

*Towards a Liberation Classroom: The Power of
Difficult Discussions and Participatory Practices
in a Psychology Course*

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“Everytime you see me...”

- Murder of Eric Garner – July 17, 2014
- November 24, 2014 – Failure to indict Ofc. Darren Wilson.
- December 3, 2014 – Failure to indict Ofc. Daniel Pantaleo
- Personal motivation – Interfaith minister/Professor split





17

VIA HUGUENES
VIA DRUMOND



I believe that
UNARMED TRUTH
&
UNCONDITIONAL
LOVE
WILL HAVE THE FINAL WORD
- MLK

STOP &
FRISK
WALL STREET

THIS STOPS
TODAY
- AMERICA'S M...

See you Do you
See What's
happening?
MURDERERS
are killing
your mothers
#SOS
#SOS
#SOS

The biggest
weapon is to
stay peaceful

Now we fight
the



RESPECT
FOR ALL
PEOPLE
& NATIONS

CLASH WITH
MASTER

RESPECT
FOR ALL
PEOPLE
& NATIONS

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Spring Semester 2015

- Taught two sections of PSY 100
- Psychology & social sciences easy venues for integration of current events.
- Easy also to ignore current events.
- Do we have a moral imperative to discuss important issues? (foundational courses vs. upper level courses)
- What are some obstacles to these discussions?
- Should we “allow” students to challenge dominant ideologies?

Elements of a Liberation Psychology

- From Liberation Theology which honors a God of life.. Promotion of life; searches for historical conditions which give life to people and understands the conditions of suffering.
- Practice has primacy over theory; struggling with separateness of the theory generating process from the lived experience; action more important than “scientific” affirmations. What one does is more important than what one says.
- Look for that which is “divine” – “life-giving” among the poor and marginalized.
- “Truth” emerges from those living it not from high above.

The awakening of a critical consciousness

- Freire's notion of *concientización*
- Martín-Baró: “joins the psychological dimension of personal consciousness with its social and political dimension, and makes manifest the historical dialectic between knowing and doing, between individual growth and community organization, between personal liberation and social transformation” (p. 18)
- As it relates to Latin America – more than people just learning to read and write but to be able to read about themselves and write their own history
- Dominant culture gets to do this all the time!

Three aspects of the process of *concientización*

- 1.) The human being is transformed through changing his or her reality. “It follows that this has to do with a dialectical process, an active process that cannot be taught by imposition but only through dialogue”.
- 2.) Through gradual decoding of their world, people grasp the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization.
- 3.) People’s new knowledge of their surrounding reality, carries them to a new understanding of themselves and of their social identity.

Example from PSY 100

- We were learning about:
 - Zimbardo's Prison Study (deindividuation; psychological distance)
 - Milgram's Obedience to Authority Study (obedience; the banality of evil)
- They got to apply it to real life with this question:

Question of the day:

- We have discussed the theories of conformity, deindividuation and obedience to authority.
- Use one of these theories to explain how this may lead police to use excessive force against civilians like in the Eric Garner case.
- Explain one way that we may counteract this effect.

Integrating liberation into classroom practices

- See the students and what is produced in class as part of building a “social mirror”.
- Focus on *Wholeness* – in everything you do in the classroom:
 - attempt to contextualize content
 - determine how topics connect to each other
 - identify the historical and structural roots
 - contextualization makes learning holistic
 - don't ignore the elephant in the room

Integrating liberation into classroom practices

- Focus on *Dialectics*:
 - Encourage student to join in discussion of meanings and findings. (we learn in dialogue)
 - Allow students to reflect and debate on the ways in which content represents and does not represent their reality. (value their voice)
 - Accurate representation of their lived experience.
 - Aligned with dominant socio-political discourse.
 - Respect student's opinions and balance tendency towards "scientism" (balance with resistance to evidence)

Liberation Classroom *Cheat Sheet*

- Learn all students names and humanize your practices.
- Acknowledge for yourself the diversity of needs in the classroom.
- Imagine your topics to be *of the* people not *about* people.
- Allow for co-creative and participatory moments – less resistance when they think other students thinking this as well. (Technology can help)
- Remind them of their voice; validate that you have heard them; legitimize their participation (I included their words in my powerpoint)