

# DIALOGUE AND HEGEMONY: SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF 'CHARLAS' FOR CRITIQUE AND PRAXIS

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**Abstract** – *A theoretical framework for discourse analysis is presented focusing on the themes of the formation of hegemony through dialogue and the development of critique and praxis through informal interaction. Sociolinguistic inquiry in traditional elementary and secondary classrooms has contributed to expanding knowledge related to student capacity development and teacher preparation. A similar discourse analytic approach may also be directed to adult learners in traditional and community-based settings to increase understanding about the phenomenon of adult adaptation to new community environments. The lessons of immigrants and their learning facilitators of problem solving and adaptation to new circumstances should be a value to educators, teacher educators and policy makers seeking authentic participation, capacity growth and sustainable development, particularly in the culturally hybridic Mediterranean region.*

## Introduction

**T**he Mediterranean region is being rocked by waves of immigration consequent to accelerating transnational movement of capital, new socio-political formations and ramifications of climate change (Aubarell & Aragall, 2005; Cassarino, 2008). Education inquiry and policy development has a strong role in understanding and addressing the background, aspirations and developing knowledge of new immigrants in their process of integration into diverse cultures and societies (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004; Reyneri, 2004; Mattheoudakis, 2005). Heeding Mazawi's (2008) call to explore the 'imaginary horizon of community' through the co-construction of participatory education inquiry (Borg & Mayo, 2006) and turning from the 'culture of the null hypothesis', it is argued that qualitative critical discourse analysis (Luke, 1995; Rogers, 2004) of adult educational interaction in the community will show how immigrants are making meaning, solving problems and creating strategies in new settings that will have profound consequences for both their success and social sustainability.

A theoretical framework for discourse analysis is presented focusing on the themes of the formation of hegemony through dialogue and the development of critique and praxis through informal interaction. Sociolinguistic inquiry in

traditional elementary and secondary classrooms (Cazden, 2001) has contributed to expanding knowledge related to student capacity development and teacher preparation. A similar discourse analytic approach may also be directed to adult learners in traditional and community-based settings to increase understanding about the phenomenon of adult adaptation to new urban areas.

Immigrant adults seeking to live and work in new sociocultural environments meet unfamiliar hegemonic discourses (Apitzsch, 2002) during their first conversations in the community that impact their experiences of social justice (Ayers, 1997) because of the precarious and marginal status and inequitable conditions (Murray, 2003; Reyneri, 2004; Borg & Mayo, 2006) provided them by dominant societies. Educators exploring curriculum study with recent Latina/o immigrants in Chicago, Illinois, learned that informal conversational dialogues called 'charlas' or 'echar platica' (Guerra, 1998) are preferred to traditional didactic lectures (Zanoni et al., 2006). Along with practical or social directions in conversation, dialogue (Borg & Mayo, 2001, 2006) becomes an important language function to raise awareness about dominant power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) relations. It is argued that educators need to examine the possibilities of sociocultural language practices to understand how this discourse functions and how to create curriculum to enhance adult experience with critique and social praxis (Gramsci, 1988) to achieve social justice. Elements of Southern Mediterranean to Northern Mediterranean migration circulation show that marginalisation and isolation of new immigrants and the creation of alterity (Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Borg & Mayo, 2006) may not be uniform (Cassarino, 2008). Curriculum inquiry is proposed to understand how immigrant adults form funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and how they utilise this knowledge.

The 'charla' process is presented as one way that participants form their conception of the world (Gramsci, 1971; Ives, 2004) through heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) and hybridic (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejada, 1999) interactions. 'Charlas' are a Latina/o cultural practice for the development of epistemology, identity and agency; immigrant groups with practices that value close family interaction and informal verbal exchange may demonstrate similar language functions. Democratic social relations (Mayo, 1999) are developed through 'charla' practice through which actors create meaning and propose social praxis. 'Charla' participant reflection on praxis and critique of outcomes shows how Gramsci's view of the 'war of position' (Mayo, 1999; Fontana, 2000; Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo, 2002) can lead to the promotion of subaltern social hegemony. Curriculum study may focus on the process of how voice is recognised, critiqued and animated to create and sustain praxis in Mediterranean and American communities.

