

Chapter 7

Critical Pedagogy and Place: Indigenous Austronesian Seafaring, Communication, and Education in Oceania

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ABSTRACT

To address potential processes of reconciliation and examine colonial and settler colonial situations, this chapter draws upon the author's role as a professor at the University of Guam within the larger Western-dominant space of academe and as an apprentice to Austronesian seafaring directly connected to cultural networks in the Marianas, Micronesia, and Oceania. They suggest that decolonization and its closely associated processes of demilitarizing involves an ontological shift through which the knowledge, testimonies, and insights of Indigenous populations are actualized in transformation-based practices of critical pedagogy. This chapter highlights ways to approach contemporary learning situations as every form of institutional learning occurs within the classroom setting and the social historical geography of the region. Ultimately, they construct an example of what critical Indigenous performance pedagogy might look like.

INTRODUCTION

To mention any structure of knowledge in the classroom is to situate that structure within the general institutional expectations of student recruitment, retention, and success after graduation as well as its community, national, and regional context. The setting of the teaching and learning described in this chapter, occurs at a public U.S. academic institution on Guåhan, a territory of the U.S. within a colonial situation of reduction and restriction, which remains in direct conflict with U.S. constitutional philosophy and policy (Statham, 2002, p.81). The island, population, and institutions of learning rely on and draw heavily from a strong tradition of Indigenous knowledge. Konai Helu Thaman (2003) notes that “as we gather to reflect on the past and help shape the future, we, particularly those of us whose identities are closely linked to Oceania, need to interrogate the images and the representations that we have inherited

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or are creating” (p.5). As contemporary critical paradigms such as postcolonial and poststructuralist theory encourage the reflexive interrogation of the way’s knowledge structures are used to obfuscate and marginalize certain perspectives; it is logical that we also do the work of examining those forms of knowing that have been erased, silenced, or left out of dominant social, political, and intellectual discourse. The methods of critical pedagogy and aspects of indigeneity, the researcher draws from here, are not extracurricular to the curriculum of communication studies or other academic fields in which they are located, but necessary to the learning processes of all models of thought and institutional content. Advocating for the rights of marginalized populations to move toward more inclusive sites of learning is an aspect of critical pedagogy, a problem-solving and dialectal approach to education based on the transformative processes involved in various forms of learning. In this regard, it has the potential when combined with Indigenous studies paradigms to as Thaman (2003) states, decolonizing curriculum (p.3).

Embedded in the researchers experiences as an academic, apprentice¹, and community member situated with the sociopolitical field of inquiry, they argue that placed-based pedagogy situates learning in the real-world negotiations of these intersections. The influence of Indigenous knowledge structures, specifically traditional Austronesian and Oceanic seafaring on course curriculum, cultural identity, and modes of social advocacy and communication, provide the space for a sustained critique of intellectual colonization. This opens practical and conceptual pathways that link differing and at times contradictory forms of learning. As students are asked to engage in course content, they are encouraged to enter global conversations concerning the ways such content impact the lives of their communities and their outlooks concerning the perspectives of their friends, families, and ancestors. As students move through institutions successfully and enter various civic communities and career positions, their educational foundations continue to effect larger audiences. While the historical contexts of intellectual imperialism, colonial domination, and settler displacement also continue to manifest themselves in realities that uphold these legacies, so will the development of the tools and desires to resist the ways these structures are normalized. Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) notes that *unity*, a central element of *dialogic* action along with *cooperation*, *organization*, and *cultural synthesis*, “occurs in a reality which is only authentically comprehended in the dialectic between the sub- and superstructure of the educational context” (p.175). This process of fostering a lifelong commitment to learning and leadership based on the negotiations of context, for Freire, partially materializes through a more dialectic approach to curriculum content and educational practices. Critical pedagogy, in this regard, starts with a consciousness of the geographical, social, and cultural situation in which education occurs (Freire, 1993, p.109).

The academic calendar at the *Unibetsedåt Guåhan*, labelled *Fanuchånan*, *Fañomnåkan*, *Tinalo*, and *Finakpo*, are CHamoru terms that more accurately describe the semesters in relation to the tropical seasons. Rainy season or “a place for rain” replaces fall and dry season or “a place for sunshine” replaces spring, while *Tinalo* or “in the middle” and *Finakpo* or “at the end” better represent the sessions not necessarily best described as summer and winter in the region. Former university president Robert Underwood (2018) led the efforts of this change, which underlines that the university is “the only U.S. accredited institution of higher education dedicated to serving Guam and the Micronesian region.” Such marking of cultural difference based on regionality is important in accuracy and Indigenous representation while functioning as a spatial and communication phenomenon. The ways educational interests and cultural perspectives are revealed through discourse is a vital element of most communication curriculum. The ways in which place is marked and ignored is also important as such discursive moves draw attention to forms of Indigenous knowledge and the ways in which colonial and settler colonial forces interact.

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