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Critical and discursive teaching in psychology

Debra Harkins¹ and Yvonne Wells²

Abstract. American youth are more adept at multi-tasking and multi-processing the fast-paced media and technology information than prior generations (Glasl, 1999; Prensky, 2001). During this new wave of “post-modernism,” youth can interact globally with a far more culturally diverse yet interdependent society. Questioning, risk-taking, conflict resolution, and continuous innovation are the systems-level skills required to live and prosper. These skills should be integrated with more “modernist” skills, such as learning the truths of one’s field as the teachers of that field present them. This paper presents an example of how teaching about conflict can be used to help students critically examine the massive amount of information available to them, and understand the socially, historically, and politically situated nature of truth. Implications of standardization, critical discourse, and discursive teaching that bring real life problems and conflicts into the education process are discussed.

I.

What classroom teachers can and must do is to work in their respective roles to develop pedagogical theories and methods that link self-reflection and understanding with a commitment to change the nature of the larger society (Giroux, 1997, p. 28).

Currently, researchers, clinicians, and teachers of psychology are enamored with empiricism and experimental methodology as they search for validated approaches that will yield “truths” for the field (Tolman, 1992). Questioning this zeal for and acceptance of empiricism as truth seems to be in order. If we live in a post-modern era that differs fundamentally from the industrial age, then we must question the unquestioning acceptance of empiricism as truth. Teaching students in this new era requires pedagogy that is more post-modern and skills that focus on perspective taking, conflict resolution, and questioning.

Post-modernism as it will be used in this paper was described by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) in his classic essay, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge*. Lyotard described post-modernism as the cultural shift in knowledge occurring in a post-industrial age—most clearly recognized as a deep questioning of the legitimacy of the grand theories of the enlightenment and modern age. This period of post-modernism is marked by deep questioning, risk-taking, confronting conflict, and engaging in continuous innovation. When this classical definition of post-modernism is combined with post-modern realities, new approaches to teaching and learning are needed. The authors explore one case example of how students became involved in a post-modern approach that included learning through

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questioning, conflict, and uncertainty.

Glasl (1999) refers to the common conflicts today as related to our ever increasing pace in society and the multiple and varied cultures, perspectives, and viewpoints that have become increasingly intertwined. We will share our understanding of relevant definitions and dichotomies between teaching based on a presentation of facts previously taken as canonical and indicative of final truths and teaching grounded in respect for process, continual critique and discourse. Standardization, critical discourse, discursive teaching, and processes that bring real-life problems and conflicts into central roles in the education process will be defined and discussed as a case is made for more post-modern classroom pedagogy. We consider modernism to be the collection of perspectives held by those who defined, described, and classified the important areas with which psychology, philosophy, education, the arts, and the sciences should be concerned. For the American psychologist, names such as Charles Darwin, William James, and James Cattell might ring modernist bells as these “functionalists” attempted to define a uniquely useful, pragmatic, and quantifiable field of psychology (Lawson, Graham, & Baker, 2007).

We begin with the definition of “standardization” as one aspect of a modernist agenda in teaching. While standardization has a place in educational processes, a focus on standards and measures as the central component to educating students obstructs fruitful discourse, critical thinking, and teaching that connect modernist teachers with their more post-modern students. An attempt is herein made to illustrate the value of supplementing standardization in the classroom with fruitful methods of teaching the psychological principles of conflict resolution. We employed a case study method where students directly participated in an immediate and relevant conflict that they initially believed would be resolved by the teacher based on truth or (in this case) one “correct” solution.

Standardization

According to many educational critics the vast majority of primary and secondary school systems in the United States are stuck in machine-age industrial models of teaching, learning, and functioning (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2007; Senge, 1990; Senge, et al., 2000). This way of schooling is described by Freire (2000; 2005) as “banking education,” where knowledge is transmitted to students rather than engaged critically. This way of teaching was very effective in the early days of industrialization when students needed minimal skills to work in a mill, plant, or an assembly line. In 1924, Durkheim discussed the appropriateness of simple traditions in societies prior to the 19th century that provided people with the knowledge and moral instruction they would need to live functional, stable lives. Even in the 1920s it was predicted that increasing growth of freedom and complexity in human lives would one day change society (Durkheim, 1924).

