EHRD 685 Directed Studies – Spring 2022

Personal Reflection Journal

Week 1

Podcast: Nothing Never Happens- Stephen D. Brookfield on being a Critically Reflective Teacher: Part 1

It’s very “white privilege” to have a professor ask you to call them by their first name. He gives reference to the tortured mind for those who as constantly reflective all the time. He begins by talking about his parents and the power of norming and origin stories. Run classrooms as democratically as possible--- the power of the grade makes it significantly different than community organizing which is where I have spent more of my time. Authoritative not authoritarian (Freirean). Creating Brave Spaces of learning.

“It is hard to be self-critical on your own.” He stresses the need of community and colleagues to help you see new perspectives… How does that work in this increased remote world? “The death of teaching is when you go on automatic pilot.”

Reading the introduction and specifically Chapter 1 of Women’s ways of Knowing was riveting. Though the research setting is US based, I was able to see many faces and recall experiences that could fit into the research findings they are sharing from my years of firsthand work in Morocco. The way the “silence” is represented in the lives of women and the extreme powerlessness that it yields is painful to read. In the book many of the women who fall into this category or stage of knowing come from an abusive isolated origin, while that is not the case for all of the women of north Africa there is a significant portion of them who likely would be classified in this stage. I found myself wondering how actual linguistic divide would increase this “silence.” For many Moroccan women who are not literate are dependent on their husbands, or even children to help them navigate the simplest of administrative tasks. Additionally, the idea of language and words are weaponized, connected to an idea of power being exerted over you through gossip etc and not at all connected to the idea of empowerment and gaining a voice. The lack of language and exposure to the idea of dialogue and the ways that develops one’s awareness of self can be seen as harsh boundaries for many women that I have worked with and the population that I continue to work among. For me, this chapter feels affirming in the sense that I have noticed these dynamics, but it also begs the question of how one engages others to see this word deficit as something that stirs up empathy and creativity and not reenforces the powerless silence through shame. I am thinking through my upcoming training of Moroccan women in leading health lessons and how I can intentionally teach, model, demonstrate a safe place for women to dialogue, discover themselves and their voice. The idea here would be the word ساكت “saaket” or صامت “Saamet”.

Additionally, the ideas of communal/social knowing and experiential knowing that the authors bring in from rural Russia feel very connected to the rural social landscape in Morocco as well as the urban communities that have maintained a primarily oral basis of interaction.

At the same time, my goals, and the goals of our education programs, are not for a Moroccan woman to feel and sound like an educated American with an enlightened sense of self. But I strongly agree with the idea that without the opportunity for dialogue (listening and sharing) there is a limited ability to reflect and grow allowing women the joyful awareness of making meaning & sharing meaning.

Week 2

Important takeaways from my readings this week come from reflective questions on the differing roles I have currently and have had historically. I appreciated Brookfield 4 eyes from which to view yourself and how applicable they are in other domains. For many years I have worked cross-culturally, and his “eyes” concept made me reckon with the how often (or not) I have though about how I am perceived from the perspective of my host culture. And not in a perfunctory way, but a deeper paused analysis. Reading his chapters made me curious to create a training on “becoming a critically reflective cross-cultural humanitarian worker,” and perhaps later on a “critically reflective halqa\* facilitator” Some of the other takeaways from the Brookfield reading was regarding the way people often practice their own oppression. This is a helpful way to articulate many actions and behaviors exhibited by Moroccan women. Regarding power present in the classroom, one aspect that helped me in creating a “community of learners” in my context was that though I came with the power of a white educated foreigner, I was also coming low be speaking their language and I needed their help linguistically and culturally to connect and build the learning. So, while I never pretended that we could operate “at-one-ness” as Brookfield mentions, I could with intentionality and humility create an environment of “all learning” without pretense. I would like to look through our literature and resources and see what assumptions about the community health circles I can see and write out my assumptions and then follow up by asking other colleagues about them.

