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'HE in FE Partnerships: what is and what might be.'

Denise Robinson
Introduction

To consider the development of FE/HE partnerships in terms of their proclaimed objectives to expand the number of HE students and to add a different route for those students who might not be considered to be ‘traditional’ HE students; to explore such developments, using immanent critique, such that the forces that interact on HE are explored and the true nature of this development is revealed.
What is Critical Theory?
*Variations on a theme?*

- Critical race theory
- Critical ethnography
- Critical race ethnography
- Critical educational theory
- Critical theory of educational struggle
- Critical pedagogy
- Critical HRD
- Critical thinking
- Critical reflection
- Student critical development
- Critical literacy
Critical Theory (CT)

• ‘Critical Theory draws on Marxist scholarship to illuminate the ways in which people accept as normal a world characterised by massive inequities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few.’ Brookfield, 2005, p.2

• Frankfurt School -1923. Used CT for ‘…gaining methodological insight, theoretical illumination, and political inspiration to carry on the tasks of critical social theory…’ Kellner, 1999, p.3. Forging a unity between philosophy & science, fact & value.

• Addressed philosophical and empirical issues, including a broadening of issues previously ignored or simply not explored e.g. the family, mass culture
Critical Theory

- Attempt to develop a democratic approach to social issues by the methodology of immanent critique
- Freeing analysis from the constraints of a veneer of rationality, freedom and choice (Marcuse, 1964)
- Emancipatory – liberating consciousness from forces of domination (Fernandes, 2003, on Habermas)
Immanent Critique

• Based upon the CT dialectical approach to reason – to speculate, to mirror an appearance that is to be investigated

• Describes what a ‘social totality holds itself to be, and then confronts with what it is in fact becoming…’ (Antonio, 1981, p.338).

• Dialectical method - revealing incompleteness where completeness is claimed
Models & Claims of HE

Traditional – HE?
- Elitist
- Pursuit of true judgement (Arnold, 1983)
- Subject-based
- Research AND teaching
- Imagination, scepticism, open-ended enquiry

HE in FE
Vocational/professional Employment and employer - Led
Student focused – greater support needed for such students?
Widening participation

But - only HE in FE?
HE in FE & Partnerships

- CT – attempt to clarify what HE is in HE and how HE in FE is realised – What is
- Is this ‘true’ HE? Or a particular sector and paradigm of HE? Third tier HE?
- Suggested four categories of HE – Research-based HE; Teaching HE; HE in (large) FECs; Partnerships - HE in (small) FECs
HE in FE Partnerships- *What might be?*

- Potential role of Partnerships when FECs validate their own FDs?
- Weaker? FECs go their own way?
- Stronger? Smaller FECs wanting to enter HE use partnerships as a basis to develop their experience? HEIs seen to provide robust QA/development and support?
- Difference between HE in large FECs and those who deliver HE as a partnership.
The basic tenets of HE?

- Can we agree on what is core to HE?
- Which model or combinations of models?
- Freedom of speech within the law
- Freedom of thought within society’s ethical framework
- Freedom to challenge accepted axioms (Wilson, 2008, THES)
CT on HE in FE – the Students

• Is HE in FE contributing to Marcuse’s ‘One Dimensional Man’ concept - negating opposition - freedom is not freedom if it is sustained through alienation (are students alienated or liberated?)

• Invasion of Habermas’s Lifeworld – instrumentality of education (processes and aims) reduces individual autonomy

• Concern with potential – the essence - *what might be*