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The Power of Difference

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This spring and summer of 2025, I have been so very fortunate and privileged to travel to other states in the United States and other countries to experience many wonderful and different people, places and things. I am grateful for the opportunities and would like to share a few of my insights with you, the readers of *Critical Praxis*, because it is with a critical lens that I bring these musings to you to further reflections about our research, praxis and service in the academy for the advancement of the greater good, wherever you may be located. Power is ubiquitous and intrinsic to and in our different interactions. My view is that ***Difference itself is power***, invokes power and beguiles power. What do I mean by this? In a critical reflexive approach, we are always mindful of how power is (de/re)constructed, used and abused. That is, how we use power and enact power and how others use and enact power particularly if we are mindful of some of the hierarchical, gendered and racialized ways power is often exerted. In this editorial, I am taking the stance that ***difference*** in and of itself is power, or to put it another way, difference is power as an asset.

We all have power of some type. The same person who might believe themselves powerless at work due to their “position” might view their power at home as “considerable.” I would contend that we all have power of some type and, to some extent, regardless of where we might perceive ourselves to be situated on the totem pole or hierarchical ladder in an organization be it at church, work, home, school or otherwise. Success is usually viewed through the lens of one’s position in an organizational structure and typically associated with one’s income and the belief that the more one makes, the better life is. If you are at the top of the ladder, you are deemed more successful versus being at the bottom of the ladder (less successful).

But what if we were to turn this hierarchical view upside down and consider how everyone contributes to the success of an organization or place and how everyone has power to make a difference in the organization? Difference in roles can be powerful if everyone is respected and valued and, not to mention, fairly compensated.

However, one's difference is more than their role at work it could also be seen as one's class, pigmentation, gender orientation, accent, linguistic or cultural repertoire(s) or (in)ability to do different things. Difference could be the state of my knowledge about a place or thing and how I respond to that state. For example, of the places I visited, six were for the very first time. I did very little background reading about these places because the power to inform me resided in my hosts. Some of the hosts were my colleagues and former students and I was in their homes. As a guest, regardless of my status or relationship, the power belonged to the host. It was their home, their context, their country. Even though I possessed a viewpoint about the new place, the power was for the host to recommend places to go and food to eat.

In Baltimore, I ate *crabs*, and in Washington, I sampled *fresh oysters*, and in Trinidad, I had *doubles* and *shark bake* for the first time. I went to museums and lynching sites in Walton County, GA and Rosewood, FLA for the first time. I visited and experienced different forms and new places of Christian worship in Tobago, Washington, DC, Greenville, SC, Knoxville, TN, and Denver, CO for the first time. Accompanying me to some of these sites were people of different spiritualities and religious affiliations and their questions and comments intrigued me and gave me pause to ponder the kinds of answers I gave. Some of the people accompanying me on some of these trips were of different ages, and experiential backgrounds which added to the richness of the exchanges. Difference is power! These first-time experiences have left indelible marks upon my thinking and what I can do to be more expansive and embracing as a person. In Houston, TX

and Simpsonville, SC, I listened to the concerns of family members with whom I had not interacted in a long time while in Nassau, Bahamas, I celebrated with other family members, my nephew's graduation from high school.

On St. Simons Island, GA and in Hong Kong, China, I participated in conference presentations with present and former students. In this case as a facilitator, I stood back and watched as others took the lead. It is powerful for the teacher/professor to become a student of her students and maybe that is the way it should always be. Former and current students bring their diverse backgrounds and experiences to the table, and they shine even more brightly when given the space to do so by their former/current teacher.

Mutually beneficial symbiosis cannot occur without the power of difference. Power lives everywhere in all things and can be simultaneously visible and/or invisible, direct and/or indirect, good and/or bad, depending on how we see it, use it and experience it. From my undergraduate years, I have been enamored with and influenced by the works of Louis "Studs" Terkel, the Pulitzer Prize General Book winner and author of numerous books. The one I want to reference here is *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do* (Terkel, 1972/74). I recall reading this text and marveling at the wisdom of the author in seeing the value of every human, in this case, the vast array of different people that he had interviewed in the United States. In my eyes, I saw how he did not center his own power as a White male interviewer but privileged the people he had interviewed by listening attentively and respectfully to their stories thereby dispersing and minimizing his own power. At the same time, Shirely Brice Heath's *Ways with Words*, another text I read in my undergraduate early years greatly influenced my understanding of conducting research in homes and minimizing one's power of difference as a researcher in being present in gathering insights and just as importantly,

reporting the insights. Likewise, impacting me greatly in subsequent years was González, Moll and Amanti's (2005) work in the homes of immigrant families, *Funds of Knowledge* and the work of Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996), *Their Highest Potential*. These highly influential works turned the tables upside down on the presumed and often assumed, hierarchical scale of power distribution and the cultural wealth inherent in historically disenfranchised communities.

As I ponder the manifestations of power in the different sites I visited from January to August of this year, if we assume that I am examining my own power – then I would say, yes. My use of power as an educator was influenced by context. As a professor, a question I would ask is how can we go further in the classroom online or in person in dismantling hierarchies of power? How can Professors' ways of being promote deeper student learning and engagement? My former students in Hong Kong would say, it is about relationality and it is about sustainability of our teaching approaches and not just the content being delivered (Tinker Sachs et al., 2025). I would agree that the beauty in difference and how we experience and welcome it in its multifaceted forms in our lives comes down to how we relate and how we sustain relationships. Dispersal of power, breaking down of traditional power structures support relationality and sustainability. There is a wonderful symbiosis in our diversity, let us embrace it (Tinker Sachs and Verma, 2014). If you remain in sameness, you will never experience the power that can come from difference! *Humility is power!*

In our article for this edition, Nicholas Husbye, engages in reflecting on his teaching preservice literacy students. His intentionality in creating 68 video preliminary guides to support deeper cognitive engagement and understanding of complex information embedded in the core text for his course is admirable and commendable. His reflexive article takes us thoughtfully through the purpose, creation and use of the videos and how they can be improved for the next

time around. In his teaching he draws on diverse practitioner articles and a variety of voices for video creation. Reflecting on his work, Husbye illustrates humility in the learning process of being a teacher educator committed to “meeting the needs of students.” *Critical Praxis* and reflexivity require an examination of our power and how we use it. In different contexts, we might use power differently, quietly, loudly, unobtrusively, humbly. We learn so much when we do!

Many thanks to our reviewers. Do pass the word on for the need for more reflexive teacher educators who are not afraid to study and critique the efficacy of what they are doing in their teacher education classrooms. *Critical Praxis* welcomes your submission.

Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Editor

Critical Praxis

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