Durkheim’s discussion is relevant to us as we consider that the information historically taught was delivered as truth and that this methodology was adequate to prepare people for work and life. Today there are still jobs for which such teaching would be sufficient. However, for those who want to participate in a more complex, system-focused, and globally-oriented society, a post-modern pedagogy becomes essential.

Despite this, standardization is becoming more valued as educators lament differences between the haves and have-nots in American school systems. Standardization as theory is manifested through high stakes testing to establish a base-line of what American students in elementary to secondary schools actually know and don’t know (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). There is a sense among educators that there is not much time for critical analysis of how teaching and learning should be done, and there is not much time available for including different perspectives on how it could be done. Similarly, a brief perusal of the

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National Institute for Mental Health website (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>) reveals a primary focus is on brain and behavior where the vast majority of grants accepted are those that focus on pathological disorders defined from a medical framework.

In contrast to teaching standardized facts and assessing standardized knowledge, critical pedagogy incorporates non-Western, indigenous, and oppressed voices and questions the empirical focus of the field of psychology. This discursive form of education is needed to solve the globally complex problems of today (Lawson, Graham, & Baker, 2007). Critical, discursive pedagogy includes awareness that knowledge is not only socially constructed but also is politically and historically situated (Foucault, 2002). Enabling students to understand how science, like all information, is steeped in cultural, economic, and political history that privileges some voices and some kinds of knowledge over others is critical to ensuring that oppression is not hidden under the guise of “universal truths.”

Critique and Discourse

Augustinos, Walker, and Donaghue (2006) describe discursive, critical, and questioning social psychology as one area of the heavily experimental field that should not be forgotten as psychology attempts to expand itself to have more global relevance. Discursive language is language that is heard and valued. It is not neutral and its meaning shifts with the context and the audience. Acknowledging the tacit rules within discursive, critical discourse reveals the underlying authority and oppression within science and education (Bruner, 1987; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2007). In psychological research discourse between quantitative and qualitative methods should exist, but modernist teaching and learning values quantitative over qualitative methods. Logical and linear presentations of information are valued over narrative forms, and lately the very notion of “evidence” in psychology has been hijacked such that “evidence-based” treatment is described as if it were only derived from standardized measurement of physiological phenomena and not also from subjective experience. Within narrative formats, linear descriptions of events are significantly valued over poetic forms of expression. These trends cannot help but influence the very materials taken to be relevant to the field of psychology, as well as its associated styles of teaching.

As educational critics, Freire (2005), and more recently Kincheloe (2007) and Giroux (2005), point out, the majority of education of students and teachers is simply training on accepting the facts, truths, and standards that result from contemporary socio-political dynamics. Critical pedagogy attempts to teach students to question the hidden assumptions of universality and objectivity as well as the class, gender, racial, and cultural biases present in the mainstream educational pedagogy. The main goal of critical pedagogy is to expose the illusion of educational neutrality present in most schooling. Educational neutrality is akin to cultural universality in the field of psychology. For instance, universalists who study cultural psychology try to describe universal characteristics that would be most highly valued in any culture, and to measure and judge all cultures according to such principles (Shiraeve & Levy, 2004; Stigler, 1990). On the other hand, cultural relativists deeply examine cultural reality from within the culture of the other, which requires depth, narrative understanding, questioning, and a sense of “not really knowing” (Shiraeve & Levy, 2004; Gurevitch, 1989).

Students in the course *Voices in Conflict*, taught by the first author, a professor of psychology at a small New England college, were given the opportunity to struggle with a personally relevant task, even as they were given many facts and rudimentary modernist truths deemed appropriate for freshmen learning at a college level. This method attempted to revive a spirit of inquiry and engage students in a process of critical discourse.