\*Halqa is the name of the community health education program

Week 3

Reading in WWK moved into subjective knowledge. This type of knowing initially seemed absent in my experience of awareness among the population I work among in North Africa. After deeper reflection and reading I think some of the aspects could be found, but they are far more subtle do to the external social pressures and a far stronger cultural value for community and belonging. So while I think this stage of knowing does take shape in north African women, I believe it looks far different and would likely feel far lonelier. Woman that I have known who have left their communities or families have deeply battled isolation in ways that western individualists would find difficult to grasp. For many of the women in our groups becoming a received knower is a significant achievement. The language I found in the book describing the truth associated and power given to the authority is reinforced by the cultures high power distance. In many situations no one had yet cared to take the time to offer a lesson to these women, so they hardly noticed the lack of voice. Integrating some of the power dynamics that Brookfield brings in allows me to see that at times that the role of the outsider can successfully disturb the situation enough to cause people to notice what they had not seen. There are other obstacles that the foreigners’ presence exposes, but one benefit can be bringing attention where there previously had not nothing. One key aspect related to hegemony is the role of women within the interpretation of Islam that is dominate in these communities. Women in these communities are often working against themselves as the contribute and affirm ideologies that assume that are less intelligent, less capable, and less valuable than their male counterparts. Being an outsider of the system, it is not a hegemony that I can address directly, but I can be a part of crafting experiences that tell a different story for these women. Our local partners can play a more direct role in addressing this damaging interpretation of women.

Week 4

My thoughts in the readings are taking two tracks, maybe 3… (1) my personal growth in development as a teacher and individual, (2) my perspective on training individually minded western foreigners working among North Africans, and (3) my perspective on North African women, their journey as learners and facilitators.
On a personal level I am enjoying analyzing my growth through stages of knowing and where my path diverges or aligns with the findings from the WWK study. Two aspects that influence divergence are my formative time and training spent in a collectivist society, and two my spiritual journey that links me to something beyond self as core and essential.
(2) I have grown in vocabulary for understanding newer volunteers who cannot seem to handle the ambiguity of working overseas as well as their grasping for external authorities
(3) my perspective on average Moroccan women learners and trainers has some common expressions but the grounding framework of a collectivist versus individualistic society has significant ramifications for the development of voice. Here, you do not develop your voice in isolation. Your voice is fostered (or not) within the group. There are more and more women “making it in a man’s world “ but that is even more extreme than in western contexts. The vast majority of women are still marginal educated. My peers mostly have a 3rd-5th grade equivalent. They do not struggle with getting stuck at procedural knowing.

Week 5

I am continuing to enjoy the further reading the WWK, and have begun to consider ways that women from a more collective society gain their voice alongside one another. Thus increasing the need and importance of modeling a culturally appropriate voice and developing minds in groups. I see in WWK a particular drawing away and solitude that helps to refine and define voice in individually minded western knowers and I have experienced the needed safe environment of community affirmation that allows more eastern women to enter deeper levels of knowing.

I was particularly struck by the development of ideas and findings on page 160 as the authors are looking at family life and how voice is developed and shared. The not surprising reality of social class and economic life chances have a strong indicator on development of voice. The urban and rural poor tend to prioritize action orientation to the neglect of motivation or reflection. Which over time reduces the vocabulary of people’s lived experiences and limits their ability to share their stories and capture their narratives. In my current context of Marseille, France, a city of immigrants and a melting pot of many cultures, there are systemic problems associated with urban poor. This is exacerbated by the immigrant experience of loosing their identity (roots) as, “one generation no longer tells its stories to the next.” (p.160 WWK). This lack of narrative expands the linguistic deficit of vocabulary and voice needed to break the cycles of generational poverty and brokenness.

Chapters 6 & 7 from Brookfield’s CRT continued to give me ideas about how to utilize his posture of uncovering assumptions as a tool to enable us to be better teachers. I see some of the tools as ideas that can have direct application as I work with other colleagues in English who have professional degrees and experience with formal education. Other’s of his ideas I am enjoying reworking or reimagining through a oral preference or non-literate environment. Using a drawing exercise instead of one-minute paper is a possibility that can sidestep the literacy mountain and still enable valuable feedback. Likewise, the ease and use of audio recordings on modern cell phones could be used to gather learning audits. Brookfield mentions using social media because his students are comfortable with that… I think that is the critical lens to consider in the variety of groups I work with, I need to ask what tools that the students feel comfortable with.