## Conception of the world

The construct of ‘conception of the world’ may be described as a worldview, viewpoint, perspective or paradigm. One starting point in Gramsci’s interpretation of Marxism is to examine how individuals incorporate meanings and metaphors to create a conception of the world. This conception enables the person to balance his or her own understanding of history and social relations as a basis for personal and social identity and agency in the larger realm of social hegemony. Gramsci prefigures Schutz’s idea of ‘human intersubjectivity’ (Tedlock, 1979) and the social determination of knowledge (Salamini, 1974) as a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980). Folklore, ‘archaic values’ (Reyneri, 2004, p. 1145) and other narratives contribute to ‘common sense’ which is the basis for the development of a conception of the world according to Gramsci.

Ives (2005) describes Gramsci’s view in this way, ‘In elaborating his central argument that “everyone is a philosopher” he notes that in “language”, there is contained a specific conception of the world’ (p. 461). Organic philosophers build perspectives through language and need to recognise that this very language is charged with power. The process by which the concepts are formed already embodies relations, histories and meanings that must be recognised to identify, understand and critique dominant social relations. Bakhtin (1981) describes the phenomenon this way:

‘For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.’ (p. 293)

Taken together, Gramsci and Bakhtin emphasise that, both in what is said and how it is said, the utterance reflects the speaker’s worldview. A necessary starting point in recognising and transforming hegemony is the ability for the individual to become self aware of language use and function, to recognise how personal meanings relate to the close social group understandings, and to explore how the utterance may propel social critique and action.

Before a new social order based on justice may be realised, educators must carefully examine how individuals create their conceptions of the world, social identity and agency as a transition to critique and social praxis. Conceptions of the world are not genetically immanent and are not transferred by osmosis from elders to youth. Social language and cultural practices are essential in establishing and

maintaining knowledge, the value of knowledge, how individuals see themselves and their ability to act in the social world (Herrera & Torres, 2006). Immigrant Latina/os in the United States and migrants throughout the Mediterranean arrive in new communities with a repertoire of social practices (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) that formed their conceptions of the world and may serve as a means of enculturation and acculturation (Gonzales et al., 2004); this process is contrasted with the traditional view of cultural assimilation (Padilla & Perez, 2003). The hegemonic stance promoting the need for immigrants to assimilate often is 'islamophobic' and recognises their cultural practices as deficit (Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Borg & Mayo, 2006), misrepresents their migration aspirations and educational backgrounds (Reyneri, 2004) and does not consider their unique needs as adult learners (Mattheoudakis, 2005). Family conversation, 'echar platica' (Guerra, 1998), is a syncretic (Mannheim & Tedlock, 1995), dialogic social language process central to socialisation and to the development of funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that sustain and promote the material and social well being of families and informal social networks (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003; Colombo & Sciortino, 2004).

Educational inquiry continues to focus on communities of learning in the Mediterranean (Borg & Mayo, 2001; Herrera & Torres, 2006) and the United States (Rodriguez-Brown, Li & Albom, 1999; Rodriguez-Brown, 2003) to propose perspectives that will enhance the continuity (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Reese & Gallimore, 2000) and relation between families and schools to maximise the skill development of children in traditional educational institutions. There is a strong challenge and need to enhance continuity and parental involvement of Latina/o families in the US since they are provided inequitable educational opportunities; Latina/os are projected to grow the school-aged cohort for many years to come (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). Dominant culture views of identity reflecting atomisation and a 'guided missile' approach to life choices (Lightfoot, 2006) underlie the challenges that Latina/os and all 'Other' immigrants face in the process of acculturation and integration in the Mediterranean and the US. Fresh educational inquiry needs to focus on the experience of new adult immigrant learners in community-based settings and the ideological reproduction of language practices (Street, 1995). Participatory action research (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003; Nygreen, 2006) in community-based workers' centres for occupational health learning is a step in this direction. 'Charla' sessions are proposed to address the experience of participants regarding health at work; empirical analysis of session transcripts may reveal the conversational means and concepts explored by participants to understand their conceptions of the world, critique and the development of social praxis.