One exercise given to students in this course was the task of grading each other on weekly quizzes. Students could either accept their grade as given or negotiate for a new grade. The aim

of this exercise was to uncover the subjective nature of truth and the difficulties inherent in deciding whose truth matters. Students were thus involved in a critical approach to a real conflict laden with numerous cultural differences. The various struggles students experienced and expressed as they tried to determine the “answers” to a series of open-ended questions sparked interesting discussion between the two authors. In this paper, the phenomenological experiences of the instructor and her students are first described in narrative discourse to connect the reader directly with a critical teaching process. Later, we discuss how these critical skills can be integrated with standard teaching techniques.

Teaching Critically

As Anyon (1978) stated in *Elementary Social Studies Textbooks and Legitimizing Knowledge*, the knowledge that is valued is the knowledge that tends to provide justification and rationalization of the current institutional systems of conduct and beliefs. She found that these texts avoided descriptions of the historical social conflict and violence throughout United States history. Instead, a picture is painted of a country that has experienced overarching social harmony and agreement regarding the dominant social arrangements. This view of our social history veils the unquestioned assumption that dissent and conflict is negative (Brown, 1981; Giroux, 1997).

Unfortunately, American public school students are distracted by conflict and violence in school, neighborhoods, and on public transportation. The American (post-modern) college classroom may be one of the few settings in which to explore ways to engage in non-violent conflict. Many students in this case study were from economically, socially, and racially diverse backgrounds. The classroom may offer them the opportunity to develop conflict resolution skills that they might not be able to learn in their more conflict-ridden communities. Can conflict and difference be brought into university classrooms with positive results?

II.

Method

Voices in Conflict is one of a number of freshmen seminars required by all undergraduates and designed by faculty members across all disciplines at a northeastern university in Massachusetts. Nineteen (15 females) students selected this seminar after reading descriptions of 40 possible seminars during their freshmen orientation week. The teacher of this course is a psychology professor with research and teaching interests in narratives and conflict resolution. The course description included the following: “We will examine narratives of conflict within and across age, gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, history, and ethnicity. We will examine the impact of unresolved conflict and the opportunities for growth when the stories of disagreement are heard.” One requirement for this course was weekly quizzes on selected reading material regarding narratives and conflicts (e.g., Kellet & Dalton, 2001). Students commented on the readings in weekly online chats with fellow students and the professor. The professor gave weekly suggestions as to what would be the best topics to discuss on-line. Students were informed that the questions did not have to be answered and that they could choose to discuss anything that came up in readings, class, or discussion. For example, the week when students began discussing conflict on-line, the first author put up the following questions:

Questions you may choose to explore for your journal reflections (Kellet & Dalton, 2001, p. 47): In what ways do your own conflict stories mystify as well as clarify your experiences of the social, cultural, and relational worlds represented by the stories? What can you do about this tendency toward ambiguity? In what ways do your stories make your experiences and their contexts more explicit and open to interpretation and the scrutiny of questions? Is there a poem or song

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particularly important to you during times of conflict? If so, why does that narrative capture the experience of conflict for you?

One student described the process by which quizzes were graded to another in a chat:

Since the beginning of the semester our class has been set up so the students receive first hand experiences on how to deal with conflict. Almost every class we start off by taking a small brief quiz, usually on the reading we had done the night before. We are given ten minutes to take the quiz. After that, we give your quizzes to another student in the room and they are given ten minutes to grade the quiz. We are given no instruction on how to grade the quiz. If you do not agree with the grade that you have received, you have a chance to sit in front of the class and discuss your grade with the person that graded your paper.

III.

Results

For the first two quizzes, some students negotiated their grade with the graders. These initial negotiations took five to 10 minutes on average and were quickly resolved. In all cases, students explained their answer to the grader and the grader agreed to change the grade. During the next week, one student requested to negotiate her grade with the graders. The three students involved, the one requesting the grade change (a Hispanic female) and the two graders (one Caucasian male and one Palestinian female), came to the front of the class to discuss one quiz answer regarding the use of metaphors in describing a conflict. The question was, "Give an example of a life metaphor." The material from the readings of Kellet & Dalton (2001) had two pages on life metaphors (i.e., life as the story of an adventurous journey, life as a learning process, life as a cycle of give and take, life as a conspiracy, and life as a game). It should be noted, and as several students pointed out during this process, there was no mention of Kellet and Dalton in this question whereas some of the other questions on the quiz did include the wording "...according to Kellet and Dalton."

