



Editorial: Neoliberal organization of classroom teaching and learning

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In a colonial and neoliberal society, student success is often measured by how well a student consumes and applies classroom materials to succeed in assignments. This consumerist approach to teaching and learning has, over time, limited students' ability to transform their learning experience, while keeping the educator as the ultimate authority and leader in the teaching process. The student is expected to emulate and model the educator in order to succeed in class and later in life. In such a market-oriented classroom, the teacher is also expected to adhere strictly to the prescribed teaching principles, ensuring they do not deviate from them. This form of teaching and learning is colonizing and helps incarcerate both the educator and the student into epistemic prisons (Nyaga, 2017). This model of teaching and learning is tied to competitiveness, individualism and commodification whereby those students who are leading in any class are determined as successful while those who cannot line up to the fundamentals of learning and teaching marked as failures. This neoliberal approach to teaching and learning in the contemporary Western classroom helps students understand the material but ultimately stifles their imagination. Students are trained to replicate and apply pre-prepared lesson materials to prepare for employment in the marketplace. Such kind of repetition helps the school system to diffuse any kind of pressure that may come from student rationalizing educational programs into economic activities. This type of education views students as commodities that must be branded with certificates to be sold in the marketplace.

This kind of neoliberal market logic found in the class has overtime produced students who are not imaginative and questioning the prevailing oppressive structure that continues to oppress marginalized communities. These forms of colonizing education must be challenged to foster ethical teaching and learning, empowering students to envision their role in society and as agents of change. This means our classrooms must engage with and be open to the everyday values and realities of both students and educators, utilizing them to reimagine and transform the learning environment. This approach to teaching and learning must consider alternative ways where success is not possible without acknowledging failure. This transformative approach challenges the binary between success and failure, encouraging the development of new languages that transcend this colonial dualism. To do this, we must change the leadership structure of contemporary Western classroom to reflect new ideas on how the classroom can be transformed into a space of co-creation of knowledge. To push for valuation of voices in the classroom is to call for new technologies of leadership and care in regard to which knowledge is valued and which is devalued.

Knowledge based leadership is built upon forms of colonialism that erases other ways of spiritual living such as those of women, Black and many other marginalized groups who have been marked as emotional and broken (Nyaga, 2019). This form of codified ethical leadership approach is

based upon dualism where there is no existence of life in the in between wrong and right (Nyaga, 2023). The in-betweenness of leadership is marked as out of space, whose existence has failed to be registered as a space of ethical leadership. This in between happens to be spiritually based and fails neoliberal registration and conceptualization of leadership since they cannot be thinged or reduced into neoliberal objects of understanding leadership. This is the space of many Black and Asian students and educators who are the focus of this study. This to me seems to be the place where we cannot define what is wrong or right; rather work with such outer-space to bring a more nuanced perspective to understanding leadership in teaching and learning. Such a space of nothingness is where we can only imagine rather than understanding its existence. This space has defied all forms of neoliberal ethical leadership defined within a neoliberal commodified market ethical order. This is a space marked as a disorder and in the words of Hobbes brutish, and nasty. In western science, this space is marked as a state of nature and in perpetual war and must be ordered and hailed by ethical leadership.

In today neoliberal society, we must reimagine this disorder as another space where we can ‘organize’ our society in other ways that are beyond emotions and rationalities. This space is one that is organized from instinctual rather than institutionalism or what Achille Mbembe refers to as Animism (Newell & Pype, 2021). It is a belief that everything is possessed by a spirit and as such we cannot imagine social life outside such possession. The problem with the current neoliberal organization of social life is commodification of leadership and care into property that can be owned. Animism helps look at leadership in teaching and learning beyond object/subject dualism and see the role of art as capable of opening new social orientation to social life. According to Fedriani (2011):

possessing an experience is something different from possessing, let us say, a bicycle. In prototypical possession, the possessor is by definition animate, the possessum is concrete and the possessor can use the possessum. In having an experience, the only feature which is maintained concerns the animacy of the possessor (i.e. the Experienter), all other things being altered (Heine 1997). p.310

This perspective on possession and ownership helps rethink ethics in leadership as operations of subterranean knowledge and experiences from below where racialized students and faculty can partake in the imagination of nonviolent leadership. Non-violent leadership is one that is community driven and geared towards holistic teaching and learning. It is a kind of leadership driven by the belief of holding hands to take space. This kind of leadership is grounded on the land and is one that recognizes and acknowledges the unique differences between those holding hands and yet they are ready to work them out to meet a particular need. With this in

mind, we can start imagining what role disordered spaces that are outside the walls of leadership can help redefine leadership beyond the current neoliberal ethical model of rights and wrongs. This unique space of leadership coming from the dark alley of ethical politics of leadership could offer us a new opportunity to reimagine leadership in teaching and learning in ways that are community based, intersectional and collaborative. The future of leadership in education must remember these 'darkest nights' to imagine life in new ways (Mbembe, 2021).

This kind of extraordinary leadership that is marked as compounded and compounding neoliberal society must be seen as a necessary antidote to current political realities in educational leadership. It can help us understand and imagine teaching and learning in new ways that are beyond contemporary rationalism. The 'darkest nights' of current ethical practices of leadership must acknowledge that there cannot be an overall truth or science that defines ethics of leadership in teaching and learning. 'True' leadership is relative and various and intersects with other aspects of life that go beyond wrongs and right and that can help imagine leadership in teaching and learning in relative and unique ways (Wane et al, 2017).

I therefore call upon imagining leadership within the context of African societies wherein leadership is beyond top-down. This kind of leadership is community driven; wherein one who assumes leadership has to seek ethical values of leadership from the unknown. This kind of leadership gives credence to unreasonable and unknowing aspects of social life as ethical requirements in understanding leadership in teaching and learning. Leadership has to operate in spaces of unknowing as much as it's been historically marked as knowing. This is an ethical requirement for leadership to be vulnerable and open to other ways of imagining and acting leadership. The leader is a guardian of leadership and must be open to be led by those who they lead. This has fundamental implications to how we think and act leadership in teaching and learning. This way, moral and ethical leadership is not documented and codified as a truth but rather keeps changing through space and time such that there is no universal way or method of leadership in teaching and learning other than one that is grounded in people's realities, values and histories. This kind of leadership is collaborative, collective and tied to the land and helps imagine leadership as fluid dynamics between community members (Wane, et al, 2017).

As a result of neoliberal management of care/leadership in teaching and learning (Green, 2014), a significant number of racialized students and educators have been impacted in ways that are deleterious (Pon, 2000; Dei, 1996). Karl Marx may help us see the different forms of estrangement within the classroom and how education becomes an alienating experience for both the student and the educator (Marx, 2021, Nyaga, 2017). This conceptualization of education however fails to imagine the ways in which racialized students are not only alienated but further violently evicted and expelled from the classroom in ways that are brutally colonial and racial (Dei, 1996; Pon, 2004) leading to high disproportionate dropout rates. The

neoliberal classroom is a racially charged ‘war zone’ for many racialized students in terms of the ways in which they are marked as lesser human beings who have no intellectual ability to speak and comprehend rationalized lesson plans.

Conflict of Interest

All authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

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