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Abstract

This article delves into the potential of decolonial pedagogies—specifically interpreted here as simultaneously engaged in the domains of narrative research and teacher education—for the (re) construction of epistemological and methodological practices with high performative force, i.e. productive in the redefinition of social meanings and the redistribution of discursive legitimacy (Yedaide, 2017). It discusses the concurrence of several perspectives which have stemmed from a particular context of teaching and researching and seem to contribute to civic (re) empowerment as well as to enabling conditions of greater hospitality for social life. Such viewpoints, which make complete sense only in the blended and highly impure territory of our Global South, attempt to methodically escape from absolutes (great or master narratives) and to appeal to emotions, feelings and aesthetics as a necessary means to approaching any human experience. We thus commit to the discussion of a few premises—tentative, local and contingent narratives—which have provided heuristic depth to our social and pedagogical concerns. Hopefully, such intent will portray a willingness to move away from servile respect to modern/colonial structures and plunge into the undefined, unstable and ever changing scenario of life experiences.

Resumen

Este artículo se ocupa del potencial de las pedagogías descoloniales—específicamente interpretadas aquí como comprometidas simultáneamente en los dominios de la investigación narrativa y la formación docente—en la reconstrucción de prácticas epistemológicas y metodológicas con gran poder performativo, es decir, productivas en la redefinición de sentidos sociales y la redistribución de legitimidad discursiva (Yedaide, 2017). Se describe la conjunción de perspectivas originadas en un contexto particular de enseñanza e investigación que parecen contribuir con el (re)empoderamiento cívico así como habilitar condiciones para una mayor hospitalidad para la vida social. Estas perspectivas, que cobran pleno sentido sólo en el territorio mestizo de nuestro Sur Global, intentan escapar metodológicamente de los absolutos (grandes relatos o narrativas maestras) y recurrir a las emociones, sentimientos y estética como un modo necesario de abordaje de la experiencia humana. Nos abocamos así al desarrollo de algunas premisas—narrativas locales, tentativas y contingentes—que han dotado de profundidad heurística a nuestras preocupaciones sociales y académicas. Esperamos que esta discusión refleje nuestra voluntad de apartarnos del respeto servil a las estructuras moderno/coloniales y zambullirnos en el escenario indefinido, inestable y siempre cambiante de las experiencias vitales.

Keywords

Decolonial Pedagogies; Teacher Education; Narrative Research; Discourse

Palabras clave

Pedagogías descoloniales; Formación docente; Investigación Narrativa; Discurso

1. An introduction (condition of departure)

We feel compelled to begin this article by acknowledging that it heavily relies on a particular con-text which profusely and actively collaborates in producing much of its meaning. We have chosen to refer to this geopolitical site as “a *Global South*” in a manner that helps us recognize both the necessary subjection to a common colonial, Latin-American wound¹ and the specific traits of our more local settlement. In the same light, our willingness to use the first person plural must be read and understood as an option which is aligned with a particular ethico-onto-epistemology (Kuby & Christ, 2018). The contribution is actually heavily indebted to the epistemic and political realm of decolonial pedagogies which—influenced not just by critical but also by queer pedagogies—willingly and eagerly escapes from entangling alliances with modern/colonial tendencies to appeal to the universal and/or generalized accounts of human experience. Such stance implies a number of decisions and concurrent textual practices—including the refusal to write in the third person—which intend to pay no excessive homage to existing structures but rather commit to a continuous dislocation and disruption of all grammars in an attempt to find room for whatever is capable of affecting—not just rationally but emotionally—the lives of people (and our own lives as such).

Particularly, the viewpoint hereby presented has been discursively constructed in a particular context of Teacher Education and on the grounds of a singular research effort stemming from the desire to understand good teaching practices at university. Actually, the experience began early in this century, as local research projects steered into learning more about good teaching practice (Fenstermacher, 1989; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; Litwin, 1996, 1997, 2008). In such scenario, some surveys were administered among undergraduates to find out who their greatest—later ‘memorable’²—professors were. On the basis of such findings, these professors were interviewed and the (auto) biographical approach gradually became the preferred methodological option, which could have increasingly led to a rather conservative scientific stance if it had not been for the stubborn outburst of emotions, especially passion, in the conversations with these great professors. The ubiquitous and persistent references to feelings, affection and the aesthetic were regarded as core elements in the equation of good teaching/deep learning, and triggered concerns as to their feeble, invisible and underestimated presence in the formal curricula. The question about their exclusion gradually disclosed a resistance to their formal, institutionalized treatment³ and ignited concerns about the conditions of construction and authorization of academic knowledge.

