Chapter 10
The Digital Third World, Digital Democracy, and Cloud Pedagogy: Learning from Multilingual Bloggers

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ABSTRACT
Cloud computing and Cloud technology has generated teachers’ and scholars’ attention as a viable alternative to traditional education. However, the discourse and rhetoric around Cloud—computing, education, pedagogy—seems to romanticize the potential of Cloud technology, ignoring, consequently, questions about language, power, and ideology. This chapter reintroduces those issues. Then it discusses blogs by multilingual writers that not only provide teaching materials free of access but also show how language, translation, and transnational exchanges get mediated. I show connection between the digital Third World, issues of equality and access that constitute part of the discussion around Cloud education, and offer a few takeaways from blogs as a democratic exercise. Finally, I discuss what Cloud pedagogy can learn from recent discussion in translingualism.

THE (DIGITAL) THIRD WORLD, DIGITAL DEMOCRACY, CLOUD PEDAGOGY AND BLOGGING

This paper will draw attention to what I am calling rather loosely and descriptively the digital Third World in connection with access to digital resources and what has recently been popularized as cloud pedagogy. When I say descriptively I do not mean that description is apolitical, un-ideological, and neutral—in fact all descriptions are discursive products and highly implicated in disciplinary practices and the politics that shape their language and discourse. Cloud pedagogy—if we can use this term to mean the pedagogy
that makes use of cloud technology, for example, by using resources like YouTube videos, blogs, and podcasts—has been hailed as a positive development that has the potential to democratize education. In this paper, I argue that while this possibility remains, those working to develop cloud technology to the aid of cloud pedagogy as an alternative to traditional institutional teaching need from the very beginning to account for such questions as who develops the materials, for whose benefit, who decides what counts as important, what cultural, linguistic, class, gender and racial factors play roles in such pedagogy, questions that have remained at the heart of critical engagement for scholars across various disciplines.

That instructors, students and institutions around the world have benefitted from accessible media platforms, software and virtual spaces in not new anymore. Cloud technology has recently been known to offer new possibilities for education. Writers invested in cloud computing have consistently pointed out that virtualized resources such as cloud technology can have significant impact on the educational future. Ercan (2010), for example, claims that cloud is “an excellent alternative for educational institutions … under budget shortage” (p. 939). Stein, Ware, Laboy, and Schaffer (2012) also speak positively; that cloud computing offers an opportunity to improve pedagogy: “the Cloud can deliver services such as remote access to learning tools in a cost effective manner to school systems struggling with reductions in local and state funding” (p. 235). This and similar discussions, however, tend to focus more on technological aspects than on what I have underscored above, such questions as who decides what counts, for whose benefit and so on.

When I say the Third World in the title, I mean it to work as a critique of what can be called the Third Worldism/Wordism, both as a desire to homogenize diverse energies and impulses within the Third World and then to subsume those into the dominant in the name of globalization of everything. This paper therefore is a critique of the desire and anxiety of the traditional centers to create homogenizable Others as static, unwilling to change, develop, or progress (to be connected, netted, or wired in the digital sense), and by the same token, frontier, virgin or unexploited land, space, and mind, to be colonized. In that spirit, I will use the term “Third World” in so far as it carries the sense of energy of resistance and decolonizing spirit, not in the sense of an insular or strategic third world nationalism, not even in the sense of Western Marxism, which conceals, in its preoccupation with economism, internal rifts, fissures and contradictions.

Also the philosophical and idealistic category “democracy” has now assumed the political and meta-narrative sense of Euro-American democracy modeled after Enlightenment rationality, which roughly carries the meaning of some fundamental principles or set of rules of governing people. This form of democracy is increasingly functioning more as a panoptical machine to normalize and contain human actions and relations rather than allowing an unprecedented, unlegislated set of relations and actions to emerge. A democracy that does not allow other systems that it deems undemocratic deserves criticism. By digital democracy I mean real diversity and plurality in thinking, believing, valuing, and interacting. In discussing cloud computing and other resources such as blogging, I will be interested in exploring how these resources could potentially democratize learning spaces. The pedagogical democracy I am looking at basically relates to access and equality and is concerned with the material and the linguistic.

This chapter forms part of my plan to work on a book length project in which I wish to analyze the language matters of the multilingual speakers based both in the metropolis and the periphery but realized in a common space of blogosphere. Blogs have lately been hailed as democratic sites of knowledge sharing and knowledge making, allowing people to self (publish), share ideas, and most importantly campaign for a cause, social action and movement (check, for example, Idle No More). With its popularity and ease of access, many traditional print media such as news and journals have started adopting