## **‘Echar platica’ language practice**

Considering Latina/o cultural language practices, ‘echar platica’ (Guerra, 1998), is a conversational and familial interaction promoting integrity (Suarez-Orozco, 1991) where narratives between generations create the basis of knowledge and is an important process of producing, valuing, and validating knowledge throughout a lifetime. The viewpoints of sociolinguistic researchers will be explored to describe the role of the conversational ‘charla’ process in epistemic formations.

‘Charlas’ are one expression of Latina/o sociolinguistic language practice that may be compared and contrasted to other forms of interaction identified in the literature as ‘memorias’ (memories and reflections on oral social history) and ‘la bendicion’ (blessing) by Olmedo (1999), ‘consejos’ (advise or counsel) by Delgado-Gaitan (1994), ‘relajos’ (relaxing or joking) by Farr (2005), ‘dichos’ (proverbs) by Dominquez Barajas (2005) and ‘corrido’ (ballads) by Pizarro (1998). In general, ‘charla’ may be described as an overarching language practice where participants may express and deploy multiple language forms such as these specific ones described. Informal conversation is a means by which participants discuss and dialogise (Bakhtin, 1981) the meanings and intentions of specific and recognised language forms or genres; ‘a memoria’, ‘consejo’ or ‘dicho’ is not just dropped into discourse but is presented in the context of informal discussion where ideas are considered, reflected upon, debated and integrated into consciousness. ‘Charla’ or ‘platica’ may provide a more open and fundamental ‘discourse state’ because it is one of the first language practices of families and continues as a practice throughout Latina/o life in family and multiple forms of social interaction.

Guajardo & Guajardo (2008) emphasise the importance of ‘platica’ practice through their own personal experience of family stories told by grandmothers to teach and transmit knowledge which becomes a method for shaping learning and knowing throughout life. Not only would children gain knowledge through ‘platica’ but, through the practice, children would display what they learned and skills they acquired from many sources. Family ‘platica’ is a prime example of the social construction of knowledge where ideas that surface in the conversation of participants would be examined, critiqued and filtered through the communal viewpoints of the shared language practice.

The ‘charla’ or ‘platica’ practice may encompass many outcomes and intentions for participants. While passing the time or gossiping may be one function of informal conversation with little import for education, ‘charla’ or ‘platica’ may be a process of experiencing respect, engaging in prioritising, problem solving and in the expression of power through language activity and

subsequent action. Olmedo (1999) describes the ethnographic process of Puerto Rican 'abuelas' (grandmothers) discussing their 'memorias' (memories and reflections) in informal conversational groups. The 'abuelas' experienced 'respeto' (respect) in a variety of linguistic and behavioural rituals and well as re-conceptualising and prioritising their cultural experiences to decide on the values and meanings that were most important to transmit to the upcoming generation. In a 'funds of knowledge' approach (Moll et al., 1992) in these conversations, the emphasis was on the knowledge created and interpersonal agency that would be most important for the future well being and sustainability of their children's and grandchildren's families.