I slightly altered Brookfield’s sentence starters from chap 7 CRT: page 120 to be used in trainings with my cross cultural colleagues.
Beginning sentence completion for CC workers:
- I know I’ve done good work when…
- I know my host people are understanding or learning when they…
- The quality I most admire in a CC colleague is when he or she …
- Cross cultural working is all about…
- If there is one piece of advice I’d give to someone starting a cc term it’s that…

These are the same sentences but altered slightly for the health education groups.
Beginning sentence completion for local facilitators or foreign advocates:
- I know I’ve done good work when…
- I know the women are understanding or learning when they…
- The quality I most admire in a teacher is when he or she …
- Halqa lessons are all about…
- If there is one piece of advice I’d give to someone starting a new halqa it’s that…

Critical Incident two questions on page 122 is a great coaching and leadership development tool.

Critical conversation protocol- I’ve seen this used in coaching, helping individuals see new perspectives as well as helping others build empathy

Week 6

Chapter 8 in CRT is about teaching in teams. In our work I often see the incredible value of team, as well as the work of team. I appreciated the simplicity of explanation that teammates do not downplay or deny a hard truth, they just tell a “different story”. I think different stories are necessary for our growth and development as a person and as a critically reflective anything. Deep teamwork which builds those trust bonds with others allows us to move from the dualistic/binary knowing into multiplicity and beyond as we strengthen our capacity to handle ambiguity. Working in the strong religious context of the Muslim world and often partnering with Western Christians means I have been able to see people move from the initial places of religious debate (binary knowing) to mutual faith pursuit without having to affirm or embrace someone else convictions we can move into a place of respect and trust even with disagreement.

The more I am reading in the CRT book the more I can see it’s interplay with WWK and the necessity to develop critical reflection as a way to move towards constructed knowing.

Week 7

I finished reading WWK. I enjoyed many insights and the frameworks of knowing the authors introduced and elaborated along the way. The final chapter on connected learning was of particular interest. The final paragraph summarizes the authors’ argument for how to help women develop their own voices. This notion of equipping and enabling women to develop their own voices is of critical importance in our work because often the development projects or initiatives are a short term, volunteer-based role and therefore to have any long-term impact of success the need of each participant internalizing and actualizing the learning in her own voice and way of the best assessment of reaching our objects. Though in North Africa the journey towards finding your own voice is significantly more communal than the stories shared in WWK, many principles can be applied and adjusted to achieve the same end. Aspects of connected learning are already established with our community health program as it is by design and intention a place of connection and safety. I was challenged to look more critically at subtle nuances in our stories that might feel more like a puzzle than a metaphor. I also was to more clearly emphasis in the written instructions in our first lesson the powerful role that these women are already playing in their families and communities. The introduction to the lessons begins by intentionally drawing out and generating awareness that the participants are already carrying the weight of supporting the family nutritionally, medically, emotionally, etc. I will rework this awareness to increase the message of what the women already know and how they are already meeting these weighty demands as well a clear path to how we will increase that knowing. The clarity, given in a culturally relevant way, will allow the scaffolding needed to raise expectation while pacifying uncertainty.

Chapters 9 & 10 of CRT cover learning from experience and learning from theory respectively. The clear and poignant examples of how and why to learn from experience I found very helpful. I agree that personal experience is significant formative force and Brookfield’s handlebars for how to intentional glean learning for a variety of circumstances seems like an incredibly profitable takeaway. Likewise, the powerful and practical why and how he lends to the learning from theory made me excited to excited to look for another title that will introduce some intellectual/ professional dissonance for me!

Week 8

This week’s reading in Brookfield’s CRT plus work related experiences with field teams has made me look more into tools and resources to uncover assumptions within teamwork, development, and cross-cultural contexts. Most of the scenarios and examples from that Brookfield that I have found so far are given in the learning setting. Though my initial research is promising that I will not have to create my own scenarios I am eager to get my hands on some. Perhaps there would be value to reach back into my personal work experience and craft a few assumption hunting scenarios.

