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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

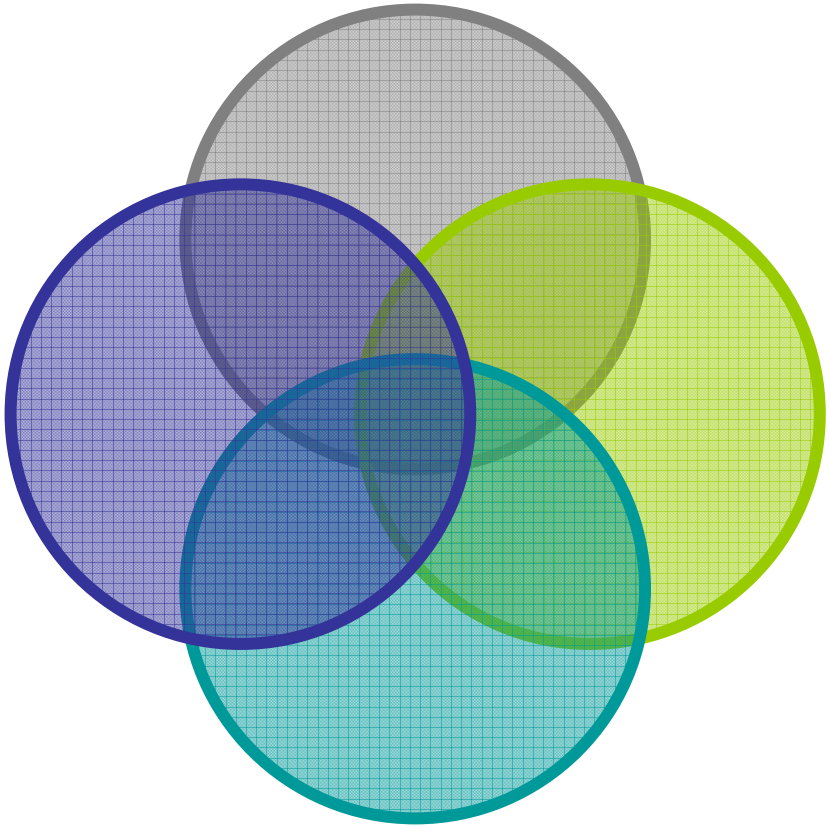
- CT – attempt to clarify what HE is in HE and how HE in FE is realised – What is
- Is this ‘true’ HE? Or a particular sector and paradigm of HE? Third tier HE?
- Suggested four categories of HE – Research-based HE; Teaching HE; HE in (large) FECs; *Partnerships* - HE in (small) FECs

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.

Research HE

HE in (small) FECs partnerships



HE in (large) FECs (self-validation)

Teaching HE

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***