## **Hybridity and heteroglossia**

Hybridity is a fecund construct in Latina/o epistemology described by Anzaldua (2000) as a 'mestizaje' practice, part of a borderland metaphor, in larger conversation about colonial hegemony (Street, 1995) and English language literacy dominance. Informal conversation practice affords participants opportunities for hybridity through 'collage, code-switching, genre switching' (p. 8) which Anzaldua describes as her hybrid practices in writing, teaching and communication. In the Southern European context of critical pedagogy, Borg & Mayo (2006) use the cosmopolitan hybridity found in the urban physical environments as a metaphor for cultural practices; they explicate Giroux's concept of 'border crossing' by challenging deficit, assimilationist viewpoints of immigrant subjectivity and agency. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejada (1999) use hybridity in classroom language practice as a way to question identity formation in post-colonial borderlands. Inspired by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism, hybridity is a means for individuals and social groups to play with and create concepts, stances, identities and interpretations in the ongoing process of problem solving and learning through informal conversation. Hybridity is also recognised as a means to alter social discourse (Pappas et al., 2003) and impact social change (Kamberelis, 2001).

Bakhtin's construct of heteroglossia has power and potential for visualising meaning creation when considering 'charla' discourse formation. Bakhtin's view of dialogue takes place on the intrapersonal level through thought and then on the interpersonal level through exchange of utterances in direct, face-to-face conversations or 'dialogic interanimation' (Wertsch, 1991). The meaning of language is not fixed or neutral to Bakhtin; meaning in an utterance is always addressed or directed toward a specific position or location. Holquist (1990) describes the importance of utterance stating 'what happens in an utterance, no

matter how commonplace, is always more ordered than what happens outside an utterance' (p. 84). In the arc of arrival to its position, the meaning encounters and is challenged by related meanings which interact in dialogue with the original meaning. Bakhtin (1981) states:

'If we imagine the *intention* of such a word, that is, its *directionality toward the object*, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colors and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself (as would be the case in the play of an image-as-trope, in poetic speech taken in the narrow sense, in an "autotelic word"), but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with the alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle.' (p. 277; emphasis in original)

These encounters may alter the character of meaning, hybridising or fusing it with other meanings, creating a new meaning or changing the trajectory and ultimate arrival of meaning to a stable understanding.

Internally to the individual consciousness, these meaning utterances begin with the voices of others and may at some point belong half to the individual and half to others. 'The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). In this way, internal thoughts and utterances may be viewed as the history of meanings that have been learned from the family and social group and align with Gramsci's construct of the interaction of common sense and the conception of the world.

The value of the 'charla' process may be seen when individuals recognise the dialogic process of meaning creation in the utterance and share this co-creative, negotiative process with a close social group. When a meaning is offered to a group in conversation, the 'charla' may externalise the internal dialogic process through social language exchange. Taken in a context that maximises the power equity between participants, a rich exchange may occur that seeks to uncover the shared internal dialogic processes and opens the dialogue to critique and challenge from multiple views. While a consensus may be reached regarding the meaning, divergent positions may be argued and seen from specific points of view and for specific reasons. Creating this social language environment may allow teachers to enhance the process of critique, social action and reflection; Borg & Mayo (2006) describe this setting, in the Mediterranean context, as the authentic dialogue

promoted by Paulo Freire (1970) which may address hegemony, social contradictions and the fear of oppression.

Ives (2004) describes the phenomenon in this way, ‘Heteroglossia or multiaccentuality, then, comes not from language, nor even from social diversity itself; rather, it is the product of different groups of people using the same signs from different perspectives. That is, it is the product of both social diversity and language use’ (p. 81). Bakhtin’s image of an interactional ray of meaning reflects Gramsci’s (1992) vision regarding the process of discipline and critique needed to see the social implications of hegemony created through dialogue,

‘The same ray of light passes through different prisms and yields different refractions of light: in order to have the same refraction, one must make a whole series of adjustments to the individual prisms. Patient and systematic “repetition” is the fundamental methodological principle. But not a mechanical, material repetition: the adaptation of each basic concept to diverse peculiarities, presenting and re-presenting it in all its positive aspects and in its traditional negations, always ordering each partial aspect in the totality. Finding the real identity underneath the apparent differentiation and contradiction and finding the substantial diversity underneath the apparent identity is the most essential quality of the critic of ideas and of the historian of social development.’ (p. 128)

Organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1996) or specific intellectuals (Foucault, 1980) discern and communicate a clear understanding of critique through dialogue with members of their social group. Gramsci sees the converse of Bakhtin’s directionality of meaning, where worker leaders organise and refine meaning through discussion and establish the pull of a guiding light based on negotiated interaction with working class comrades. Curriculum studies may focus on voice animation analysis starting with observing how the voice of organic intellectuals animates reflection and practice through informal discourse.