Beyond that I have deeply appreciated the Brookfield’s chapter on negotiating the risks of critical reflection. It gives excellent practical advice for those of us entering this complex territory. It also spurred some compassion in me as I was able to see the many ways missteps are possible and the many reasons why colleagues might prefer to keep plodding on instead of evaluating practice more rigorously. His comments on “cultural suicide” could also be titled “cultural assassination” meaning if you press and push too hard in the organization you might find yourself squeezed out or eliminated.

https://elearningindustry.com/think-about-why-examining-assumptions-is-critical-to-intentional-practice

Week 9

I finished CRT by Brookfield this week. Significant takeaways in the final chapters were connected to his direct application in a broader leadership context. I added the leadership books he listed in the theory section “to read” list. I also resonated with his personal experiences of counterfire consultation, betrayal, and arbitrariness as abuses in leadership. In fact, this week we are currently coaching one of our teams through the breakdown of trust because of these abuses. As a result of this chapter, I have adapted aspects of the CIQ into our existing review process called Observing Progress. This is currently a process discussed as a work team and submitted by the team lead. I am suggesting that in addition to the group’s OP each team member also complete a modified CIQ that will be submitted with the OP. One of the challenges of administering CIQs in small work teams is the loss of anonymity. But I think a modified version that is reviewed by the supervisors has the possibility to catch misses a team might not notice as they are in the thick of the workday and day out with one another.

Significant takeaways from the entire book include (1) doing the self-work of naming and identifying my assumptions up front as a way of modeling and acknowledging before the learning communities I am connected to. (2) sprinkling my trainings and teaching with opportunities to wade into critical reflection for myself, my colleagues, and the learners around me. (3) being gracious to others as they deepen their journey into discovering and checking their assumptions. (4) increase my opportunities to partner with colleagues and get feedback from them. (5) create culturally appropriate opportunities to generate feedback from learners. (6) when I bump into a assumption that doesn’t with a colleague (or others), be eager to investigate the deeper “why” that I is influencing me, instead of being quick to defend. (7) several practical tools/resources/ ideas.

I also started Moment of Lift(MoL). While I have read sections of this book I am looking forward to reading it as a whole and seeing the process from which Melinda Gates recounts her development and experiences through the opportunities, places and women she encounters. Even in the opening chapter we see how Gates employs some retroactive critical reflection on her experience and the power her choices made and the power she had to make those choices as well as the assumptions that lead and guided those decisions (to pull back professionally when she became a mom, to space our her children, to take a more supportive role, etc).

Week 10

MoL has been full of voice language that is reminding me of WWK. I do not think that is accidental. I think voice and power are intrinsically linked and it is impossible to speak of women being empowered without their voice being accounted for in the process. I find Melinda Gates’ format of carrying compelling data on the coat tails of powerful narratives an effective way to convince and recruit allies. For my part, her early chapters on the necessity of family planning have made me reconsider the ordering of lessons. And if in fact our lesson on family planning should be replaced within the initial starter lesson package. After reading her data and reflecting I will suggest this to the team.

Week 11

After reflecting and consulting with some colleagues I revised the new introductory lesson one more time to eliminate the abstract object lesson of the “cube” that I had taken from WWK. I knew it needed to be an object more embedded in their context to be doable, but I had not been able to land on one that captured the wider principles of affirming intelligence well. After discussion we are planning to test run the lesson using the object lesson of a round loaf of bread. This is something these women would be very familiar with and its use in place of the cube would extinguish the fear I had of reinforcing the opposite goal of their ignorance by using a foreign mathematical abstract idea. I also quite like that the affirming intelligence activity will also easily segue into affirming experience as they will all know every ingredient, movement, and aspect of preparing the bread. Another colleague also highlighted the need to expressly introduce that we learn from both good and bad experiences. I found that obvious, and clearly an assumption of mine, but necessary to express as this assumption is connected to cultural values of “learning from our mistakes” which differs greatly from “be dishonored from our mistakes.”

