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**4) Consider Vik Muniz’ cultural project as depicted in Waste Land in relation to the readings on Freyre and Boal’s concepts of pedagogy and theater of the oppressed and participatory budgeting. How does this project demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of these theories and vice versa?**

Vik Muniz is an artist who began his career in Brooklyn and is known to incorporate strange materials into his art. The documentary*, Wasteland*, documents his three year project in which he spent in Rio de Janeiro’s largest landfill, Jardim Gramacho, at the time, to create portraits of the Catadores, garbage pickers who work tirelessly in the garbage field. One of the goals of Vik Muniz’s project was to bring social changes through by sharing the histories of the catadores through art, but also, through the three year process of the project, Muniz and the catadores were able to learn from each other and transform their perspectives and self. Vik Muniz’s project exemplified Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, which was an influential education social movement. In addition, the theories of Augusto Boal, theatre of the oppressed, was also shown through the project itself. Muniz Project demonstrated a multitude of strengths of Freire’s and Boal’s theories, and vice versa. Foremost, the project demonstrates the encouragement of critical thinking that is present in Freire’s ideas of increasing the recipients of levels of consciousness. Also, by having the pickers taking part in helping to create their self-portraits from recycled materials, Muniz is essentially facilitating the voices and thoughts of the people, thereby reflecting a strength of Boal’s strategy of incorporating the spectators into the play. In addition, the project also demonstrated the strengths of Freire’s technique of dialogue, through effective communication between Muniz and the Pickers. Next, the project practices the successful implication of the idea of codification in Friere’s pedagogy. Lastly, the project allowed the ACAMKG, the Association of Recycling Pickers of Jardim Gramacho, to fund a public campaign in effort to help the pickers which is similar to the participatory budgeting that allowed its citizen control over what the municipal budget was spent on. However, the project also displayed some weaknesses of the theories of Freire and Boal. A primary weakness is that when the theories of Freire and Boal are implemented in reality there isn’t necessarily a clear direction of progress, thus results are not always optimal, and thus the theories of Freire and Boal, when implemented, have rather local and limited social impact.

Muniz’s project was efficient in encouraging critical thinking of the participants, the Pickers or Catadores, through having them taking part in the creation of their own portraits out of recyclable materials. As such, this aspect of the project really outlined the theories of Freire’s level of consciousness, and how the project effectively raised their “level of consciousness” through participating in the project. The picker, Tiao, who was the president of the ACAMKG, the Association of Recycling Pickers of Jardim Gramacho, led cooperative movement to improve the fellow lives of his fellow workers. In the film, Tiao discussed the purpose of art. Before he thought art was practically useless, and he did not really understand it. After participating in the project, Tiao became more appreciative of artwork, and the influences it has on the people who not only helped created but also helped displayed the lives and hardships of the Pickers to the world. Through the project Tiao, learned to think more critically about art rather than just a simple picturesque object. Here, Tiao’s level of consciousness is at the level of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is the ability to understand the situation and “recognizes the nature the possibilities of responds and to act upon it” (Freire 83). Tiao displayed this level of consciousness already by creating the ACAMAKG to help his fellow pickers rather than sit there and accept the unfairness that is put upon his workers. He learns to appreciate art, and actively helped to make the recyclable portraits and used the money to help his fellow pickers. Tiao not only understands the situation of the unfairness towards the pickers but is “critically acting” towards a goal to solving it. The film also documented testimonies of people who were at a lower “level of consciousness. Isis was one of the pickers hated working at the dump, but did not know any other way to survive. Isis’s level of consciousness is that of magical consciousness, which “simply apprehends facts and attributes to them to a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit…”(Freire 83). Isis did not know of a world outside of garbage picking and testified in the film that she even hated working there. She didn’t know what else to do, so she thought she had no other choice besides working in the dump. At the point she was at the level of magical consciousness but could not perceive a different choice outside of picking garbage, and was under the impression that outside forces has only given her that single choice. However, Isis was able to become more critically aware, and by the end of the film, it was told that Isis left Jardim Gramacho and began working with recycled jewelry. She became aware of here situation and realized there are other options of life and took action to improve her life after the project was over. By acting critically, Isis was able to reach the level of critical consciousness. All in all, Muniz’s project helped the pickers of Jardim Gramacho to think more critically, and even improved their very lives, which features a major strength of Freire’s method of essentially “leveling up” their level of consciousness, so they are able to think and act for themselves in a healthy manner. Also, in turn the project was a perfect example of Friere’s theory of the importance of critical consciousness.

Vik Muniz’s incorporation of the pickers’ help in producing the art exemplified the strengths of the theories of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed by a giving medium to voice the ideas of the people through, primarily, participatory theatre. The idea of theatre participatory is that the actors would play out a scene that reflects some political or social issue, and they would stop the scene and have one of the spectators to join in and have them decide how the scene would play out. In one scene in the film, they talked about a major political scandal where these children in Brazil were shot by police officers, and was covered up by the government. To voice the discontent of the issue, the people would reenact the scene and further spread the corruption of the government. The people were able to fight against the media and television through spreading the word among the people through theatre. Similarly, by having the pickers working on the project and having their testimonies being documented, the project exemplified tactics used in the theatre of the oppressed by giving a medium for which the people can voice their discontent outside the influences of government control over the media. Whereas, the pickers were able to voice their content through art, the people in Rio were able to express their voices through participatory theatre. Giving a medium to voice the people’s opinions outside government influences was a key strength of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed that was displayed in Vik Muniz’s project.

