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REJOINDER

Toward a Critical Race Pedagogy of Hope: A Rejoinder to Brian Schultz

By Sherick A. Hughes

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“The idea that hope alone will transform the world...is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. The attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion” (Freire, 1996, p. 8).

Introduction

Oprah Winfrey was interviewed recently by *Newsweek* regarding her forty million dollar Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa. Winfrey justified launching the project in South Africa instead of in the States by adding:

“I became so frustrated with visiting inner-city schools that I just stopped going. The sense that you need to learn just isn’t there. If you ask the kids what they want or need, they will say an iPod or some sneakers. In South Africa, they don’t ask for money or toys. They ask for uniforms so they can go to school.”

Winfrey’s HARPO studios are walking distance from Byrd Elementary School. A sign in the vacant lot that was promised to those students as a spot for a new school was posted nearly a decade before The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy and her negative comments regarding “inner-city” schools made international news. Schultz (2007) provides counter-evidence to Winfrey’s claims: “[I]nitially, when I asked about a problem they [inner-city Byrd Elementary School students] wanted fixed, I had anticipated the students might choose simpler tasks like ‘wanting fruit punch at lunch’ or ‘getting recess everyday.’” Shultz (2007) further recalls with pride, “instead, they decided on a more serious issue, one that had been in Chicago’s Cabrini Green community for years – a new school had been promised but was never built.” Schultz (2007) offers a thorough appropriation of Kozol (1992; and 2005) to describe how he and his students co-created and implemented a culturally relevant, emergent, authentic, integrated curriculum at Byrd Elementary School called “Project Citizen” to seek recourse for this broken promise.

Room 405 of Byrd Elementary School apparently came alive with in-depth dialogues and social critiques, as Schultz (2004) and his all African American fifth-graders began to connect school disparities described in Kozol’s (1992) *Savage Inequalities* with their own lived experiences (Van Manen, 1977). It was through this initial connection that “Project Citizen” seemed to provide a pedagogical road map for navigating the political economy en route to (a) school improvement, (b) higher attendance, and (c) higher school performance assessments. Byrd Elementary School families lived in the former Cabrini Green Housing area of Chicago, arguably one of the most impoverished and neglected living spaces in the U. S. at that time. Schultz’s class (2004) readings and discussions of Kozol (1992) seemed to incite the type of substantive conversations, cooperative learning opportunities, multimedia projects, and student presentations that are indicative of democratic classrooms where coursework is meaningful, expectations are high, materials are challenging, and students are more likely to reach their highest potential.

Whereas more “popularized” public figures like Payne (2001) are criticized for attempts to generalize social classes and, thereby, exaggerate the differences between and similarities within them, Schultz (2007) alludes to the structure and agency of social class and its particularities and pushes his students and himself to consider the “hidden curriculum of schoolwork based on social class.” Albeit

inadvertently complicit (Gordon, 2005), Payne's *Toward a Framework for Understanding Poverty* seems to contribute to the reinforcement of oppressive social class ideology. Even with its opening caveats intended to dissuade readers from overgeneralization, Payne still offers somewhat oversimplified class anecdotes that seem to be teaching teachers to apply a deficit-model response to impoverished youth.

Approaches akin to Payne's (2001) are limited in their ability to challenge systemic producers of class inequities due to their inherent concentration on the impoverished as products to be managed. While Schultz is strong on these points regarding social class, and he critiques class-based "cultural reproduction" convincingly, I want to challenge his approach to the reciprocal relationship between hope and struggle, as well as his analysis of racialization in regards to "Project Citizen." This article illustrates the complexity of teaching and learning with our racialized and classed "selves." I contend that "Project Citizen" is indicative of a synthesis of pedagogy of hope and critical race pedagogy (CRP), or what I conceptualize as *critical race pedagogy of hope*.

Pedagogy of Hope

Schultz (2007) offers readers a glimpse into *pedagogy of hope* in the following passage: "*Their hard work, hopeful struggle, subsequent attention and recognition, clearly elucidates....*" For understanding more in-depth the hope and struggle dynamics of "Project Citizen," I turn to the work of Paulo Freire. Freire (1996) understood that teachers and students must struggle for school improvement, but we must do as our ancestors did so ardently--cling to hope with each daily accomplishment. There is no life to the struggle without hope, from Freire's viewpoint. Struggle is not *the* tool that produces improved social conditions; participation in the struggle is not the improvement in and of itself. There must also be hopefulness. In his illustration of hope as a fundamental human need, Freire seems to caution against separating hope from the action of struggling/critiquing to transform oppressive circumstances, "the idea that hope alone will transform the world...is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism" (p. 8).