## **Social and meaning relations in everyday discourse**

Critical pedagogy for adults features the participation of learners and the leading role of learners in directing curriculum activities. Adult learning interactions in Greece (Mattheoudakis, 2005), Malta (Mayo, 2003) and a parent empowerment programme in Malta (Borg & Mayo, 2001) all highlight the importance of listening and the evidence of listening for authentic adult involvement in curriculum activities. Bakhtin’s emphasis on utterance addressivity (Holquist, 1990; Wertsch, 1991) supports this perspective in an inverse to the traditional



pedagogical participation framework. In traditional settings, the instructor, in a position of power, is lecturing to address students, to impart knowledge, in an interaction that Freire (1970) described as the 'banking model' of education; the instructor deposits knowledge into the brains of the students and reproduces the social conditions that favours forms of expert knowledge.

Wertsch (1991) describes Bakhtin's commitment to addressivity by stating, 'He insisted at many points that meaning can come into existence only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of the speaker' (p. 52). When critical educators open discussion, creating environments where students may address each other and the instructor as equal participants, meaning positions are revealed (Morrell, 2004). Holquist (1990) elaborates by saying, 'the subjectivity whose placement is determined by the structure of addressivity requires us then to be answerable for that site, if only in the sense that the subject occupying that particular place (who *is* that place) will be the source of whatever response is called forth from it by the physical forces of nature and the discursive energy of society' (p. 167; emphasis in original). A dialogue may then ensue in a hybrid environment where the possibility of discussing all viewpoints and positions is then managed by the instructor and negotiated by participants.

In describing the usefulness of the novel related to cultural reflection and production, Bakhtin described the functioning of language genres. Genres are socially recognised sets of language communication that create expectations for the type of language used and the outcome of interaction. Examples of genres include the exchanges involved in buying a newspaper, greeting neighbours, holding a meeting, participating in a lecture or speaking on the telephone; each setting has routines and expectations for exchanges, turn taking and the content and complexity of the communication. Bakhtin believed that the novel was an advanced form of cultural production because the author in the novel presents a multitude of genres, most importantly the primary genre of informal conversation and discussion which is normative and from which all other genres stem (Holquist, 1990).

Bakhtin's priority on conversational genres in the novel leads directly to the importance of the informal conversation that is the primary interaction of 'charla' discourse. The 'charla' is the novel of cultural production; superseding the novel, the 'charla' creates its interaction from the dialogue and interplay of multiple authors exchanging meanings through the addressivity of their utterances. Ives (2005) describes Gramsci's linguistic stance that meanings in language are not fixed but are defined in relation to each other. The 'charla' is the social environment where these meanings may interact and become animated most directly.

In the 'charla' as well, social relations reflecting power equity are expressed and are the basis for the potential of lively exchange and proposals for action. Mayo (1999) states: '... every effort is made to promulgate democratic social relations and to render the learners the "subject" of the learning process. The culture of the learner makes its presence felt through a dialogic teaching process. The educator's task is to facilitate the means whereby this culture is examined critically by the learners themselves, so that the "common sense" is converted to "good sense" ' (p. 138). Mayo's insistence on equal and democratic social relations in critical pedagogy and Bakhtin's vision of dialogic meaning creation in conversational discourse potentiate each other during 'charla' interaction.