Muniz’s project also demonstrated the strengths of Freire’s technique of “dialogue” as a tool to foster a close and working relationship between him and the pickers. Throughout the three years that Muniz spent in his project in Jardim Gramacho, he was able to become close to the pickers he worked with. Freire elaborates the idea of dialogue in which it involves a discussion between two people. “Whoever enters into dialogue does so with someone about something, and that something ought to constitute the new content of our proposed education” (Freire 84). Basically Freire hopes to encourage the discussion between people and foster the intercommunication amongst the student rather than just engage in “anti-dialogue,” which is where one person lectures or delivers communiqué (Freire 84). The effectiveness of the dialogue is illustrated the Muniz dialogue with his art subjects, the pickers. Rather than engaging in anti-dialogue, where he, the artist, is the one creating the art he has his art subjects, the pickers, help him in the creation of the art portraits. This collaborative form of dialogue bolster the creativity of Muniz because he was able to draw inspirations from the background and lives of the pickers, and have them incorporate different perspectives that wouldn’t have been possible if Muniz did not have the pickers work with him. Effectively, Muniz’s project demonstrated the ability of dialogue to help fully express the multitude of ideas through effective intercommunication and foster a learning relationship between Muniz and the pickers that was used to develop the project.

The project exemplified successful implementation of codification of Freire’s pedagogy.

Codifications is defined as, “the representation of typical existential situation of the group which one is working. These representations function as challenges, as code situation-problems containing elements to be decoded by groups with collaboration of the coordinator” (Freire 88). Basically codification is the process is given a situation and the coordinator and the students go through a process of discussion of said situation. In practice, the project essentially used the ideas of codification. Each of Muniz’s art project was a collaborative effort with each individual picker. For example, Suelem was one a picker with two kids who started working in Jardim Gramacho as a picker rather than becoming involved with prostitution and drug trafficking. In this situation Muniz and Suelem decided to do a portrait of Suelem and her kids to capture the pride that Suelem has for her work. Suelem was essentially decoding the situation she was in. She discussed about how garbage picking was a way for to have honest and independent work as opposed to prostitution and drugs. Muniz, inspired by her story was able to express that pride Suelem has for her work through art. The documentary of Suelem’s situation opened up perspectives to the larger problem of prostitution and drugs in Brazil, and thus de-codes the situation.

The collaborative project between Muniz and ACAMKG demonstrated a strength of the participatory budgeting, by in the project’s case, allowed an opportunity for the pickers to participate in an art project, where all proceeds would go directly to the ACAMKG. This allowed Tiao and his organization to fund a campaign to allow the betterment of the lives of the pickers.

The participatory budgeting method was a type of democratic process that was implemented in Brazil to give its citizen in certain areas to take part utilizing the municipal budget. The project raised over 250,000 U.S. dollars for the organization, which allowed Tiao to fund his campaign to help the lives of the pickers. For example, Zumbi, a male picker from the film collected books that were transported to the landfill. After the ACAMKG raised enough money from the project, Zumbi and the organization created a library at the ACAMKG’s office with 15 computers for the children. It was announced at the end of the film, that Jardim Gramacho started closing in 2012, and the ACAMKG used the money to provide education and skill training to help the pickers of Gramacho with their transition. The ACAMKG was a sort of participatory budgeting for the pickers, in which it allowed the workers themselves have access to the money made from the project. The project brought institutional changes such as new libraries and resources for the pickers after the closure of Jardim Gramacho that would have otherwise be impossible without the proceeds from the project. Clearly, the ACAMAKG is a clear successful example of the participatory budget because allowing its people to make decisions on the expenditure of a public budget, paves way for public institutional changes such as those new libraries and public resources, and also gives a sense of political freedom to the pickers to make decisions in the government.

Though the project highlighted the strengths of Freire’s and Boal’s theories, there were also apparent weaknesses to these theories when implemented in reality. Foremost, though the theories encouraged critical thinking and exploration of individual ideas. It lacks a clear direction of progress. The ideas explained in freire’s reader talks about how after the “active educational method helps a person to become consciously aware of his context and his condition as a human being as a Subject….At that point he will become politicized” (Freire 92). Basically, Freire believed after the person learns to think critically of the context and situation he is in, that said person would become politically active and strive for democratic progress. In reality, however the effects of the project were rather local and limited. The ACAMAKG’s money was used to better the lives of the pickers who participated in the project an helped in easing the transition after the closing of Jardim Gramacho in 2012, but the pickers did actually engage in higher political and democratic activity in effort for further social change. The project showed that though at theory Freire’s ideas were logical, in practice Freire theories are only effective up to an individual and local context. Boal’s strategy of participatory theory was a way to pave way a source of social events and government oppression to the illiterate people Rio de Janiro. Through that the people would be encouraged to act and bring social changes to the world. However, we saw that in the film, the workers party lost the election in 1994, mostly do the government controlled over social media and television propaganda. Understandably, the project was never meant to evoke some social revolution it does display the weaknesses of the theories when implemented into reality. Though the theories of Boal and Freire offer logical, insightful solution to social oppression, there are confounding variables that would inhibit the implementations of these theories in reality.

The project exemplified the theories of Freire and Boal. Though a glaring weakness of the theories imposed by Freire and Boal was that when implemented in reality, we saw that in the project the social changes were rather limited and local. However, the strengths of the theories outweigh its weaknesses. The ideas of level of consciousness and the importance of critical thinking, dialogue, and codification was exemplified through the process of working the project. Vice versa, the theories that were put in practice helped bring Muniz’s project to fruition. Boal’s ideas of from his theatre of the oppressed were also illustrated in the efforts of the project through the participatory effort by the pickers in helping out with Muniz’s project.

Citations

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