The discussion as to what was the correct answer and whether or not the student requesting the grade change was right in asking for it was still unresolved after 45 minutes. Many students in the class became frustrated that this issue was taking so long to resolve. The reader will recall that typically the student requesting a grade change simply engaged in negotiation, stated the expected grade, and got it changed. This conflict arose when the correct answer could not be determined and the student who made the case for the grade change could not clarify her position. Another student (Caucasian female) asked if she could try to negotiate a solution to this conflict. After 20 minutes with the fourth student trying to serve as mediator, there still was no resolution. Much to the students' surprise, the class ended that day with no resolution. That no correct answer was ultimately given by the professor to the students became suddenly problematic for them.

On-line Chats about the Quiz Conflict

Of the 19 students in the class, six chose to discuss the quiz conflict within two days of the class discussion, even though the suggested ideas for on-line reflections that week did not include mention of the quiz conflict. Students were given permission to discuss any issue related to conflicts in their on-line entries. Their spontaneous entries for this conflict suggest this was an important issue for many of the students in the course. The following is the text of students' on-line chats regarding the quiz conflict.

Week three. Student reflections during week three included recognition that dealing with conflicts is frustrating and sometimes irresolvable as indicated by the following student:

When Jane went up with the other two students who were involved in her graded paper, I believe that the situation was blown out of proportion. After about thirty minutes of conflict and arguing, the conflict was not resolved. In my opinion, I believe that the issue should have been dealt with quite easily. A mediator was even brought into the situation, which I thought did a very good job, but the conflict could not be dealt with. In situations such as these, when a mediator still cannot resolve the situation, what else is there to do?

Although the issue was small (several students described it as silly)—arguing for five points on a quiz worth less than two percent of the total grade—it was important as big conflicts can and do result from seemingly small issues. This idea was expressed by the following student:

At first I thought it was silly, only because the conflicts did not appear to be a big deal. Even the smallest matter though can mean the most....I see now why it is important to get out how you're feeling and why it is important to you. Whether it is a big issue or just a small one worth 5 points.

Another student echoed:

.... People think and feel differently about the same issue—so I think that is a big factor in conflicts. If two people are in conflict, one may not even know because they do not feel the issue is a big deal to them. Though the other person may be stressed over that issue.

The process gave needed practice for the resolution of real conflicts that will occur in the real world as this student pointed out: “I think that this really will help us practice for the real world when real conflicts come about to deal with them then.”

The on-line chat revealed that students thought letting issues slide and not discussing them is detrimental (or in this case, not standing up for your grades, opinions, or beliefs). For example, one student who observed the conflict wrote:

I am the type of person that let things go easily, also known as a “push over” so seeing this really made me quickly jump to, “I have no problem with my quiz,” even if I really did have a problem with the grade I received. Having this as an option now....we are allowed to express our feelings, is a great thing.” At first, I noticed how passive certain classmates are and how vulnerable they can be in front of a group of people. And when you really get down to it, what reason is there to be so nervous? Is the person going to not like me because I am disagreeing with the grade? What is the class going to think? Am I doing this wrong? We are in class to learn, for that matter, we're in life to learn. When you get down to it, what is most important is every person's beliefs and what one feels is right. I would just like to say to my fellow students, don't ever be afraid to try something because you might make a mistake. Just learn from your mistakes, and oh yes...do the readings or you'll do bad on the pop quizzes!

Analysis of student conversations reminded us, from a social psychological perspective, that students view conflict negatively and are more comfortable avoiding it, even in a course where confronting conflict is a part of the assignment. As one student wrote, “...Another thing is that it, for the most part was just a small problem, but it makes us realize how much we will do to avoid any conflict whatsoever.”

Week four. By the fourth week students were still discussing this conflict, but their on-line discussion changed to the non-verbal and deeper conceptual issues of fairness, culture, and perspective-taking. Note the professor's on-line questions were: “What metaphor or image best describes how you view life in general? How does your everyday behavior and communication

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with others reflect this metaphor?” One male student wrote that he saw himself as having been pushed out of the conversation in the classroom where he had physically stood to the side as the grader and the gradee confronted their conflict over the quiz. He wrote: “...I also thought it was really funny how you two boxed me out immediately when we just had a conversation the class before on body language.”

