Critical Pedagogy and Language Learning

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Abstract

In contemporary scholarly discussion, the theoretical concept "critical" is the center of attention of many scholars. Scholars have managed to generate significant intuition for the enrichment of theory construction. Critical pedagogy is defined in different names such ascritical work,transformative pedagogy, participatory approach, emancipatory literacy, critical education, pedagogies of resistance,liberatory teaching, radical pedagogy, post-modem pedagogy, border pedagogy, and pedagogies of possibility. Teaching under the CP paradigm is always politically engaging, and not neutral as in critical thinking, because CP aims to lead to social change. Proponents of critical approaches to second language teaching are interested in relationship between language learning and social change. From this standpoint, language is not simply a means to express or communicate; instead, it is a product that is constructed by the ways language learners recognize themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their potentialities for the future.In actual fact as Morgan represents, "politically engaged critiques of power in everyday life, communities, and institutions" areexactly what are needed to develop critical pedagogies in language education. This paper aims at introducingcritical pedagogy as a teaching method, the tenets inherent in it, applying critical pedagogy in EFL and ESL environments and the critics received in this respect.

Introduction

In the education prospect, critical pedagogy is a relatively old concept, primarily uncovered by prominent Brazilian educator Paulo Freirein hisbook titled "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed in the 1960s and 70s."Freire was especially critical of capitalistic oppressors (feudal landowners), and wanted to empower the oppressed (peasants working for landowners). Freire's (1970) problem-posing model of education endeavored for empowerment as a goal of education and he criticized the traditional education assumes learners as empty agents who receive knowledge from teachers. Fundamental aspect of critical pedagogy is to overcome discouraging life situations by raising awareness of the power relations embedded in society.

Just asdiscussed by critical discourse analysts, the reason for minority marginalization is resulting from the power imbalance in society. Auerbach (1995)asserts that power is unequally and unfairly distributed in society, and the dominant classes exercise powerunder obligation and through consent. Hereby, the oppressor and the oppressed will always exist. According to Giroux (2001), critical pedagogueshypothesize that educational institutions are indeed a part of societies with uneven distribution of power that they are political sites and they are not neutral, therefore they tend to manifest and reproduce societal power imbalance.

The educational philosophy of Paulo Freireproposes that education aims at developing critical thinking by presenting the people's situation to them as a problem so that they can discern, think about, and act on it. In this regard, the life situation of the learnersshould be the primary content of curriculum and dialogue forms the context of the educational situation. Students use learning materials produced by themselves and the teacher engages in the process of knowing as a learner among learners. This line of curriculum theory compares its preferred practices with those of what it calls traditional or *banking* education.

Reading this concept, critical pedagogy specialists refer to teaching that is merely the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students.

By contrast, in the problem-posing model of critical pedagogy the teacher participates in critical dialogue along with the students, contributing them to identify the subjects they themselves see as problematic, and rather than solving problems, reflect back these problems (problem-posing) as the incentive for a process of collaboratively constructed knowledge. During the dialogical engagement between teacher and students and students themselves, the life experiences of students are underlined through which the students begin to recognize each other as sources of knowledge. While producing and evaluating their learning materials, students are engaged in the decision-making process in class, which in turn results in their own decision-making outside the classroom (Auerbach, 1995; McLaren, 1988;Shor, 1996).

Ira Shor defines critical pedagogy as:

> "Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional cliches, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse". (Empowering Education, 129)

From this perspective the teacher works to lead students to question ideologies and practices considered oppressive (including those at school), and encourage libratory collective and individual responses to the actual conditions of their own lives.

Critical Pedagogy as a Teaching Approach

Critical pedagogy does not ignore nor replace well-developed teaching methods. Instead, it adds critical quality to the existing textbooks and everyday instruction. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach attempts to help students question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate. This to say that, it is a theory and practice of helping studentsachieve critical consciousness. Luke and Gore (1992) pointed out that critical pedagogy is not single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment and liberation but should be able to evolve in response to local contexts and needs.

Critical teaching is principled and it has a coherent view of society and the role of power in forming relationships in society. The critical language educator relates knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to knowledge of social problems and how to act to solve these problems. Learners are active in the classroom and in society in critical pedagogy. We focus on a critical pedagogy in teaching education because of the goal of preparing citizens for participation in a democratic society.

It is not always easy to distinguish critical pedagogy, active learning, and the learner-centered or learning-centered approaches. Each is predicated through student engagement and suggests involvement via such strategies including collaborative and cooperative learning and problem-based learning. Whether or not a teacher is philosophically content with the principles of critical pedagogy, applying it in the classroom presents teachers with the same dilemmas that become apparent when using active learning or learner-centered approaches.

