

# Rethinking Research for Transformative Change: From Big Questions to Bold Futures

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This acknowledgment is not simply an apology for what has happened in the past but to recognise and raise awareness about how racial slavery and the history of colonialism have led to the University's development and accumulation of wealth. Through this statement we reaffirm our commitment to reparative justice through our actions.



## Introducing CenTCS' Inaugural Seminar Series

#### **Our Mission**

In CenTCS, we focus on the power of the teacher and leader as levers for transformative change.

### The Research Compass

- 1. How do we conceptualize transformative change in schools?
- 2. How do we prepare teachers for transformative teaching and praxis?
- 3. How do teachers enact transformative teaching in classrooms?
- 4. How do we describe the complex relationships between transformative teaching and its impact in different contexts?







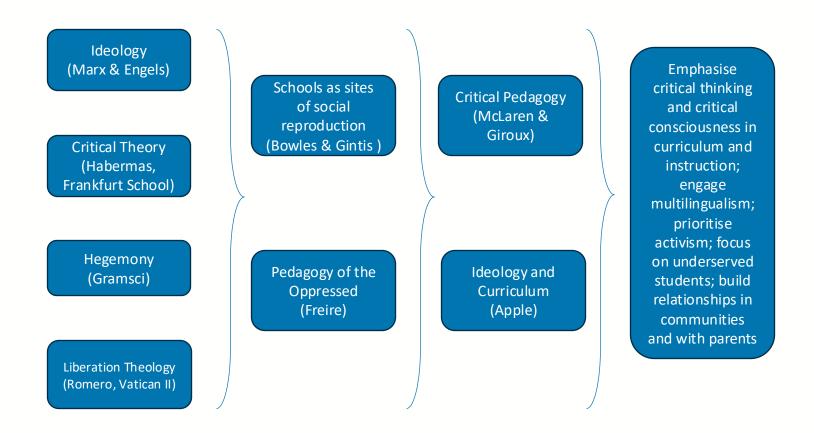
### **Overview**

- 1. Defining transformative change in teaching and research
- 2. Transformative change as a research goal in "research situations"
  - Sociohistorical influences
  - Human geography
  - Positionality
  - Theory-methods
- 4. Lessons about transformative change research situations: Three example studies
- 5. Conclusions and directions

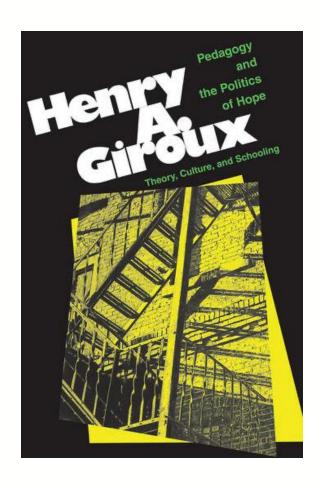


### Defining transformative change

Foundations in teaching for transformative change:







### Defining transformative change

"...struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to be able to alter the grounds on which life is lived" (p. 103).



# Transformative change and research

### Foundations in researching for transformative change:

Ideology (Marx & Engels)

Critical Theory (Habermas, Frankfurt School)

Hegemony (Gramsci)

Liberation Theology (Romero, Vatican II) Ethnography and qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln; Erickson)

Schools as sites of social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis)

Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, Chicago School of Sociology)

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire)

Situated learning and practice theories (Lave & Wenger; Polkinghorne)

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings)

Critical Pedagogy (McLaren & Giroux)

Teacher practices, expectations and biases (Okonofua; Pianta; Valencia)

Ideology and Curriculum (Apple)

Contexts of inclusivity and exclusion (Gregory)