Leps (2004) describes Bakhtin's interactional process stating, 'Speakers who engage in dialogical relations are altered by their introduction to transgredient elements that modify their ideological horizons' (p. 273). The meanings encountered, shared and debated through informal conversation reflect the ideology of the participants and the animation of the discourse through these exchanges may change the viewpoints of participants, leading to new positions and possibilities of action. Goffman's constructs of production format emphasising author, animator and principal in the role of the speaker and participant framework in the role of the listener may assist the recognition and analysis of the dialogical exchanges in the 'charla' (Kamberelis, 2001). In the 'charla', the production may be more direct and participants more engaged due to their close social relation and trust. It is argued that the social justice needs of immigrant workers in the community may be advanced through the creation of informally guided discussion with the goal of uncovering and negotiating meaning and generating strategies for social action.

Building on the commitment to equitable social relations in community-based workers' centres in the US, the dialogue of the 'charla' may be used to identify, exchange and enhance the funds of knowledge that Latina/o families create and maintain in many well established communities. An opportunity and consequence of 'charla' dialogue is reciprocity; the primary means may be to communication in the conversational interaction, but it may also be to material ways through sharing knowledge or resources. In the US, workers' centres may be unique urban settings for new immigrants to reveal and gain new funds of knowledge. If traditional funds of knowledge are recognised in established Latina/o communities and are routinely shared, it will be even more important to immigrants who are travelling and living far from their original networks to access and share funds of knowledge in the new community.

In the Mediterranean, promotion and analysis of informal discourse among immigrants in community-based settings may reveal valuable insights to promote self-awareness and agency in the process of integration and to inform public

policy. Reyneri (2004) challenges the common sense construct that most immigrants to contemporary Italy are poorly educated peasants from rural areas; he describes a range of immigrant capability and viewpoints he defines as 'underprivileged,' to 'underachievers,' to 'upwardly mobile' to 'privileged,' each with particular educational experience and social status. His labels need to be critiqued regarding class power relations and given allusions in education to meanings that blame the learner for their social position. Nonetheless, his labels are a heuristic for the subjectivities of immigrants (Borg & Mayo, 2006) as they bring their aspirations and education to seek employment. While some underachievers may welcome blue-collar employment available in Northern Italy, an upwardly mobile immigrant may reject this work based on the undervalued social status associated with the position. Promotion and analysis of informal discourse with immigrants seeking work may assist them in clarifying their goals and viewpoints, to critique the social relations that promote inequity and to outline informal or social support to gain skills, take action and to sustain themselves and their families in the contemporary economy.

Recent inquiry (Cassarino, 2008) presented results of interviews with returning migrants to the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) and explored the construct of return preparation given interaction between return preparedness, resource mobilisation and the context of the sending and receiving countries. While a debate of the history, motivation and power relations inherent in this initiative is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is clear that many migrants originating from Maghreb countries seek to return to their countries of origin. Analysis of informal discourse of migrants contemplating and preparing for return migration may reveal how they access informal social networks (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004) to gather the information they need to make the best decisions about practical financial decisions or how their impending move may impact their families and social relations both in their country of residence and origin.

## **Critique and the war of position**

Educational researchers conducting inquiry in school settings utilise Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue in teacher and student interaction. Recognising that the teacher has a significant role in managing classroom interaction and setting discourse patterns, researchers conducted inquiry to describe in large and small scales how the teacher can enhance dialogue (Nystrand et al., 2003; Pappas et al., 2003); the teacher's role is mediating the dialogical process. It is argued that adult education teachers and organic intellectual worker leaders may also take a mediating role in guiding discussion around the hegemonic war of position to critique meaning and to create social action.

By foregrounding reflection and dialogue about social action, evaluation of the action and new meaning may be created. There is a link between power and knowledge (Kamerelis, 2001), where the agency of immigrants taking action to protect themselves on the job or communicating about protection may lead to risk reduction or protective outcomes and new capacities to act. This curricular reflection is another aspect of what Fontana (2000) describes as ‘the organization and deployment of ideological and cultural instruments of struggle’ (p. 319) that add to the war of position. The power to act creates new knowledge that may then be shared and evaluated through the ‘charla’.