Tenets Inherent in Critical Pedagogy

Although no one can present a procedural guideline for applying critical pedagogy in a program of teacher education there are three tenets that are inherent in a critical pedagogy. These tenets are viewpoints statedby several critical theorists including Giroux, McLaren, Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Dillard, hooks, and others.

These three tenets are as the followings:
   a) *reflection upon the individual's culture or lived experience;*
   b) *development of voice through a critical look at one's world and society, which takes place in dialogue with others;*
   c) *transforming the society toward equality for all citizens through active participation in democratic imperatives;*

The language class is a place where people learn new ways of communication and understand the world through a specialperspective(Wink, 1999).Suppose that one's understanding of the world is affected by one's views and values, any practice of language learning and teaching is intrinsically political and socially constructed (Auerbach 1995; Pennycook, 1989).As a result, the macro social, cultural, and political contexts where the learner is situated should be integrated in the curriculum, and teachers should play an envisaging role in critical educational practice. The student often initiates as a member of the group or process (such as religion, national identity, cultural norms, or expected roles) he or she is critically studying. Afterthe studentreaches the point of communication where he or she begins to see present society as deeply problematic, the next behavior prompted is sharing this knowledge, paired with an aim to change the oppressive nature of the society. A good picture of this development from social member to disagreeing to radical teacher/learner is presented in both Paulo Freire's book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and bell hooks' book "Teaching to Transgress." An earlier proponent of a more active classroom, where students direct the epistemological method as well as the actual object of inquiry is the late Neil Postman, who, in his "Teaching as a Subversive Activity"offers creating a class where students themselves are fully under control of the syllabus, class activities, and grading.

A critical pedagogy is required to manage the complex social system of the classroom and identify the need of individual students. There is always disorganization regarding teacher's role in the society: transmission or transformation.In fact, this issueoverlooks the experiences and abilities of the students. Their creativity is lost and become more dependent upon the teachers.Now thepedagogical paradigm has been moved towardtransformation and teachers can cooperate withthe students and other stakeholders, e.g. communitypeople, colleagues, educationists, educationadministrators etc. to transform. Critical pedagogy calls forcooperation. Teachers are the agents who work incomplex social sites and who have the power to helptransform. But it is difficult to practice it in existingschool environment. Firstly, weneed to perceive that knowledge and productionof knowledge might be made less external so thattransformation is possible even if it takes a longertime.

Critical pedagogy encourages teachers to consider theirpractice critically and complexities of the educationalprocess through various viewpoints. Moreover, critical pedagogues share an end of academic success for each student, demonstrated in the preparation and experience of children to be active citizens in a fully democratic society. For critical pedagogues, the goal of education is for social transformation towards an entirely democratic society, where
(a) each comment is shared and heard in an equal way;
(b) one critically investigate oneself and one's society and;
(c) one acts upon decreasing social discriminations;

Critical ESLPedagogy
Through the perception that society is actually unequal and unfair, critical approaches to second Educators of English as a Second Language (ESL) who believe in critical pedagogy find it significant to adapt the theory of critical pedagogy into their curriculum and syllabusesparticularly as ESL teaching mostly deals with racial and language minorities (i.e. immigrants and foreign students). According to the studies conducted on second language learner identities by Norton, 2000; MaKay and Wong, 1996; Miller, 2003, some second language learners, without social, communicative, and linguistic competencies, and often with damaged identities, face hardships living in anew country. Language teaching and learning must be connected to the objectives of educating students, to understand why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way (Simon, cited in Morgan, 1998). Critical ESL pedagogy is the "pedagogy of hope" (Freire, 1992).

Critical EFL Pedagogy
Whileeducators in the fields of literacy education, ESL, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have discussed a great number of articles and descriptions of the actual application of critical pedagogy (e.g.Norton and Toohey, 2004;Benesch, 2001;Auerback, 1995), much less has been reported in the EFL context, since critical pedagogy has been set aside as culturally inappropriate specially for the East Asian contexts (Crooks 2010). One of the few studies carried out in an EFL context is reported by Shin and Crooks (2005). The study investigated Korean high school students' responses to critical dialogues and non-authoritarian interactions with teachers. The results of the study indicated that students were not resistant to the materials including critical topics, and that East Asian students are capable of coping with criticalapproaches.