Pedagogy of hope is what sustained the struggle for a better condition for the youth participants of "Project Citizen." As Freire continues, "the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion" (p. 8). Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as begin the arduous struggle and relentless criticism of oppression. Summarizing Freire's pedagogy of hope, Oakes and Lipton (1999) conclude, "hope sustains the actions, and people must act or the hope turns against them—empty" (p. 32). Several aspects of "Project Citizen" at Byrd Elementary School (Schultz, 2007) seem to epitomize pedagogy of hope, of possibilities to transcend any barriers to learning by students, their peers, families, teachers, and administrators. "But without the struggle," Freire contends, "hope...dissipates, loses its bearing, and turns into hopelessness" (p. 9). Jennings and Lynn (2005) offer critical race pedagogy (CRP) as an alternative lens to view and participate more productively in the struggle against oppression in education.

Critical Race Pedagogy

I suspect that Schultz (2007) limited discussions of race-based struggle in his article because (a) perhaps, he seeks to avoid perpetuating the common U.S. narrative of the "white savior" teacher of impoverished Black youths, and thus he moves readers to focus upon class rather than race to offer some form of disruption to that narrative; and (b) perhaps, his lived White, Midwestern, urban Jewish experiences led him to a magnifying lens of class on the world. In contrast, my Black Southern, rural, coastal Baptist experiences led me to a magnifying lens of racialization. Indicative of a strong sense of the inequities that accompany race and class identity in her life, one of the girls from Byrd Elementary

School Room 405 asked, “Is anyone gonna listen to a bunch of black kids from Cabrini Green, anyway?” Schultz (2007) and his students arguably don’t live as different races, but as different ethnicities influenced daily by race, which suggests different lenses from which to see and to be seen in the world of schooling.

Jennings and Lynn (2005) presented recently their conceptualization of critical race pedagogy (CRP) as an additional route to confront educators’ taken-for-granted knowledge about living, learning, and teaching race (Hughes, 2005b) in relation to class and gender (including gender roles as connected to sexuality). In fact, Jennings & Lynn stand by CRP as a “theoretical construct that addresses the complexity of race and education” (p. 24). The scholars further describe the roots of CRP as growing upon a set of “very broad yet closely interwoven characteristics that form the basis for this continually evolving construct” (p. 25). The applicability of Jennings and Lynn’s CRP for engaging the struggle of anti-oppression in education can be summarized in the following five tenets:

1. CRP must be intimately cognizant of the necessary intersection of other oppressive constructs such as class, gender and sexual orientation (Jennings & Lynn, p. 26).
2. CRP must recognize and understand the endemic nature of racism... (Jennings & Lynn, p. 25).
3. CRP must recognize the importance of understanding the power dynamics inherent in schooling . . . (Jennings & Lynn, p. 26).
4. CRP must emphasize the importance of . . . reflexivity. . . [and how the] exploration of one's "place" within a stratified society has power to illuminate oppressive structures in society . . . (Jennings & Lynn, p. 27).
5. CRP must encourage the practice of an explicitly liberatory form of both teaching and learning. . . advocating for justice and equity in both schooling and education as a necessity if there is to be justice and equity in the broader society. . . (Jennings & Lynn, pp. 27-28).

Most pertinent to this essay is the consideration of how CRP provides tools to challenge the dominant, oppressive, and oftentimes inadvertently complicit (Gordon, 2005) actions at the intersection of race, class and education (Delpit, 1988; Delpit, 1995; and Anders, Bryan, & Noblit, 2005). While CRP offers a space to center race for dialogue and critique without the mandate for de-centering class and other forms of oppression, it conveys little to inform readers about the action of hope and possibility and about how hope works concomitantly with struggle.

In short, pedagogy of hope is limited in its exploration of racialization, and CRP is limited in its consideration of the actions of hope. I find that “Project Citizen,” as applied in Chicago’s Byrd Elementary School Room 405, provides a glimpse of *critical race pedagogy of hope*. Although Schultz, (2007) does not explicitly name critical race pedagogy or pedagogy of hope as part of Room 405, there is evidence from his article to support the notion that experiences of “Project Citizen” did involve both forms of pedagogy, but in complex, multiple, and dynamic fashion rather than in some linear or formulaic way. The following discussion sections and excerpts from Schultz (2007) provide a case in point. Narratives from Schultz and “Project Citizen” youths below express their collective dispositions toward hope, while battling any unearned penalties and struggles they perceived at the intersection of race and class in their lives.

