Communicative space and the public sphere

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Overview

1. Communicative action and communicative space
2. Public spheres
3. Education
Jürgen Habermas

- **On communicative action**
  - A short version of the argument of Volume II can be found in:

- **On public spheres**
(1) Communicative action

- Communicative action occurs when we interrupt what we are doing to ask “What is going on here?”
- Communicative action is action directed towards reaching (1) intersubjective agreement about our ideas and the language we use, (2) mutual understanding about each other’s perspectives and points of view (= recognition), and (3) unforced consensus about what to do in the situation in which we find ourselves.

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Four validity claims: (a) Is it comprehensible? (b) Is it true (in the sense of accurate)? (c) Is it sincerely stated (i.e., non-deceptive)? (d) Is it morally-right and appropriate?
(1) Communicative action

- Habermas distinguishes ‘communicative action’, guided by communicative reason, from ‘strategic action’ (or ‘success-oriented action’) guided by functionalist reason.
- (Communicative action is like a social, rather than individual, form of Aristotle’s *praxis*, guided by the disposition of *phronēsis*. Strategic action is like an organisational form of Aristotle’s ‘technical action’, *poiēsis*, guided by instrumental reason, *technē*.)

Using the notion of communicative action critically

1. Have people reached agreement about the meaning of key ideas in their conversation – that is, have people reached *intersubjective agreement* about the language they are using in their action and in their research?
2. Have differences of perspective been *recognised* and *respected* – that is, have people reached *mutual understanding* of each other’s points of view about their action and their research?
3. Have people agreed on actions that could be taken in their situation, both as a step in the *action* for the group to take, and as a step in the *research* to be done to investigate their practices and their consequences – that is, have people reached *unforced consensus* about what to do?

“the public sphere distinguishes itself through a communication structure that is related to a third feature of communicative action: it refers neither to the *functions* nor to the *contents* of everyday communication but to the *social space* generated in communicative action” (1996, p.360).
Communicative space

• “Unlike success-oriented actors who mutually observe each other as one observes something in the objective world, persons acting communicatively encounter each other in a situation they at the same time constitute with their cooperatively negotiated interpretations. The intersubjectively shared space of a speech situation is disclosed when the participants enter interpersonal relationships by taking positions on mutual speech-act offers and assuming illocutionary obligations. Every encounter in which actors do not just observe each other but take a second-person attitude, reciprocally attributing communicative freedom to each other, unfolds in a linguistically constituted public space. This space stands open, in principle, for dialogue partners who are present as bystanders or who could come on the scene and join those present” (1996, pp.360-361).

(2) Public spheres: Ten features

1. Public spheres are constituted as actual networks of communication among actual participants.
2. Public spheres are self-constituted, voluntary and autonomous.
3. Public spheres come into existence in response to legitimation deficits.
4. Public spheres are constituted for communicative action and for public discourse.
5. Public spheres are inclusive and permeable.
Ten features of public spheres (continued)

6. In public spheres, people usually communicate in ordinary language.
7. Public spheres presuppose communicative freedom (to speak, to listen, to observe, or to leave).
8. Public spheres generate communicative power.
9. Public spheres generally have an indirect, not direct, impact on social systems.
10. Public spheres are often associated with social movements.

Public spheres under threat

- By administrative and economic systems
  - *(Between Facts and Norms, 1996, p.369)*
- By lobby groups
- By the media
(3) **Education**

- Education is a lifeworld process (as well as occurring in the context of the system process of *schooling*).
- At its base, education occurs not just through strategic action, but also, crucially, through communicative action.

