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Preparedness as public pedagogy

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Background

Security alerts, body searches and public information (such as the recent H1N1 / 'swine flu' information campaign) are ubiquitous features of everyday life in 2010. These banal but discomfiting rejoinders to be prepared have been critically analysed in terms of securitisation and governance but have rarely been of interest to educational policy analysis. In this paper preparedness is considered to be an element of public pedagogy. Public pedagogy refers to pedagogies outside of formal or informal education operating as popular cultural forms (Giroux, 2004). The paper draws on materials from the ESRC project 'Preparedness pedagogies and race: an interdisciplinary approach' considering the policy process around the construction of the 'Preparing for Emergencies' campaign (2004). This campaign which appeared as a leaflet (distributed to every household in the UK) and as a television campaign was a belated response to preparedness by the UK government post-9/11.

'Preparing for Emergencies' marked a shift in purpose for preparedness pedagogies. In its cold war guise, as civil defence, preparedness as pedagogy was concerned with community and latterly familial learning in survival against nuclear war. After losing focus in 'multiple hazards' preparedness in the 1980s its explicit focus on terrorism has more recently returned. 'Preparing for emergencies' occurs at the cusp of this change emphasising public pedagogy, individual and local community resilience. It is an apt case of how even the banality of preparedness can be infused with racial discourses.

Research Questions

The first research question addressed in this paper considers the ways in which preparedness materials can be interpreted as pedagogical, specifically as publically pedagogical. That is, in what ways do design considerations, delivery and use draw on pedagogical concepts as well as, or in addition to, policing, public information and security models of preparedness.

The second research question is, given that these materials are created within a white supremacist state (from a critical race theory perspective), what is their explicit or tacit function in the maintenance of white security and privilege? Related to this question is how the maintenance of white security and privilege intersects with the interests of capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity and able-ism.

Methods

As an identified and identifiable 'white' researcher within a white supremacist society the paper obviously reflects my material and ideological interests no matter what effort that I make it to appear that it does not. Epistemologically, the paper can only represent glimpses, or a partial truth, of writing 'against whiteness' from within. The paper therefore adopts what I call a 'fractal standpoint' (emerging from a new positionality) in writing from (my) white, working class position using critical race theory. That is, a standpoint that falls both against and within whiteness.

The results in the paper are based on ten interviews and two focus groups conducted between 2009-2010. The interviews and focus groups were orientated around a preparedness artefact being the UK government's 'Preparing for Emergencies' booklet published in 2004. Interviews were conducted with a previous home secretary, members of the cabinet office, private sector security consultants, civil servants and emergency planning officers. Where required subjects' details are anonymised and in some cases respondent validation of transcripts was used. Recordings were transcribed and critical

discourse analysis was used to consider the racialised thematic, emphasis and absences used in the data.

Frame

This paper frames the research within a public sphere that is increasingly being conceptualised as a pedagogical space. Bernstein's theory of the totally pedagogised society and more recent theories of public pedagogy consider that popular culture and cultural spaces are arenas of learning. Analytically, the paper considers preparedness materials and enactments to be a form of public pedagogy. Not only preparedness materials, but public spaces, security architectures and emotional repertoires are used as pedagogical forms of social control. Preparedness is framed in notions of active and community learning with associated forms of active and 'heroic' forms of citizenship in which individuals are expected to behave as representatives of the surveillance and violent state by identifying and even restraining terrorists.

These public pedagogies are contextualised through theories of white supremacy drawing on critical race theory and whiteness studies. Specifically, Neocleous' critique of liberalism (that the liberal state is dependent upon securitisation and a permanent state of emergency to secure property rights) is synthesised with critiques of liberalism, law and security within critical race theory. Public pedagogies of preparedness are shown to be necessary on an everyday basis for whiteness to retain its symbolic and material oppression of BME people.

Research findings

Two main research findings are considered in the paper. Firstly, that the interviews reveal a pedagogical thickening of preparedness. Multi-modal methods of delivery are considered to be optimal and a range of channels are used for delivery (television, the internet, radio). Pedagogies are increasingly designed to impact not only behaviours, but sentiments, values and emotions. 'Preparing for Emergencies' is intentionally 'thick' pedagogically.

Secondly, that pedagogical constructions around preparedness rely on the racialised 'other' in creating binary oppositions between the 'active / inactive citizen', the 'locally embedded and authentic / internationally driven and deceptive', and the 'heroic / anti-heroic subject and object of preparedness'.

References

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Neocleous, M. (2008) *Critique of Security*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.