over itself. The A Team, as the dominating culture, “continuously invalidates and marginalizes the voice of the B Team. This is how the A Team socially constructs knowledge and maintains its own power” (100). Through hegemony, power relationships are constructed and groups are prevented from achieving their potential.

In the hegemonic construct, the A Team utilizes cultural capital to maintain its power. Wink defines cultural capital as “a process of powerful practices: ways of behaving, talking,

acting, thinking, moving, and so on. These practices are determined unconsciously by the dominant culture and are used to promote success for specific groups in our society” (40). There is value placed in certain situations by the dominating group that allows the ones who follow the norms of such group or culture to acquire power. “Often the nondominant culture buys into the dominant culture’s way of thinking, supporting and encouraging it” (40). This is due to the B Team wanting to gain the capital and resulting power by following the ways of talking, acting, and thinking as mandated and influenced by the main culture. Through cultural capital, power is gained by the A Team that allows for authority over the B Team through the transmission of ideas that may not be completely conducive to the nondominate group’s position.

“Schooling refers to the hidden educational processes by which schools impose the dominant ways of knowing on all” (56), states Wink. The A Team utilizes schooling as a means of spreading the ways of cultural capital. The ideas and values of the dominate culture are imposed upon students. Those in power control how to act and speak. As an effect, socialization occurs in these settings. “Society sends many messages to each of us. Sometimes we hear those messages, and sometimes we don’t. However, when we consciously or unconsciously accept those messages and live those messages, we are being socialized” (58). Grooming also takes place within schooling as one person or entire groups are controlled in their paths of life. Wink explains grooming as “preparing one group for a high-status place in life. Grooming is akin to putting one group on a superhighway and the other group on a rough and bumpy road. When the group on the on the highway arrives first, they assume that they got there because they deserve to because they worked harder, because they are smarter” (54). Students are shaped into the groups they are supposed to belong to as predestined by the dominating group’s values and ideas. This would be a form of marginalizing in the negative aspect of grooming. “To marginalize is to place

someone or something on the fringes, on the margins of power” (55). For the power structure to continue, a group must be placed below another group. This marginalized group has less power in the voice of the culture.

For the B Team, the nondominated group, to surpass the confinements of the concept of hegemony that is placed upon them, naming must occur.

Naming is more than just articulating a thought; it is more than just talking and labeling. Naming occurs when we articulate a thought that traditionally has not been discussed by the minority group or the majority group. Naming takes place when the nondominant group tells the dominant group exactly what the nondominant group thinks and feels about specific social practices. (55)

Naming in the form of talking honestly and openly about ones experiences with power and without power can allow the B Team to gain the awareness to change the dynamics of power. Although, the theory of naming is much harder to actually implement. Naming involves the courage to speak out against the dominating group that is of the main culture and go against regular cultural norms; to use voice to express one’s reality, one’s experiences, and one’s world. For example, one must tell the dominant group that they are being racist, sexist, or implementing classism. Through naming, the process of changing power dynamics can begin to result.

The A Team prevents naming from occurring easily by silencing the B Team and limiting expression via unconsciously or consciously. When silenced Wink says she “did not know it, did not understand it; (She) did not recognize it. In fact, (she) bought into it and supported it with (her) behaviors. When silenced, (she) cooperated and perpetuated the process” (57). Many people encounter the same experience with not recognizing silencing when experiencing it for

themselves. The dominant culture makes it so one is not aware of the situation in which the silencing is occurring, but instead lures one into a fog of incomprehension of the real situation at hand; a situation in which a restriction of expression is transpiring; the restriction of power within the nondominating culture.

As an educator, one must be aware of how hegemony through cultural capital, grooming, marginalizing, schooling, socializing, and silencing is apparent in schools today and how it can affect the students' and educators voice. Utilizing and practicing true critical pedagogy to examine the structure of power enables one to know and understand that what one is doing as an educator could be limiting the power of a group. As Wink informs us, "enriched programs can be used as a hegemonic tool to groom one group and to marginalize and silence another" (46). As with the talented and gifted program, to place one group as dominating in the sense of ability causes another group to always be demeaned. Tracking and labeling produced the same type of scenario where the A Team thrives, which enables power, and the B Team is perceived as less successful and without power. This, in turn, is only "reproducing the existing social, cultural, and political power bases" (102).

In conclusion, power dynamics exists and are hugely apparent in our contemporary society. It can be seen from the work force to the education system to politics. As an educator who implements critical pedagogy into daily life, examining the realities of the affects of power relationships is crucial to the execution of critical pedagogy. As Joan Wink states, "critical pedagogy has helped me to understand what teaching should be about: encouraging teachers to be complete professionals, intellectuals, and above all, people who own their own experiences and humanness" (60). People who own their own experiences and humanness is the fulcrum point concept of critical pedagogy that allows one to want to deeply consider how power

dynamics affects oneself as an educator and one's students. Understanding and realizing the reality of hegemony, grooming, silencing, and the other factors of power in the society today are the concrete implementation of critical pedagogy. Although, one must continue the learning and transforming continuum and as Freire defines "to name, to reflect critically, and to act" is to engage in true critical pedagogy.