Fairness in applying standards became a very complex issue once students were empowered to decide what was fair with the help of the teacher. Students struggled with how to satisfy the request for a grade change on the part of the gradee but give her only the points she “deserved.” One of the female graders of this conflict wrote: “I thought that Chris and I were trying to help her get higher grades but also wanted to be fair, we didn’t give her points that she didn’t deserve, so I think that we dealt with the situation in a good way.”

The authors came to recognize that the conflict revolved around a cultural difference in meaning of a particular term presented in the quiz. Students were struggling to decide who had the ultimate authority on the meaning of the term—the teacher, Americans, the textbook, or the student. As one student who watched the conflict wrote:

The problem this one group was in a conflict and then the problem started to become cultural. It was a problem was one saying means something else in Spanish but in English it had a different meaning. When we take a test in our class I believe that you shouldn’t be able to say that in your culture the answer would be correct because if you were in English class the teacher would disagree and say this may be true in your culture but our academics are based on the English writing. This is why I believe that something may be different in your culture but if the teacher isn’t going to be able to recognize this difference right away then the answer still should be wrong. In other words just think if the peers in class didn’t grade the papers and the teacher did would you tell the teacher that this answer was correct because of your culture or would you agree with her grade she gave you? This is how I believe that this conflict should be resolved or handled. If a different conflict came up in society today that had culture as a problem I believe that both parts of the argument need to realize that there are lots of different cultures in the world and not one is better than the other nor one is right and one is wrong. So I believe that if a conflict does come up that has cultural difference to it you need to realize that that person was raised and believes there right because there different then you. Therefore I believe that you need to compromise when it comes to a conflict that has to do with culture. This is a problem that is happening around our world today and it’s a problem that I believe will never be resolved because there are just so many different cultures around the world today!

Students acknowledged that they initially did not consider the issue from the gradee’s perspective. One student, reconsidering her initial response, wrote: “Before when I commented on the situation in class, I feel as if I wasn’t looking hard enough into Jane’s perspective and more from the view of an audience member. I wish I had thought more about Jane’s side.” In this case, this student is responding to another student who indicated that he felt bad for Jane:

I feel bad that Jane was singled out and it was over her confusion. It is never fun to be confused in an academic setting and I feel like she was not being helped....I hope that as the year progresses our knowledge will progress and we will be able to accommodate each students personal needs.

In this way students began to help each other shift perspectives.

Week five. By the fifth week, discussion of this conflict was still occurring both on-line and within the classroom. Students were asked to construct a story regarding the conflict that they could then compare to other students' interpretations of this event. Students provided extensive narratives on the complexities of this and other conflicts. These included the recognition that resolving conflicts is a lengthy process and that positions tend to harden and become fixed. As one student wrote:

The problem did take a long time for one issue that could have been easily resolved. In everyday issues though people don't just give in to what they believe is right, even though it makes a situation more easy to handle, the conflict really would not have been fixed if everyone just let go of the issue for their own convenience, that's why it took so much time just to work out what the problem really was.

Most conflicts have multiple levels to them and often include underlying issues of race, gender, age, politics, and religion. These unspoken, implicit issues often get mixed into more surface-level issues that can become difficult if not impossible to resolve. Consider the following student's on-line post:

From our class conflict, we saw problems arise from other problems. What started small escalated to something more complex than what we began with. The reason being because people have different views on different topics, and interpret things differently. I think some factors that can be involved with this includes race, gender, age, political and religious views. All these basic everyday traits can mash together in conflicts as we saw in our class.

Many students recognized that ultimately conflicts framed in terms of right or wrong only lead to battles where someone will win and someone will lose. Further, students identified this phenomenon as a common problem in situations of conflict. Another wrote:

We can't judge who was write in that particular situation because people's opinions cannot be labeled as right or wrong. Everyone tried to be fair but we saw that no one was giving in, it was more of a competitive conflict approach because everyone attempted to voice their opinions, and yet still be fair while not giving into one another. This is probably a common problem that people run into when they try to fix the situation they are in.