Critical pedagogies appeared first as a response to the inquiry into the nature of power transactions, hegemonic constructions and (tacit) conditions for legitimacy. Bourdieu’s habitus and the notion of fields—and that of the academic field, particularly— (Bourdieu, 2008, 2012; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964) greatly enhanced the critics’ discussions on the structures of domination but also on the confidence in civic intervention (Giroux, 1983; Giroux et al., 1997; Freire, 1975, 2005). The emphasis on language, and particularly its rhetoric and political dimensions traceable to Bajtin’s work, was already clear and sound in critical pedagogy, especially in McLaren’s and Apple’s writings (McLaren, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2011 ; Apple, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 2015). However, it was decolonial thought—and eventually the construction of decolonial pedagogies—which aided our research most by providing a historical tale to account for the current epistemological relations. Quijano’s coloniality of power (1997), as well as the associated coloniality of knowledge and the self, has proved central to understanding the founding premises of the modern/colonial world which are still fully operational – and functional—in our social settings.

¹ We borrow this expression from the sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who has coined the phrase to refer to the common—though sometimes invisible—colonial mark all Latin Americans share as an effect of conquest.

² The innate research category ‘Memorable professors’ became an icon of the Research Team and its production in the local, national and international spheres. To read more about this, we suggest Porta et al., 2009; Porta, Álvarez & Sarasa, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Porta, 2011.

³ This has been extensively developed in many early publications, which include Flores & Porta, 2012; Porta & Yedaide, 2013; Flores, Yedaide & Porta, 2013; Porta, Álvarez & Yedaide, 2014; Porta, Flores & Yedaide, 2015; Yedaide, Álvarez & Porta, 2015.

Such insights have combined with the consolidation of both narrative research practices and radical scientific stances in the last decades. The perspectives in qualitative research have actually strengthened the centrality of political questions in the practices of knowledge production and distribution, as they have revealed the circulation of power in the form of arbitration and the grant of credentials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015). The relationships have been exposed and denounced, and the traditional criteria for validity seriously impaired (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2012). Conversely, a new realm of practices stemming from social movements has been authorized and made legitimate and is gradually the main source of social (academic) productions (Chase, 2015; Holman Jones, 2015). This brief historical account of the local research has intended to justify and explain the epistemological stance adopted, which conditions greatly the approach that follows.

2. A (customized) definition of decolonial pedagogies; a (customized) definition of science

In the scenario depicted above, the choice for decolonial pedagogies owes much of its assertiveness in the local context to two of its main traits: immanence and a refurbished perspective on knowledge production and legitimation. As to the first feature, immanence, the modern school *dispositif* has been lately and profusely recognized in its diminished and fiercely contested social function in articulating social experience (Grinberg & Levy, 2009; Feldman, 2010). It is clear that the modern/colonial favorite means of educating has yielded to many more powerful learning situations to be found in the text epidermis of everyday life (it may even be fair to say that school has always competed with other agencies of socialization, though its limits had not been so ample and evident). The pedagogical nature of all social life has been particularly exposed in the reinvention of the basis of existence fostered by native Americans and other dissident communities in our continent and worldwide. In making room for their own experience, these social movements have made clear reality can change with the recovery and reinterpretation of other knowledges and practices which the modern/colonial regimes of truth had ruled out as disposable materials (Santos, 2003, 2006). Social transformation and change can then respond to alternative models of social interaction based upon the acknowledgment of a common history and a will for a shared collective future (Segato, 2015). These models, in turn, are to be recovered from a variety of social texts—not just those attributed to explicit discursive or verbal practices—and from all settings of human experience made expressive in a plurality of manifestations (cognitive but also affective, sensitive, emotional, aesthetic).

As to the epistemological stance which has so vigorously supported decolonial pedagogies, the extension of the educational spatial conditions to the whole realm of social life is coupled with the dismantling of a number of modern/colonial prescriptions. To begin with, the schism between the mind and its historical counterparts, body and nature, calls for urgent dis-rupture. No knowledge can be fairly conceived without its organic inscription in a body and a particular time-place relation (Escobar, 2010); all cognition is situated. The whole idea of fragmenting human experience into chunks and awarding differential legitimacy to each—Grosfoguel (2010) has named these chunks ‘heterarchies’—can be understood in terms of the function it has performed in social control but cannot remain sacred.