EFL learners arequite different from ESL learners, since many of them involve the category of future bilinguals. Within the EFL context, learners come from different backgrounds of gender, sexuality, social classes, and the endeavors within micro-relations of power always exist. In addition, when the learners are actually the elite members of the society who exercise power, critical pedagogy might play an important role in education since the language learning could be a tool for them to understand how to dominate societal power, how to convert that power to the less-powerful, and how to exercise their influence in a right way to make the world a better and more equal place.

EFL critical pedagogy might be the "pedagogy of possibility" (Simon, 1992). Crooks (2010) firmly points outs that more reports of the actual application of EFL critical pedagogy are required. Increased sensitivity to diversity, to different types of oppression, is likely to make radical pedagogical initiatives more relevant in a variety of classrooms, especially in EFL contexts.

Critiques of Critical Pedagogy
Possibly the first critique to take into consideration is that which comes from within. The very nature of critical pedagogy requires a constant examination of its philosophies, desires and practices. Giroux and McLaren (1995)make their peers remember thatmany current procedures in critical pedagogy are integrated in the epidemic weaknesses of a theoretical project unduly related to developing a language of critique. Critical pedagogy is immersed in a posture of moral indignation toward the iniquities created in American public schools. Unfortunately, this one-sided emphasis on critique is parallel to the lack of theoretical and pragmatic discourse upon which to ground its own insight of society and schooling and to form the direction of a critical approach.
Critical Pedagogy has been subject to similar and identical criticisms. Claims that Critical Pedagogy is "rationalistic" that its denotedreliance on "open dialogue" indeedcovers a closed conversation that it excludes issues and voices that other groups bring to educational encounters, have been stated with some force (Ellsworth 1989; Gore 1993).

Jennifer Gore's (1993) critique of critical pedagogy presents that there aretwo critical pedagogies, or at least two distinct components within critical pedagogy and these components are diagnosable via looking at individual figures who have dominated the discourse of each of the components.She defines this component as contributing to "pedagogical practice." On the contrary, Gore is more severe regarding the approach taken by those who promote a 'pedagogical project', particularly Giroux and McLaren. She asserts their approach is through articulation of an abstract political insight and should not be called "critical *pedagogy*, but critical *educational theory*." Gore believesthat the main concern here is failure to prescribe specific practices for use in classrooms. The result is thattheir pedagogy might be seen to limit its audience to those readers who have the time, energy, or tendency to struggle with it and subsequently constricts its political potential.

Obviously, Gore (1992) is concerned about the realities for teachers and the tendency of some critical pedagogues to construct abstracted theories that lack applicability. The purpose of this same criticism is the notions of empowerment, a central concept in critical pedagogy. These too have been characterized by abstract theories which impose a requirement on teachers to do the work of empowering, to be the agents of empowerment, without providing much in the way of concrete guidance for that work.

Freire himself, as noted earlier, challenged every teacher to focus on the realities of students' lives and experiences and to construct learning experiences that articulate with these. There is a responsibility on the teacher to create, adapt or specify the appropriate strategies for the particular context. Gore might argue that some critical pedagogy theorists could do more to acknowledge the realities of educational contexts rather than dwell in the rarified terrain of the theoretical.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992), writing from a feminist perspective, articulates similar concerns. She suggests that the term 'critical' is a "repressive myth that perpetuates relations of domination" and hides "the actual political agendas namely antiracism, antisexism, anti-elitism, anti-heterosexism, anti-ableism, anti-classism, and anti-neoconservatism." Ellsworth proceed to claim thattheorists of critical pedagogy have failed to initiate any meaningful analysis of or program for reformulating the institutionalized power imbalances between themselves and their students, or of the necessarily paternalistic project of education itself. Further concerns are addressed to critical pedagogues who she suggests are always implicated in the very structures they are trying to change.

Feminist critique is not the only voice heard in the argument over critical pedagogy. Bowers (1987) has examined the work of Freire and his followers and, while acknowledging the significant contribution made by Freire, Bowers argues that his pedagogy "is based on Western assumptions about man, freedom, progress, and the authority of the rational process." Moreover, Bowers suggests that Freire's pedagogy contributes to a modernizing way of thinking, and thus runs the risk of strengthening Western values and assumptions. The problem with Freire'sposition is not that he favors critical reflection but that he makes it the only legitimate source of knowledge and authority. Also, more potentially dangerous is the use of dialogue as a tool for liberty. Bowers contends that the mode of thought involved in dialogue shifts the status of authority from that of community and tradition to the individual who unifies thought and action in a new praxis. This analysis undoubtedlydemonstrates a conflict between the focus of Freirean pedagogy and what Bowers perceives as the potential outcome. Essentially, Bowers is critiquing much of the literature of critical pedagogy which has developed out of the philosophies of Freire. Pinar *et al.* (1996) notify against directing too much criticism at Freire himself but suggest it is better administered at the political theorists who have appropriated his work.