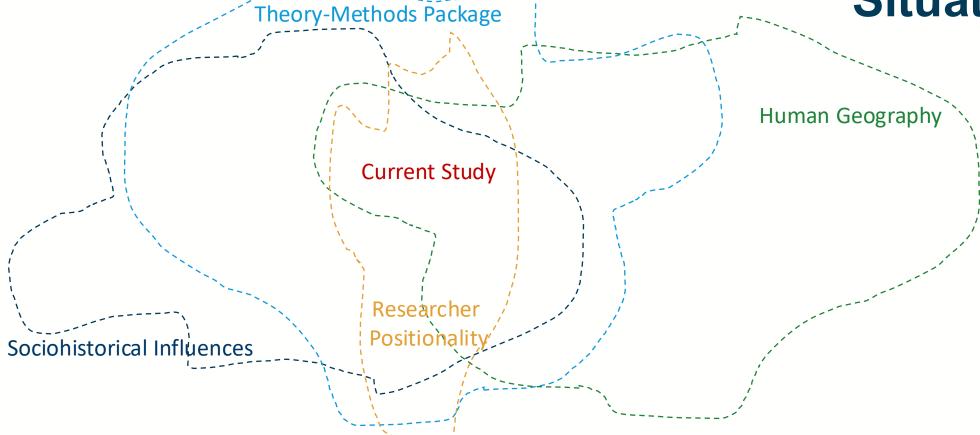
Emphasise
critical thinking
and critical
consciousness in
curriculum and
instruction;
engage
multilingualism;
prioritise
activism; focus
on underserved
students; build
relationships in
communities
and with parents

Marginalization of nondominant groups, Culturally responsive pedagogy, classroom management and school exclusion, teacher beliefs and biases, school policies and practices



Transformative change and research: The Research

**Situation** 





### The Research Situation

#### Sociohistorical influences

Culture, social structures (e.g., race, class, gender, language), historical trajectories and struggles, and discourse, which are determinants of phenomena (Bourdieu, 1977; Cole, 1996; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2010; Rogoff, 2003)

#### Human geography

Space, place, and location, which are socially produced, historically contingent shapers of values, power and resource distribution, and experience (Harvey, 1989; Helfenbein, 2021; Massey, 1994; Soja, 1989)

### **Positionality**

Social group memberships which affect where one stands in relation to others in society and shape what one can see and understand about the world (Fine, 1994; Haraway, 1988)

### Theory-methods package



### The Research Situation

### Foundations in teaching for transformative change:

- Central focus on social class
- Activism and social justice
- Knowledge positioned in unschooled people
- Male dominated
- Invisible
   Whiteness,
   heteronormativity,
   able-bodiedness

Ideology
(Marx & Engels)

Critical Theory
(Habermas,
Frankfurt School)

Hegemony
(Gramsci)

(Romero, Vatican II)

Schools as sites of social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis)

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire) Critical Pedagogy (McLaren & Giroux)

> Ideology and Curriculum (Apple)

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### Theory-methods package

Combinations of theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and methods that share ontological and epistemological assumptions; based on the assertion that theory and methods are "co-constitutive" (Clarke & Star, 2008; Star, 1989).



### Theory-Methods Package

Example Study 1: Teacher Practices at a Disciplinary Alternative School (San Diego, California, US, 2008)

Teaching and learning as a situation
Research as situated: interpretive ethnographic case
study using interpretive paradigm

Methods of participant observation, interview, and

document analysis

- Settler colonialism and legacy of the Mexican American War ("La invasión")
- White, middle class schooling and Chicano resistance
- Meritocracy and school exclusion ("zero tolerance" policies)
- Teacher job shortage
- Relative ease of doing research

Sociohistorical Influences

#### **Current Study**

 Started out as a focus on relationships and became a study about teaching practices in the domains of relationships, classroom management, and curriculum and instruction.

### Researcher Positionality

- · White (similar to teachers, different from students)
- Female (gendered space)
- Cultural consonance with region
- Experience as a teacher in this type of school in this system
- Proficient Spanish speaker

### **Human Geography**

- Cross-border migration (missed school time, tensions between teachers and parents)
- Racially and economically segregated city and school system (distance to students' communities...)

Musings about transformative change and research in this Research Situation:

- Who the researcher is matters
- Extended time in situ makes meaning and clarity, and resonates with me as a researcher...
- Development of the interdependence of three domains proved very important to my future work.
- Did I really capture students' perspectives?
- I wonder how to do critique respectfully...what are the ethical obligations around critique? What are the ethical obligations around reporting?
- I am making process-product assumptions...what kind of difference should we expect to see? How does research make a difference? Are these expectations reasonable?