According to Quijano (2000), two founding myths concocted after the conquest of America can explain the peculiar matrix which arose to legitimize European/colonial, and in turn modern, rule. On the one hand, he refers to the conception of all human experience as a single trajectory, whose ultimate exponent were thought to be the European; in such narrative, non-European peoples would necessarily become pre-European and the words advancement, civilization and evolution—as well as backwards, savages and brutes, among many others—gradually adopted their current (hierarchical) connotations. On the other hand, the interpretation of Cartesian dualism into a binary structuring principle of all existence resulted in dichotomies which carried within differences seen as organizing principles in the assignment of social material and symbolic value. That explains, among other modern/colonial features, the reinterpretation of pre-columbine mild dualism in America as strong patriarchal modern/colonial rule (Segato 2015).

On the bases of such myths, coloniality of knowledge was erected with the aid of social sciences (Lander, 2001; Smith, 1999; Segato, 2015). Modern/colonial pedagogy, as all other “disciplines” in the late 19th century, adopted the tone of a grand narrative (Lyotard, 1979) and exercised control over the distribution of discursive legitimacy (Yedaide, 2017). As the authorized narrative on education—a social distinction which it would soon lose to the ‘education sciences’ in our country (Sanjurjo, 1998; Best, 1988)—pedagogies contributed to the normalization of social practices which respected the modern/colonial conditions and implied recognizing as valid knowledges a particular set of social productions resulting from a (controlled) set of circumstances. Not only what counted as reliable knowledge and the norms for its production were regulated; the sacred status of such knowledge—actually conceived as Truth—was guaranteed by certain criteria founded on the belief in objectivity, neutrality and universality.

This is precisely the point where coloniality of knowledge—which transmuted into coloniality of being with the aid of pedagogy and schooling, among other devices—and science combine; the choice for decolonial pedagogy thus entails the support for a new, tailor-made science. Such tailor-made note, however, should not be interpreted as an individual’s option: individuality itself is a chimera, a by-product of the modern/colonial tale. Though knowledge is (re)produced with some degree of creativity, the source of that inventiveness is not to be found in a single gifted mind but rather in the convergence of several active bodies in their fertile relations with time and place.

The kind of science which may serve decolonial pedagogies does not believe in objectivity. Supported by the ontological and epistemological divides with the modern view (Ryan, 1999), the discrediting of the illusion of direct, unmediated reference has led to the acknowledgment of the intersubjective (social and compelling) hermeneutic drive. In the face of the impossibility of offering guaranteed access to the ‘real’, the attempt to grant legitimacy to a particular version of reality has been exposed as an epistemology of a zero point (Castro Gómez, 2001, 2005). Producers of knowledge conceal their bias and the locality of their provincial viewpoint beneath the unreal pretension of objectivity, obtaining an advantage which is not only epistemological but also political. As don José Coronel Urtecho⁴ has allegedly claimed, ‘Those who make a religion out of objectivity lie. They do not want to be objective; that is a lie. They want to be objects, to save themselves from human pain’. An ethical concern is hereby raised; by disclosing objectivity as a means for knowledge control and accepting irremediable human (social) mediation, the ethic responsibility of assuming a given perspective is enhanced (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2012). The scientists’ stance must be spoken out to give their audience a chance of deciding whether to subscribe to their representations.

In close relation with the abandonment of objectivity, neutrality must be disarticulated too. The influence of critical pedagogies is in this point supreme, as they signal the necessary ideological nature of all social practice and advocate for explicitness or political literacy (Giroux, 1983, 2015; Freire, 1975, 1992, 2005). Educational practices are endowed with hope: schools and teachers can promote awareness and social transformation. Social movements have proved, however, much more fertile in achieving this in the last decades.

Finally, a word must be said in relation with the scientific thrive for universality or generalization, especially in the light of the difficulty it entails to operate on the basis of local and singular knowledges and successfully avoid technocratic arbitration and dodge institutional bureaucracy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The love for universals is clearly traceable to the myths which secured coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000); without a grand or master narrative whose credibility was guaranteed by all parts involved it would have been hard to exercise control beyond the stages of physical and military domination. The modern/colonial tale implies a belief in the possibility of neutralizing simultaneous and equally-valued experiences – what Mignolo has called the negation of covalence (2001)—and of ordering them hierarchically according to a single, prevailing pattern (Galcerán Huguet, 2010). Decolonial pedagogies can thus rely on

⁴ The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano reports on the alleged conversation in *The Book of Hugs*, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2016.

science insofar it renounces to general criteria of validity and embraces authenticity, especially in terms of educational and catalytic resonances (Guba & Lincoln, 2012).