I am not surprised, but I am noticing the strong use of the idea of “voice” in Moment of Lift and how it aligns with ideas in WWK. As I finish MoL, I find myself re-envisioned as well as retooled with some key stories that flesh out principles of our work in transformational development. It is always so tempting to go fast and hard to try to get more dramatic results, but several of Gates’ stories exemplify the measured approach of doing smarter, not harder in order to arrive at actual change or transformation. It is not a money problem. There is a web of brokenness and injustice that perpetrates the problem. There are also heroines that prove that hope and restoration is not a pipedream.

Weeks 12&13

I’ve begun reading Learning through Leading (Priskill and Brookfield). It is an articulate-broad-strokes read that addresses many of the values in leadership that I hold, identifying them with their strengths and weaknesses and then illustrating them in the life of a social justice worker. I am enjoying the narrative lens that brings these attributes to clearer light. These two weeks have been my children’s school spring break which means a change of pace and occasionally an incredible learning opportunity. My sons are all in scouts and we attended a “Camporee” on the beaches of Normandy in the north of France. Two learning environments took place that I want to reflect on here. (1) the military and global significance of what happened on those beaches in WW2 and (2) the Bayeux Tapestry.

1. There were several events that took place on Omaha Beach, Place de Hoc and the American cemetery nearby. One thing that is often done in a military or veteran context is observing a moment of silence. We observed many over the course of the Camporee in its various sights. Each moment was preceded by location relevant information, and I noticed that the moments of silence while surrounded by a context that assists you in remembering and visualizing was far more powerful than a non-environmentally associative context. In the case of WW2, I was able to enter the emotional reality, the engineering reality, the leadership aspects, and the very real physicality of the moment. And because of all those things I can recall more naturally the dates, numbers, and data specs that have often alluded me. It made me want to think about moments of silence (not with the same reverence reasons) for reflective and imaginative use intentionally within our lessons. Setting the scenes of the stories, give details and then giving space for women’s imaginations to warm up and enliven the scene in silence…
2. The Bayeux tapestry is a historical and artistic masterpiece, it details the circumstances surrounding the battle of Hastings 1066 in what is playfully called the 1st and best comic strip of the Middle Ages. Nearly 1000 years old, it is magnificent! What caught my attention is that this was a piece of history thought important to communicate to a largely illiterate society. It was not written down, but it was embroidered onto wool able to wrap around the interior walls of the cathedral of Bayeux. There are very few words stitched in, a few names and direct comments, but the weight of the history is carried out in interpreting the gestures and expressions of the characters as they replay what took place. Much room for interpretation is given to the “reader” and the community would share in the “reading” and interpretation as they walked and talked and narrated the tapestry, noticing various aspects and building a common story. Though obvious power is held by the storyteller there is a willingness to give power to interpretation by not forcing it into words, but in to forms. This idea made me think of contrasting a lesson like a series of comic strip panels and posting them around the room, having a group of women walk about the room interpreting and then coming together to discuss… just an idea. I have read ideas in Brookfield’s writing that include types of walking around and interacting with written panels, adding to them, but the idea of a graphic lesson seems fascinating to me.

OZ training reflections day one: 5/15/2022

I feel so thankful, so stretched, so honored, so humbled to be here and doing this training. Today went much like I expected, started late with a lot of connection and chitchat up front, we had a good break midway with tea and coffee and sweets that helped everyone connect well. Linguistically fascinating to be in a majority berber context. When they would go off talking on their own it was amazing to feel both lost and comfortable. I cannot speak Tashelhait, but I can appreciate it and I know Moroccans and so it doesn’t feel off putting. They were kind in coming towards my Arabic and frequently changing in order for me to understand. During the actually lessons we always stayed in arabic unless someone needed a one word translation. We covered the introductory river lesson i wrote/revised. And it all went really well. Telling the story and then having them act it out was spectacular. It showed aspects they understood, and it also made it fun. They came up with the majority of the takeaway ideas without promptings. AMAZING educationally. The Prevention lesson went well too. Zakia and Khadija were great allies in creating the scene and Khadija understood the concept of the circle importance and not expert centered importance.

they were, of course, complimentary of my arabic. I felt the limits of my Arabic, but I was able to manage it. Tomorrow I would like to be ready to do 3 lessons. So i will use a chunk of the morning to prepare those. We might only get to two of them, but I would like to have the option.