### **Example 1: Artifact**

#### Reporting of Findings

- Considerations for reporting back to
  - "Ring true" to faculty's experiences
  - Have an immediate application
    - Provide unifying, rather than divisive, findings
    - Provide material that can be used for professional development
  - Protect individuals' anonymity
    - Omit direct quotes and specific examples

In keeping with the considerations listed, I am providing reflection and inquiry questions that derive specifically from the data regarding successes and areas of need at

Setting aside consistent and ample time to discuss and re-visit these questions may enhance your practice and improve your successes with the students. I would be pleased to assist with this process in any way. Feel free to contact me at any time:

### Finding 1

- According to staff interviews, there are two distinct philosophical perspectives at
  - One perspective emphasizes student discipline and measures success by how well students conform to school rules.
    - Students should change to become what schools expect.
  - One perspective emphasizes the support of students and measures success according to students' personal transformations.
    - Schools should change to become what students need.
- Conclusion: school culture embodies contradictory purposes.

### Finding 1: school culture embodies contradictory purposes.

- Inquiry questions for staff discussion:
  - What is our true mission?
    - o How do we agree or disagree on this mission?
    - o How do our agreements enable success?
    - o How do our disagreements impede progress?
    - How do our agreements and/or disagreements impact the students?
    - How can we build on our agreements to move past disagreements in tangible ways toward a unified mission and plan of action?
  - How can we collect and analyze meaningful data to reflect our successes and guide future discussions regarding areas of need?



# Example Study 2: Schooling Experiences of Persistently Disciplined Students (Pinellas County, Florida, US, 2012)

- Theory-Methods Package
- Labeling and positioning theories
- Social construction of roles
- Consistent with an interpretive interview study foregrounding the (socially situated) perspectives of young people about labeling
- Use of drawings and longitudinal data collection to build rapport and provide additional modes of expression and exchange

- Legacy of settler colonialism and slavery present in contemporary structures/ interactions
- Racialized "Good ol' boys" networks
- Conservative religious influence in social institutions
- White, middle class schooling
- Meritocracy and school exclusion ("zero tolerance" policies)

Sociohistorical Influences

- Grade 3 retention
- · Schools judged by their "grade"

### **Current Study**

 What have these students experienced in schoo over time? How have they become persistently disciplined? How can teachers/schooling better educate and serve them?

### Researcher Positionality

- · White (similar to teachers, different from students)
- Cultural dissonance with region –
- Lack of knowledge and experience in school system
- Knowledge about middle school
- Familiar with urban challenges
- California accent!

### **Human Geography**

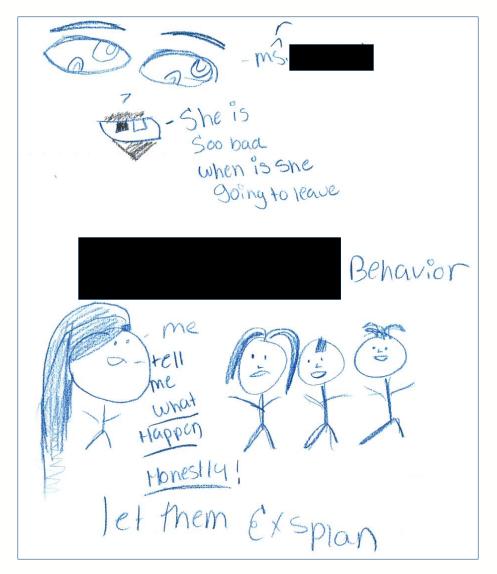
- Agriculture and climate connected to slavery and Jim Crow
- Racially and economically segregated city and school system
- Humidity influences pace (partly mitigated by urban context)

Musings about transformative change and research in this Research Situation:

- Who the researcher is matters
- Drawings yielded unexpected gems (including a way to think into the future...)
- To what extent should the researcher take the interviewer's perspective as truth? What if they are children?
- There is a potential reproduction of deficit narratives.