Several students continued to focus on the issue of fairness, arguing that they memorized the metaphors in the book and that should count for a lot. Consequently, some students denied that culture was connected to the conflict. For example, one student wrote:

Regarding Jane's conflict from class...I do not even recall if she did get the points or not, but I believe that it is not fair to everyone else in the class who did remember every metaphor and got them correct. Like myself, I studied and wrote down the correct metaphors from the text.

Other students began to explore the relationship between culture and fairness. For example, one student wrote:

When discussing the conflict, the issue of culture came into play. How much culture is actually involved, in the way you handle problems or certain situations? This question clearly came answered in our last class. Apparently culture has a lot to do with the way you handle a problem, as well as the way you view a question on a test. In my opinion, the only way to truly understand why Jane wrote the answers that she did on her quiz, is too fully understand her culture and beliefs. But is this even possible? Would you have to listen and understand everyone's

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culture in the class? In order to be truly fair, yes you would have to. Everyone in this world has culture and different points of views. So how can you possibly deal with a conflict when a strong thing such as culture is brought into play?

Many students in the course had not been exposed to diversity in their home communities and may have lacked understanding of how diversity issues can impact conflicts. Students began to acknowledge to each other that they needed to listen better. One student wrote:

Although it didn't occur during all our conflicts....seeing we have a very diverse class, things such as race, ethnicity, and social class separate us into several groups. Therefore, we are not all going to see eye to eye on every conflict in the class, in fact it is probably impossible. But for a lot of us who come from own little "bubbles" in society, this is a great experience. We get to see firsthand how college students with different backgrounds, history, and personality play a huge role in how the situation is dealt with.

The minority students began to voice how frustrated they were that people did not try to understand them, how it felt to be a minority when people began to talk about their countries and cultures, and how the resultant feeling was one of being discriminated against rather than welcomed. As a student from the same culture as the gradee noted: "I agree with Jane, since me and her... we are from the Spanish culture it might be hard for people to understand us. Jane and myself are the only Spanish minorities in the class I understand how she felt." And Jane wrote for the first time two weeks after the initial conflict:

Since I was involved in all of this, I did not know that I was going to take the whole class. I honestly thought that it was going to be over in twenty minutes or less. ...Like last conflict that I had I did not agree what the grade they gave, but accepted the grade. But this time I was not going to give in easily because it is my grade and I know that I was studying put the effort into it. I know it may sound like some people said "stubborn", but they do not know how hard it is for me to explain something. They just judge of what they see but never even bother thinking or putting the shoes of that person. To see what is wrong or why they act the way they do? I know it is very difficult, even in the book we are reading of how to deal with conflict say remember they are not the same as you and everyone comes from different background. Imagine being the minority group in a place how would you feel if they started talking about your country or culture? Would you feel discriminated or not welcomed?

Week six. By the sixth and final week of this activity, the original conflict still had not been resolved. Students formed themselves into two groups -- those who thought the instructor should do the final grading and those who thought they should continue to grade the quizzes and try to resolve this conflict. Students spent a very passionate class period trying to convince each other of their positions. At the end of the class, there was no resolution reached and the first author of this paper announced that she would do the final grading on this quiz. On-line questions from the instructor included: Practice writing a narrative about the resolution I imposed on the "quiz conflict." Practice writing a narrative about the evolving "quiz conflict," my imposed resolution and/or class dialogue.

Many students wrote online posts about this experience:

Our class is based on this diverse outspoken situation where we get hands on experience with dealing with conflict. We all agreed on this concept that gaining these experiences was beneficial and valued. Though should the professor interfere or not. Regardless of this simple question the class had slight different

opinions on the situation. An hour and fifteen minutes passed and still no resolution.

Another student wrote about the morality of the issue:

As student it is hard to take points away from a peer, especially if it isn't taking away from your own grade. Are we afraid to tell a peer that they don't deserve a point just to avoid a conflict? This question also allows the student to see if we will follow what we think is morally right and wrong.

IV.