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**Education**

- Education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into (1) forms of understanding that foster individual and collective self-expression, (2) modes of action that foster individual and collective self-development, and (3) ways of relating to one another and the world that foster individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards both the good for each person and the good for humankind.
### A theory of education

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The project: Education and the good for each person

**Education for living well**

The project: Education and the good for humankind

**Education for a world worth living in**

### The theory of practice architectures and a theory of education

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**Education for a world worth living in**
A critical use of the definition of education

- Do our current *practices*, and the *practice architectures* of our educational institutions, unreasonably limit and constrain
  - the way people *understand* things (or who gets to understand what), and their opportunities for individual and collective *self-expression*? Do they help secure a *culture based on reason*?
  - the way people are able to *do* things (or who gets to do what), and their opportunities for individual and collective *self-development*? Do they help secure *productive and sustainable economies and environments*?
  - the ways people are able to *relate to one another and the world* (or who gets to relate to whom and what), and their opportunities for *self-determination*? Do they help *secure just and inclusive societies*?

(4) Creating a public sphere and identifying a shared felt concern in critical participatory action research

- It’s hard to decide *who* should be in the public sphere until you know *what* you want to investigate, and
- it’s hard to decide *what* you want to investigate until you know *who* will be involved in the investigation (in the public sphere).
- So: we need to decide these things together, iteratively, through *conversation* conducted in the form of *communicative action*—oriented towards intersubjective agreement about the language they use, mutual understanding of one another’s points of view, and unforced consensus about what to do.
Public spheres in critical participatory action research

- ‘Participation’ in CPAR not solely determined by who participates in the action, but by who participates in both the action and the research – in the public sphere in which a shared felt concern is investigated.
- In the new Planner, we have encouraged the formation of public spheres that include the variety of those involved in and affected by a practice, rather than groups with the same roles (not groups composed only of teachers, or only of students, for example). Thus, we give examples of public spheres that include students, teachers, principals and others (district consultants, school custodians and parents, for example).

We encourage teachers, students, principals and others to begin by making critical use of our definition of education to identify legitimacy deficits

- Do our current practices, and the practice architectures of our educational institutions, unreasonably limit and constrain
  - the way people understand things (or who gets to understand what), and their opportunities for individual and collective self-expression? Do they help secure a culture based on reason?
  - the way people are able to do things (or who gets to do what), and their opportunities for individual and collective self-development? Do they help secure productive and sustainable economies and environments?
  - the ways people are able to relate to one another and the world (or who gets to relate to whom and what), and their opportunities for self-determination? Do they help secure just and inclusive societies?
Who participates in what?

- **Teachers** teaching, and reflecting on their teaching practices.
- **Students** learning, and reflecting on their learning practices.
- **Professional learners** learning, and reflecting on their learning practices.
- **Leaders** leading, and reflecting on their leading practices,
- **Researchers** researching, and reflecting on their researching practices.

Frequently, the same people occupy two or three or more of these roles...

Practices are sometimes interdependent in ecologies of practices – e.g., in the Education Complex of practices.
The interdependence of practices suggests the interdependence of practitioners: candidates for joining a public sphere

- A university researcher, academic partner
- Some professional developers/professional learners
- Some leaders
- Some teachers
- Some students
- Educational research and evaluation
- Teachers' classroom educational practice (teaching)
- Students' academic and social practices (learning)
- Educational leadership and administration

along with others affected by the practices involved – parents? employers? community members? graduates? past students? people who left the program?

The public sphere for the Braxton High School (Canada) recycling project

- Rhonda Nixon, district consultant
- The school principal
- Jane, a science teacher and other teachers
- Ten Grade 11/12 science students
- Rhonda Nixon, lead researcher for the district critical participatory action research program
- Educational research and evaluation
- Teachers' classroom educational practice (teaching)
- Students' academic and social practices (learning)

along with others affected: school custodial staff (janitors), Students' Council, other students (surveyed, interviewed), district consultant in science and environmental education, parents (invited to comment).
The public sphere for the Braxton High School (Canada) recycling project

Ten Grade 11/12 science students

The school principal

Jane and two other science teachers

School custodial staff (janitors)

Rhonda Nixon, research facilitator and lead researcher for the district critical participatory action research program

Others affected: Students’ Council, other students (surveyed, interviewed), district consultant in science and environmental education, parents (invited to comment).

Questions? Comments?

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