### **Example 2: Artifacts**











- White Innocence
- Resistance to categorization or naming of race due to proximity to Germany in WWII -->lack of data.
- Streaming by school program at age 11
- Lack of teacher preparation in cultural differences or cultural responsiveness
- Assimilation and strict emphasis on Dutch language use in schools as the current preferred approach to immigration
- Applications of GDPR hinder research potential
- Division between universities and schools made it difficult to find research participants
- Cultural/professional distance makes it hard to build networks

Theory-Methods Package

Interpretivism/Constructionism (in knowledge itself, between teachers and students, between researchers and participants); use of semi-structured interview

**Teachers From Nondominant Ethnic Backgrounds** 

**Example Study 3: Schooling and Teaching Experiences of** 

### **Current Study**

 How do the experiences of being a student from a nondominant background in a Dutch school shape teacher beliefs and teaching practice?

### **Human Geography**

(Utrecht, Netherlands, 2022)

- Living below sea level led to the conflict avoidance strategy of *polderen* in decision-making (in order to regulate waterways)
- Location of urban central belt cities creates a core/periphery profile

### Sociohistorical Influences

### Researcher Positionality

- White (similar to dominant group)
- · Skilled immigrant status
- Cultural dissonance with region
- Lack of knowledge and experience in school system
- Familiar with urban challenges
- Beginning level Dutch (not proficient for research)

Musings about transformative change and research in this Research Situation:

- Who the researcher is matters (Do I really have a sense of the "data" second hand and through translation?)
- Is it okay to conclude that "critical consciousness" is needed if that's where you started in the first place?
- Fluency with language, culture, and systems facilitates the methods of qualitative research, but being "foreign" brings a useful lens on the social situation
- Is it okay to reproduce categories? Am I wrong to focus on race and advocate the collection of data by race?



### **Example 3: Artifact**

Centre for Transformative Change in Schools

As pupils... As teachers...

"The teachers said I needed to work with my hands."

"The teachers said I should do the lower level because it's safer for me." "These pupils will only work for teachers they like."

"These pupils need consistent classroom management."

"These pupils have short attention spans."



### **Conclusions and (Self-Directed) Provocations**

#### Outcomes of the research

- Learning/knowledge: importance of teacher beliefs, student experiences of marginalisation, three domains of teaching (relevant to future research, professional development facilitation, and teaching—my own and others)
- Raising awareness, starting conversations, establishing foundations for increasingly popular topics
- Empowerment of (some) participants

#### Dilemmas

- Re-creation of binaries, categories, exclusions/inclusions, and margins
- Linear assumptions about process-product research, promises of continual growth and improvement, incremental building of knowledge
- Insufficient attention and methodological rigour given to complexity
- Over-reliance on interpretive description, backwards facing data collection with future facing recommendations (but no way to move from the present into the future through the research itself)
- Little consideration of nonhuman ecologies, climate, or sustainability
- Discomfort with the unfulfilling nature and duration of relationships with participants
- After decades of equity-focused research, we have a backlash against "wokeness," polarization, and post-truth policy-/decision-making



# Directions for a Research Agenda Focused on Transformative Change

Marginalization
of
nondominant
groups,
Culturally
responsive
pedagogy,
classroom
management
and school
exclusion,
teacher beliefs
and biases,
school policies
and practices

Make anthropocentrism and the nonhuman visible (Massey).

Human Geography

Adopt or create methods that "world" with participants (Barad; Haraway, etc.).

Theory/Methods Package

Do something different with binaries, categories, and complexity (Clarke, Massey).

Theory/Methods Package

Take up "place" as integral to the research situation, focus, and outcome (Massey).

Human Geography

Move away from micro/macro distinctions and "context factors" and toward situations, coconstitutions and rhizomes (Clarke).

Theory/Methods Package

Produce work that speaks to the post-truth era. How does it resonate (Roeck; Rosa)?

Sociohistorical Influences

Placeresponsive, communityengaged student and teacher learning: collaborative teacher sensemaking (with researchers); co-constructing belonging through curiosity in the classroom...



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- What type(s) of research do we want to do and why?
- What theory/methods packages will we take up? How? Why?
- How will we take our positionalities into account? What might they yield us and how might they constrain us?
- How do we create the transformation we advocate?
- Which sociohistorical and human geographical themes are relevant? How do we position our work on the international stage?