Discussion

From a modernist perspective, conflict task presented above is unfair and distracted from the real task of learning at hand. Many students were frustrated and only a few students understood the relevance of exploring the issue deeply from the beginning. These students wrote in their on-line posts to other students that the process of figuring this out was more important than the actual outcome. Even though the major goal of the course was to teach about conflicts, many students thought that the teacher should be telling students the answer and grading them on whether or not they had memorized it.

The first author of this paper chose to end the exercise at the end of the sixth week when students were unable to resolve the conflict themselves. Although it would have been preferred to continue until students reached a decision, it became clear that at least half of the students were frustrated at their own inability to reach a decision. We agree with Kegan (1994) that facilitating learning and development requires awareness of how much one should support and challenge another. This exercise provided the teacher with invaluable information about where students were in the process of understanding the role of culture in resolving conflicts (one of the main goals of the course) and about knowing what type of additional support and challenge was needed to ensure that each student succeeded in meeting the course objectives.

Additionally, the exercise demonstrated how one could use a standardization tool (quiz) to teach students questioning, diversity, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution. This activity could be generalized across many other standardized didactic tools (homework, exercises, and exams). In the end, the first author did grade the quiz and gave the points to Jane. In addition, she reviewed all student quizzes to determine what they were learning and what still needed to be reviewed.

This activity provided the best of both teaching worlds—the learning of more traditional academic skills as well as more process oriented skills. As this was a freshmen seminar course offered in lieu of an English course it was important for students to learn and practice reading and writing skills. The on-line chat room provided an excellent forum for students to practice these skills. For example, students were required to respond to the instructor's on-line questions each week with a 300 to 400-word response and to provide a minimum 100-word response to at least one other student weekly. This activity required students to write more publicly, to read other students' ideas, and to provide written reactions. Often students would bring some of the discussion from the on-line chat board into the classroom for further discussion, creating deep integrations between their oral and written ideas. And they wrote passionately, as the issues were personal and in real time for them.

The task was risky, since students expected someone with authority to provide a final grade based on one quick answer. Yet the process was more relevant to the real world they will have to negotiate when they leave the college classroom. In the above case, students recognized the value in addressing the deeper issues of fairness, perspective-taking, and social justice through an activity in which they actively chose to participate. Students learned that they must stand up

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for their rights and listen to other voices on the issue of conflict. Bringing this critical inquiry into the classroom rather than suppressing it provided students with the skills they need to negotiate with others different from themselves. It also provided students with the opportunity to affirm their own histories through social practices, language, and content that are respectful of their own cultural experiences. Once student voices are valued as part of the pedagogy of teaching, it becomes possible for those who have been voiceless to learn the knowledge and skills to critically analyze the role society is playing in shaping and inhibiting their dreams and goals. In this way, teachers provide the resources needed for students to become active participants in shaping their futures.

The issue of authority cannot be overemphasized as it is the central concern of the post-modern angst and was one of the major aims of the exercise for the teacher of this activity. Educators need to place this question as the primary terrain of struggle for students who must critically examine who has authority under what conditions, whose voice is valued, and whose voice is not, revealing both the possibilities and interests of the students. Students need to become more aware that the struggle for voice is really a struggle for power and meaning in society. Who is heard? Who will be heard? Who will be silenced? These are the big questions that students will grapple with in the 21st century.

We agree with Paulo Freire (2005) that teachers must move beyond the slavery of mechanistic, positivist “nurturing mothers” to those who teach by critically questioning the educational pedagogy of the dominant culture. For us this means practicing pedagogy in which students learn not only how to read and write and speak but also to engage in the discourse of democracy, social justice, and empowerment. It means practicing a pedagogy that rejects authoritarian approaches that would promote silencing and oppression. It means engaging in pedagogy that questions a psychology steeped in positivistic frameworks explaining behavior under the guise of objectivity.

We must be sure that in psychology’s zeal to help others that we do not maintain institutional arrangements that benefit oppressors and cause suffering to the oppressed. Educational practices must be rooted in a pedagogy that acknowledges subjectivity, power relations, constructivism, and multiculturalism. In this way psychology can move from outdated models of explaining behavior to a more empowering approach that improves the lives of all.

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