The war of position may also manifest in discourse critique due to Gramsci’s observation that in language ‘residues of these struggles and linguistic changes are never totally erased’ (Ives, 2004, p. 81). Sociohistorical meanings that are embedded in discourse may be another focus of ‘charla’ critique lead by a facilitator. As a mediator, the discussion leader may ask what participants think about certain terms such as a ‘macho’ attitude displayed when asked about risk at work. The leader may draw out the meanings and probe regarding the sociocultural basis or history of the term. Orality shows the cognitive capabilities of participants and is part of the continuum of literacy where writing is not more valued or instrumental than oral discourse. According to Street (1995), ‘all people have conventions for formalizing, distancing, analyzing, separating, holding some things constant, acting as if the evanescent world could be “fixed”’ (p. 157). Repositioning or animating new meanings may be evident or traditional meanings may be supported in the dialogic process of exchange.

Bakhtin draws a distinction between authoritative discourse that is transmitted integrally and does not allow for interpretation or representation and ‘internally persuasive’ discourse that allows for dialogic transformation (Wertsch, 1991). Brandist (1996) describes this tension: ‘This does not mean the struggle for hegemony consists merely of a conflict between two preformed ideologies but a conflict of *hegemonic principles*’ (p. 103; emphasis in original). Given Gramsci’s emphasis on the persuasive power of hegemony, critical educators should be sensitive to the emergence of internally persuasive discourse and to examine through dialogue the elements and aspects which give the discourse animation, force, and direction. Regarding the metaphor of war, Holquist (1990) states ‘Bakhtin translates Dostoevsky’s dictum that the heart of man is a battleground between good and evil into the proposition that the mind of man is a theater in which the war between the centripetal impulses of cognition and the centrifugal forces of the world is fought out’ (p. 47). Discourse analysis should be directed to compare and contrast the function of persuasiveness for the individual with the social group and to determine through dialogue what makes a position or view more or less persuasive.

Culture (Tedlock, 1987) and art (Leps, 2004) emerge dialogically. Where there is asymmetry in dialogic relations, there is an opportunity for critique. Tedlock (1987) states, 'What is ethnography if it is not the phenomenology of asymmetry, of otherness, foreignness? And what would ethnography be if its practitioners gave up seeking out asymmetries of the kind that exist across separate languages, including languages very different from one another?' (p. 329). Interpretation and reflexivity are central to this dialogic process. Catalytic validity is one potential outcome from qualitative inquiry in education where participants consider how their participation in the process promoted or hindered their goals for transformation (Lather, 1986).

Participants of workers' centres may measure the impact of their ability to critique power relations through dialogic descriptions of the war of position in 'charla' discourse. Power/knowledge that advances their economic sustainability may then be further promoted. In Egypt, Herrera (2006) described a community-based participatory research project where she and colleagues worked together with a school leaders, teachers, parents and children to renovate and upgrade a girls elementary school in her Cairo neighbourhood. Something so simple as choosing the colour mauve instead of the traditional grey for the walls and carrying through the painting process in one classroom was a salvo in the war of position to signal participation and respect for the environment that lead to changes for the students, teachers and administrators. The war of position continued in the project since the school was divided into two shifts, where the morning shift of teachers and students were fully engaged in the school transformation and the afternoon shift was coolly neutral. Examination of informal discourse may uncover elements that persuaded or were barriers to participation or how their agency may lead to further action and reflection.

### **'Charla', 'currere' and curriculum in workers' centres**

'Currere' (Pinar, 1994) is the action of curriculum in lived experience. It is the summation of lessons from the school of life, 'La Universidad del la Vida' (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008), and the reflections that a person may make based on formal and informal experiences, the path of learning in evolving life. 'Charla' discourse is part of the path of learning, part of Latina/o repertoires of cultural practice. 'Charla' dialogic meaning-making may take place naturally within the family and social groups that are part of the Latina/o community in the US. Curriculum studies hold a promise of leading conscious reflection on communal praxis or group 'currere' in community-based workers' centres that takes place through encouraging and analysing 'charla' discourse.