Critical Race Pedagogy of Hope: Evidence from Curriculum and Instruction

The innovative curriculum and instructional techniques from Schultz (2007) seemed to build upon connectedness between students and teacher. Room 405 youth participated in instruction that strengthened the connection between social class inequity within urban schools and a racialized society. Curriculum implementation seemed to involve spaces where meaning was made for, with, and by students as part of daily preparation for informed citizenship. Teaching and learning in Room 405 also appeared to involve a co-creational setting, where building a community of learners was encouraged and engaged, and where instruction was often rendered as humbling and as part testimonial (Freire). Collaborative learning was

also encouraged, whereby Room 405 students and their teacher, Schultz (2007), were expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other, what Freire conceptualizes as teaching while learning and learning while teaching. Finally, the innovative curriculum and instructional tools from “Project Citizen” seemed to cultivate teacher-student relationships that were fluid, co-equal, and interactive beyond the classroom into the public sphere. The following thick, rich narratives from Schultz (2007) speak directly to my claims regarding the connection of critical race pedagogy of hope to the implementation of “Project Citizen” via curriculum interpretation and instruction in Room 405.

1. The comments of Crown, who was a chronic truant prior to participating in this classroom, resonate strongly: “I did not feel school was a place for me. I didn’t think it would help me in my life, but this project made me like coming to school. . . It did not feel like the boring school I was used to.” His turnaround, newfound dedication to schoolwork, and attendance demonstrates the power of a democratic classroom where all students are critical members and are allowed to embrace their own ideas of what is most worthwhile. In addition, it shows that black students from inner-city housing projects, such as Cabrini Green, care about and are willing to fight for an equal educational opportunity – an opportunity that is unfortunately non-existent in many urban areas.
2. As their teacher, I learned content can come from the students rather than be driven into them by forcibly preparing concrete objectives in an artificial manner. Just as students in the more affluent schools are encouraged and rewarded for their insight and creativity, these particular African American students now could have their voices heard through purposeful action and determination. And in this particular case, their voices were no longer silenced as they fought vigorously in hopes to get a fair and equal school building.
3. At times, though, I was accused of “being behind this” because, as a Chicago Public Schools official stated, “there was no way that kids from Byrd school were capable of doing work like this . . . we have gotten too many letters.” . . . These disparaging comments were frequently made in light of the fact that many people simply could not believe that these “inner-city, black kids” were capable of doing such amazing work, but their efforts, recognition, and results were testimony of their high achievement.
4. Fairly frustrated with the response, I could not figure out why they [CRFC Board Members] would not want to have the students’ perspective. I questioned in my journal whether it was “because they don’t want a couple of black kids running around their law offices or if they are just not prepared for fifth-graders at this meeting.” Whatever the reason for denying the kids as the presenters, which most likely was nothing more than the need for expediency rather than having to do with race, the students and I still felt it was an opportunity to have the efforts presented to a wider audience that potentially had more reach; “Cause the more people that know the better it be,” as one student put it.

The evidence from experiences via narratives seems to firmly place curriculum and instruction in Room 405 often at the intersection of struggle, hope, race, and social class inequity. Yet, the evidence feels incomplete without exploring the degree to which student progress was assessed (Hughes, 2005a). Indeed, assessment surfaces as an indispensable component of curriculum and instruction in Room 405. Dr. Jodi Haney (2005), Co-Director of Project EXCITE (Environmental Health Science Explorations through Cross-disciplinary & Investigative Team Experiences), describes three types of assessments used to determine the progress of school-age children. Shultz (2007) emphasizes assessment in ways that are reminiscent of Haney’s (2005) Type I, II, and III forms of assessment. Narrative evidence above suggests that innovative forms of assessment were crucial in efforts to advance “Project Citizen” and critical race pedagogy of hope in Room 405.

Critical Race Pedagogy of Hope: Summary of Evidence from Assessment

Type I Assessments include the traditional referral, behavioral modification forms, and one-shot tests involving paper and pencil, timed elements, multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and short essay item. Such “efficient” forms and one-shot tests comprise the bulk of the way youth are currently measured and weighed in the U.S. Type I assessments are the least “authentic” of the three forms of assessment. “Project Citizen” expands the possibilities of Type II and Type III assessments. During Type II Assessments, learners are asked to do or perform in order to demonstrate knowledge or skills. During “Project Citizen,” the following Type II assessments were implemented: Students

1. made oral presentations of their findings, wrote letters, and had email exchanges with officials;
2. made multimedia presentations (DVD production, website development, and usage of presentation software (i.e. PowerPoint));
3. engaged the higher order thinking skill of *problem posing* by engaging substantive conversation and debate regarding the appropriate actions to take toward promising possibilities and solutions to the problems at hand.