3. Narrative and discourse: enhancing the political dimension in teacher education and research

To complete a text which has been insofar unable and unwilling to follow the standard organization in academic writing—which forces scientists to report accurately the methodological dimensions and those related to ‘results’ and ‘conclusions’ separately—we should refer to a core element in this epistemological-methodological approach. The use of narrative, narrative inquiry and narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) has been extensively developed in the social sciences and, particularly, in the field/s of/about education. In constructing a legitimacy of its own, it was even characterized as a particular human mode of expression (Bruner, 1986, 1991, 1997). However, we are now in a position to assert that narrative research is a technology on its own and, as such, greatly exceeds the scope of technocratic concerns regarding its use to ‘gather data’. We are, as Bruner would later acknowledge (2003), factories that manufacture stories: tales that (re)produce meanings to make both the surrounding world and ourselves intelligible (thus, possible).

This complete subjection to the narrative nature of all our encounters with ‘the world’—whose treatment in the academic field was promoted long ago now by both the linguistic and hermeneutical turns—does not necessary result in the dilution of the metaphysical identity which the postmodern (Eurocentric) viewpoint proposes. Such stance unfairly stresses the view of a self-centered subject and the explosion of fragmented and disseminated identity referents, and deprives us from the right to expose material and symbolic conditions of oppression (Richard, 2013). Our creative capacities are thus limited also by the normative matrixes that nurture us—Weber’s webs of significance. However, they are neither extinct nor disabled.

Relying on a narrative approach implies acknowledging its preexistence as a human, collective technology while we attempt to delve into the processes of meaning production and reproduction. Such domain recognizes discourse as a mandatory—though not exhaustive—means to grasp the narrative nature of the human kind. As Angenot (1999, 2005, 2010, 2012) claims, discourse is a social fact, a historical product which can be accounted for through history and the analysis of power circulation and distribution. In such contextual location, discourse contains the full inventory of what is knowable and speakable (and thinkable) at a given moment among a certain people. Hegemony is precisely constructed and reconstructed by establishing the patterns of intelligibility of a given utterance, while anything which falls out of such language is necessarily ruled out as anomalous—or even impossible. The subaltern voice can be heard insofar as it speaks an understandable version of social discourse and, thus, is somehow subjected to its domain (Grimson, 2013). Counter narratives (Nelson, 1995) must be then understood either as dissident voices which are still functional to the established social order or—in the best possible scenario—as germs of eventual revolutionary language moves (Angenot, 2002).

Counter narratives, needless to say, depend on the recognition of master or great narratives (Bamberg, 2004, 2005, 2015; Lyotard, 1979) which are as necessary as they are challenging, especially in regard to (the use and abuse of) power, social control and linguistic normalization. A perspective which understands discourse as a feasible way of grasping the political dimension of narrative acknowledges the centrality of linguistic practices in negotiating legitimacy and the conditions which curtail the creative possibilities of human beings. However, such stand also offers room for plurality and the domains of human experience that are either implicit or manifested in alternative forms of expression. Berry’s work on the (conflictive, uneven, ambiguous) relations between master narratives and local tales can be exemplary of the movements within discourse analysis that try to offer a discontinuous view of social (linguistic) dynamics (Berry, 2008). Likewise, the emphasis on the local, singular character of the narratives we produce in research on Teacher Education does not neglect the existence of

certain prominent discourses but stresses the overlapping, juxtaposition and complexity of narratives to the extent that distinctions can only be drawn by violating – for the sake of analysis—their natural tendency to integration (Yedaide, 2017). Analysis allows dissection into categories which are completely amalgamated in personal epistemologies. The relations with structural meanings are always partial, incomplete and particular. Not much can be claimed as general insight or truth, but much can be understood by the subjects that co-produce narratives to ignite their desire for transformation. The catalytic and educational forms of authenticity we described above show their value at this point.

To recapitulate, relying on the political potential of discourse in conjunction with the wider realm of narrative approaches can be understood as a self-awarded prerogative to respond organically to what research in education has exposed: a complex, somehow undefined and ambiguous fabric of social meaning which only indirectly refers to the (non-so-clearly-identifiable-now) social structures. Without denying the force of discourse in the construction and legitimation of conditions of symbolic and material existence, we expose the plurality and divergence with which these are (re) interpreted by individuals and collectives. Evading more orthodox strains of Discourse Analysis, discussions revolving around the more comprehensive domain of narrative also responds to our eagerness to fuel the already existing drive into discussing emotions, feelings and the aesthetic as central elements in the human experience—even when they are only minimally captured in conventional, rationalized languages. The emotional turn (Macon & Solana, 2015) is opening a whole new realm of conceptualizations which invite us to authorize other (humane) dimensions of being. Narratives have always nurtured on these domains and may be a medium for the recovery of the erotic nature of life.