By directing critical pedagogy to practical reflection, workers' centre participants may enhance their ability to form praxis critiquing current hegemony and developing new hegemony, thereby deepening their sustainability in communities. Mayo (2005) states, 'testing ideas about work against one's own work experience constitutes education through praxis, an important feature of the democratic approach to work promoted by Gramsci and others' (p. 9). Researchers may empirically analyse and demonstrate the role that dialogue plays in recognising a conception of the world and creating a war of position through critique to create social praxis. The skills developed and shared may have greater impact in the community utilising critical pedagogy to bring about change for social justice. In Greece, Matheoudakis (2005) conducted inquiry with recent immigrants and found respondents valued access to Greek language learning but many were unable to participate due to their urgent need to work. He recommended the development of language learning programmes designed in practical ways oriented to employment and everyday conversational interaction as a means to economic and social integration; immigrant associates, such as workers' centres, should participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of these projects.

Moving from a formal, institutional approach to curriculum that favours 'treatment' or 'intervention' as is often proposed in health disciplines, educational researchers need to encourage and listen to informal conversational discourse among community learning participants to uncover what working immigrants are doing now in their efforts to raise critique and form praxis. Participatory action research is a design for inquiry that is well suited to the goals of adult learning in workers' centres. Any idea for programming or skill development from a disciplinary perspective needs to be grounded in the beliefs, motivations and strategies of the leaders of workers' centres. As Street (1995) argues, there are diverse ideological and power dynamics imbedded in any kind of skill building or educational programme; 'natural' goals such as literacy or safety and health at work need to be problematised to uncover the hidden colonial and hegemonic assumptions about who sets the goals and how they are achieved.

## **Conclusion**

Watkins (1993) described African-American curriculum studies as 'orientations' to ethnic identity, creation of knowledge and capacities in sharing culturally authentic worldviews based on cultural practices, decisions regarding identity and agency, and stakes in relating to dominant hegemonic practices. Gutierrez & Rogoff (2003) guide the discussion of culture in education by clarifying their stance that inquiry should reflect a description of cultural practices

as individual or group repertoires and not as essential or reductive characteristics, 'essentialised and stable identities' (Sultana, 2008), linking individuals to membership in an ethnic group. Individuals participating in a culture have a multivariate experience depending upon the development of the culture, social group membership and individual capacities, facilities and intentionalities of cultural practice (Borg & Mayo, 2006). Educational researchers need to move from a stance of homogenising, creating, or accepting monolithic representations of culture, recognising that individual and cultural expressions are variable and that cultural contexts are highly dependent on interaction and location (Gutierrez & Correa-Chavez, 2006). Inquiry should seek to describe a continuum of variation in cultural practices through communities, social groups and individual repertoires.

To understand capacity and skill development, educational researchers turn their attention to the phenomenon of dialogue, discourse and language practice. Learning and skill development takes place in many settings and contexts throughout the life span, beginning in families and continuing in schools and community settings (Schubert, 1986; Street, 1995). Community-based organisations created by immigrants in the United States called workers' centres (Fine, 2005) organise and educate recent migrants to empower members seeking to integrate their activities in the economy and to gain skills in democratic participation.

Curriculum study through analysis of informal 'charla' discourse seeks to show how participants form their conceptions of the world, use language to uncover, understand, describe and critique hegemony, then plan and reflect on social praxis. Critical discourse analysis may also be fruitful in discovering the exchange of indigenous knowledge from regions south to south and enhancing interpretive analytical understandings in participatory interactions with communities to co-construct and engage in a 'counter discourse' to neo-liberal educational policy (Sultana, 2008). The lessons of immigrants and their learning facilitators of problem solving and adaptation to new circumstances should be valuable to educators, teacher educators and policy makers seeking authentic participation, capacity growth and sustainable development, particularly in the culturally hybridic Mediterranean region.

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