Type III Assessments involve long-term projects. During Type III assessments, learners are asked to co-create artifacts in order to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, or dispositions. This type of assessment includes (a) student investigation of topics over extended periods of time; (b) encouragement of student creativity; and (c) facilitation of student decision-making about the content and processes related to the project. “Project Citizen” included at least two hopeful strategies toward Type III assessments:

1. curriculum integration throughout the school term;
2. long-term planning and implementation of a “Take Action Project” to address learning and teaching barriers at school.

Schultz (2007) notes a “98% attendance rate,” a “35% increase in standardized test scores,” and “no disciplinary problems,” which suggests that Type I assessment performance can be positively affected by the more “authentic” Type II and Type III forms of assessment.. Haney responds below to the frequent concerns for how to check and score Type II and Type III assignments:

Checklists and scoring rubrics are matrices or guidelines that help define quality performances for Type II and Type III Assessments. They often help improve student performance since task expectations are specified and communicated in advance. Therefore learners can self-evaluate and modify their work prior to submission, or during multiple revisions following “draft” submissions. (Haney, pp. 1-3).

Innovative assessment via “Project Citizen” in Room 405 offers more evidence of critical race pedagogy of hope and how it seems to evolve in this context. Schultz (2007) concurs in an excerpt from his journal “over the many months of the project, standardized test scores of most students increased over the previous year, several significantly, without direct time spent on test preparation.” Although Room 405 students never directly received any responses from the decision-making authorities within their own school system, they maintained the action of hope. How might one assess this type of school action? Haney would undoubtedly applaud the assessment strategy applied by Schultz (2007) and his students.

Keeping his own white privilege in check, while engaging curriculum and instructional efforts conducive to Type II and Type III forms of assessment, Schultz (2007) and his students reached levels of achievement that exceed any traditional Type I measure that I can surmise. Due to their co-created

curriculum, instruction, and assessment efforts, some of their listed problems within the school were remedied. Schultz (2007) further details “discipline problems were inexistent, and attendance was at a sky-high 98% . . . items the school engineer had been asking to have fixed for years were all of the sudden getting the attention they had lacked.” Other major school outcomes included instances where finally “doors were fixed, lights were replaced, and soap dispensers were installed in the bathrooms” (Shultz, 2007)! Therefore, one classroom of students and their teacher acted in ways that benefited the entire school. Type I assessment appeared to have a quite limited space in the ecological niche of Room 405, a fact that challenges and indeed illustrates for me how other teachers and students might begin to engage critical race pedagogy of hope.

Closing Thoughts

“We would love to get our perfect solution of getting a new school built, but we have figured out that great things can happen when you fight for what is right . . . Even though we are not getting a new school we have done great things. . . like it said in one of the letters supporting us, “Spectacular things happen along the way!” --Room 405 fifth-grader

“We are finally getting on the news for somethin’ good!” . . . [the] “process was the best part because people listened to us and agreed with us” --Room 405 fifth-graders

At the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) 2007 in Chicago, I had the pleasure of meeting youth from Byrd Elementary School’s Room 405 and their “Project Citizen” teacher Dr. Brian Schultz. During that meeting, another poignant narrative was shared with me, which relayed the challenging words of a young Black male after the “Project Citizen” youth group finished presenting at another national conference earlier in the year. The student contended “Applause is great [and I think well-deserved in this case], but all of you live near schools where youth have similar barriers to learning. . . what will you do to change their plight. . .?”

Essentially the young man asks the question, “Now that I am here, what shall you do?” I have attempted to illustrate how a young man in his circumstances would likely not benefit the most from responses that equate critical race pedagogy and pedagogy of hope as separate entities. The narrative evidence above suggests his situation breathes race and class struggle, but the oxygen to sustain the struggle emerges from the winds of hope (Freire). Although these pedagogical actions are not named explicitly in the Schultz (2007) article, there is an underlying current of both strategies. Moreover, a synthesis of critical race pedagogy and pedagogy of hope offers alternatives with promising possibilities for me to begin drafting an active response to the young man’s inquiry.

For me, publishing a rejoinder is gratifying, but the struggles for an equal opportunity to learn as illustrated by youth from Byrd Elementary School’s Room 405, inspires and challenges me to work toward critical race pedagogy of hope, where hope is transformative action that must transcend the act of publication, which pales in comparison. “What will I do to change their plight and plights like theirs?” “What will you do?” The young Black male’s brilliant inquiry speaks to the same frustration of Australian aboriginal artist, Lilla Watson, who contended at a 1985 UN conference on women’s rights, “If you have come to help me, I don’t need your help, but if you have come because you now find your liberation tied to mine then, come, let us work together.” Come, let us work together to follow the example of the Byrd Elementary School youth who dared to name and struggle in an oppressive situation while contemplating and engaging the action of hope.

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