Actually, the strength of decolonial pedagogies in the semiotic webs we inhabit is tributary also of queer pedagogies and their potential for dismantling categories and making room for different blending/blended options. Both (radical, third or fourth wave) feminist studies and queer theories have unsettled coloniality rather indirectly by launching a series of recurrent and efficient attacks on the modern pretense of unicity and univocity (Britzman, 2010), also denouncing both occidental metaphysical dualism (Hooks, 1994) and the more recent cult to diversity, depicted as ‘a merchantalized and aseptic form of damage induced by the neoliberal rhetoric’ (Flores, 2017, p. 17).

Feminist and queer pedagogies are, needless to say, focused on immanence as the permanent, fruitful source of meaning-making in social life; education is thus amplified to conveying any thrive for transmission in any possible manner. Feminist and queer pedagogies are practices to reveal and make explicit the way in which difference is encoded hierarchically with such efficacy that it reaches the intimacy of our feelings and affections (Flores, 2017). These pedagogies denounce the use of individuality and psychologization of narratives about difference which conceal the social dimensions in the process of (re) identification (Flores, 2017).

These pedagogies also attack ignorance as a neutral or primary state and depict it as an effect of knowledge—rather than its absence (Britzman, 2010). They likewise expose the eurocentric habit of representing others in occidental terms under the illusion of the ‘omniscient’ writer/scientist (Chase, 2015). This stance has grown to propose self-theory (Preciado, 2008) and self-ethnography (Holman Jones, 2015) as means to full empowerment and faithfulness to singular, local and concrete, needs for social transformation. They are thus capable of revealing the conventional, constructed nature of any social convention as they discuss the transitions between authorized and disruptive, insurgent social normative fictions (Preciado, 2018). Once the claim for Truth has been dethroned, collective meaning making is a cage as much as it is a trigger into something new.

4. Some (in) conclusions

The time seems right to reassert that the very particular conditions in which we have undertaken research on Teacher Education have led to the embracement of a rather distinctive stance within the domain of narrative approaches—one which profits from the political bias of

Discourse Studies without neglecting the immediate, local and affective/emotional dimensions of experience. Such context is then organically responsible for the appeal that the decolonial pedagogies and critical social research have exerted on us. Field work, on the other hand, early provided circumstances which defied the use of more conventional theories.

Although it would be unrealistic to neglect a partial dependence on modern/colonial habits such as generalization, appeal for Truth and monoglossy, we believe that (critical and) decolonial⁵ pedagogies seem to provide a condition of dispersion, ambiguity and divergence which responds better to the kind of unsettlement and destitution for which social sciences seem to be craving. They seem to be continuously searching for the antidote against the necrosis resulting from fixed, undebated certainties, and are thus especially attractive as we strive for social change.

In his Dictionary, Texeira Coelho discusses the modern/colonial age in these words: 'The beginning of modernity could have simultaneously been the start of the most recent time of induced suffocation of desire' (Coelho 2009, p. 24). Eros and desire have effectively become under-legitimized counterparts of rationality and its associated phenomena; they constitute, however, the source of full human realization. Their exclusion from the scientific fields can be explained and understood, though it does not seem convenient to keep on working under this spell. Successfully escaping from the effects of over rationality requires an incessant disruption of grand narratives as it demands making room for other non- rational, emotional and affective, manifestations of the human experience.

In our "Global South" context of Teacher Education—and stemming from our experiences with narrative research— decolonial pedagogies manage to address the permanent, immanent, nature of education in social life and define themselves as practices capable of redistributing legitimacy and altering power relations. Through discourse, pedagogies can constitute the very forces that authorize alternative (subaltern) voices which, without abandoning the matrix of intelligibility, can nonetheless re- create milder, more hospitable conditions of existence. Such pedagogies, conceived as practice, are not content with apprehending and exposing social injustice; they permanently upset material/symbolic structures to satisfy their appetite for social transformation.

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⁵ Although critical and decolonial perspectives are conceived by many scholars as a poor match, we have often times argued in favor of a comprehensive merge. Arguments can be consulted in Porta & Yedaide (2017) among other available bibliographic sources.

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