Bowers (1987) has further criticized critical pedagogy in writing from an ecological stance. From this viewpoint, his criticism aimed at Marxist educational perspectives which, he contends, have failed to address the issues of the nature of the world and the ecological crisis. Bowers believes that the focus on the particular has led to a lack of focus on the wider issues.

Postmodern Critique
The final critique to be taken into account is that from a postmodern perspective, even though the term itself and associated concepts are complicated to define and, indeed, cover a broad range of perspectives. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with all the extensivesubjects related to critical pedagogy and postmodernism but an overview of the relationship between the two is effective. It is interesting to consider the problems inherent in this relationship. In many ways there are aspects of the two that are fully consistent, or at least there are overlapping practices. The goals related to resistance of oppression so strongly rooted in the history of critical pedagogy are not the same goals of postmodernism, where analyses of texts and multiplicity of approaches are uppermost.
Burbules and Rice (1991) try to investigate the whole issue of a postmodern critique of critical educational studies. They suggest that there are difficulties inherent in any comprehensive critique beginning with the fact that a definitive interpretation of postmodernism itself is difficult. However, they extract three recurring ideas that presented in the literature: the rejection of absolutes; the perceived saturation of all social and political discourses with power or dominance; and the celebration of difference. Having defined these ideas as the key principles, they go on to suggest that there are in fact two varieties of postmodernism that adopt fundamentally different positions relative to modernism itself and they call these two trends postmodernism and antimodernism.

In a similar vein, many critics have suggested that the preoccupation with class issues that appears most commonly in Marxist discourses often results in other issues (race, gender, sexual orientation) being significantly ignored (McLaren, 2000). A rightful criticism can be developed both from a feminist and postmodern position that other voices and concerns are not addressed by the promises made through some components of critical pedagogy (Burbules&Berk, 1999).

Weiler (1991)has noted in very clear terms of the tensions she perceives between the modernist tendencies of critical pedagogy and postmodernism. She writes from the perspective of a feminist influenced by postmodern theories who wantsto maintain the intuition of social justice and transformation that underlies liberatory pedagogies. Her intention is to build on rather than reject the universal goals of liberation which, she claims, do not always address the specificity of people's lives. She believes that these ideals do not directly analyze the contradictions between conflicting oppressed groups or the ways in which a single individual can experience oppression in one sphere while being privileged or oppressive in another. Further, Weiler suggests that the assumptions of a collective experience of oppression do not address the realities of the classroom. Attempting to name and struggle against oppression might be difficult if not impossible in the classroom because of the range of emotions that are engaged and even those best intentioned may well retreat to more traditional practices rather than face the various issues involved. The main question to confront is that of commonality of experience of oppression and the need to define it in the "context of historically defined struggles. In relation to this particular issue, Weiler challenges Freire's pedagogy and his premise that all people are subjects and knowers of the world.

She claims that he does not confirm the possibility of a contradictory experience of oppression and infers that she is arguing for a more situated theory of oppression and subjectivity, and for the need to take the contradictions of such universal claims of truth or processinto consideration.

Conclusion

Many educational changes occur during the 20th century were brought about by historical facts, social movements, and political agendas. Politics is a starting point of changes in education. Comments that spokeabout peace, imperialism, racism, feminism, and other social issues came from differentareas of the world, and individuals, like Apple in the USA and Freire in Brazil, launchedsocial and educational reforms that would reach the problem in its source, sociopoliticalinterests. Taken together, critical pedagogy was started out of the need of reforming education in a way that it would approve the influence of the social and political elements existent in each educational context.

In case that critical pedagogy integrates in our everyday teaching it can possibly change the way the world is seen,organized, induced, and the ways lives are lived by minorities or in regions of the world wherethe social lacks organization. Critical pedagogy expects people to be independentlearners, thinkers, and doers. The main tenets of critical pedagogy are that no education ispolitically neutral, and all education should be empowering and providestudents with a model of critical behavior they can take with them to the outside world. The information collected on critical pedagogy indicates that critical pedagogy is anintricate and complicated tapestry made up of various colors and shapes. It is the outcome ofdiverse comments that come from different areas of the world andfrom people of numerous races and color. However, critical pedagogues share one common goal"to fight againstimperialism and social and political injustices through education."

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