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INCORPORATING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This literature review aims at dealing with some issues to be considered at the moment of thinking about the incorporation of critical pedagogy in the EFL classroom. In such way, it explores different points of view given by several authors who have been working deeply on this topic. Thus, it compiles and discusses the most relevant issues in relation to the definition of critical pedagogy, education as reproduction, English language and critical pedagogy, critical pedagogy into practice, the role of the teacher, and the incorporation of critical pedagogy in the classroom. Finally, critical pedagogy is tackled in this document taking into account that it is necessary to look for teaching

Resumen

Esta revisión bibliográfica, tiene como objetivo tratar con temas a tener en cuenta a la hora de pensar en la incorporación de la pedagogía crítica en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. De tal manera, explora diferentes puntos de vista dados por algunos autores que han trabajado sobre este tema a fondo y reúne y discute los temas más relevantes en relación con: la definición de la pedagogía crítica, la educación como reproducción, el idioma Inglés y la pedagogía crítica, la pedagogía crítica en la práctica, el rol del docente y la incorporación de la pedagogía crítica en el aula. Finalmente, la pedagogía crítica se aborda en este documento teniendo en cuenta que es

approaches which go against the conventional language classrooms and the traditional teaching and learning processes that do not have a transformational effect on learners.

Key words: critical pedagogy, education as reproduction, role of the teacher, English foreign language classroom.

Defining Critical Pedagogy

Different definitions have been given about what is critical pedagogy. Morgan (2000) pointed out that Paulo Freire, the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy, is known as the most celebrated critical educator. For Freire (1974), critical pedagogy is a way to develop students' ability to think critically about their situation and allow them to recognize connections, between their individual problems and experiences and the social context in which they are embedded. Freire believed voice, social transformation and agency should be major goals of education. Sadeghi (2005) argued against traditional methods where educators perpetuate the relations of power, domination and authority in the classroom, while the learners remain passive recipients of knowledge. Materials alienate learners from learning and facilitate a process of cultural invasion, because the learner is uncritically exposed to ideas imposed from a dominant culture.

Shor (1987) defined critical pedagogy as a radical approach to education that seeks to transform oppressive structures in society

necesario buscar enfoques de enseñanza contrarios a las aulas convencionales de idiomas, la enseñanza tradicional y procesos de aprendizaje que no tienen un efecto transformador sobre los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: pedagogía crítica, educación como reproducción, rol del profesor, salón de clase de lengua extranjera.

using democratic and activist approaches to teaching and learning. Even though the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is built on a critique of the reproductive process, the most significant defining feature of critical pedagogy is its emphasis on the emancipatory potential of education.

Pennycook (1990) points out that critical pedagogy considers how education can provide individuals with the tools to better themselves and strengthen democracy, to create a more democratic society, and thus to reformulate education in a progressive process of collective and individual change.

According to McLaren (2003) critical pedagogy shifting its focus on social class to include issues such as: race, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, globalization and other elements. Thus, he pointed out that the democratic character of critical pedagogy is defined through a set of basic assumptions, which holds that knowledge, power, values, and institutions must be made available to critical scrutiny, be understood as a product of human labor, and evaluated in terms of how they might open up or close down democratic practices and experiences.

Canagarajah (2005) pointed out that “critical pedagogy is not a set of ideas, but a way of ‘doing’ learning and teaching». This definition puts critical pedagogy squarely in the classroom and leads to view how teachers interact with students and how students treat one another, while negotiating institutional and societal expectations. Thus, it is totally related to the principle of problem posing education, introduced as a way of avoiding the banking model in which teachers are active and students are passive in the learning process.

All of those scholars have much in common in their understandings of critical pedagogy. Thus, I reckon at this point that it is possible to notice how critical pedagogy provides principles and suggestions to foster the education, and it is the responsibility of schools and teachers to recognize and address their teaching and learning processes to face with power relationships and starts society transformation.

Wink (2005) pointed out that critical pedagogy is a natural response to current human conditions. Throughout human history the search for new unexplored boundaries, new territories, and new possibilities has been a constant goal and freedom has been the principle that guides this goal. I believe that school is one of the most important institutions through which students can enrich themselves. Critical Pedagogy is a natural response to the human condition that considers the school as the site to save society from catastrophe. As McLaren (2003) stated “schools should be sites for social transformation and emancipation, places where students are educated not only to be critical thinkers, but

also to view the world as a place where their actions might make the difference “ (p. 187).

Summing up, critical pedagogy is about linking learning to social change, education to democracy, and knowledge to acts of intervention in public life. Critical pedagogy encourages students to learn to register dissent, as well as to take risks in creating the conditions for forms of individual and social agency that are conducive to a substantive democracy. Part of the challenge of any critical pedagogy is making schools and other sites of pedagogy reflective about how students can be empowered to transform their community in important ways and how they have the potential to effect change enabling emancipation through personal and social transformation.

Education as reproduction

Apple (1990) pointed out that a fundamental premise of critical pedagogy is that systems of formal education in modern society function, in part, to maintain and reproduce an exploitative capitalist system and this is accomplished when schools are used to advance the class interests of economic elites at the expense of non-capitalist classes.

Scholars working within the tradition of critical pedagogy have identified several disciplinary practices within the classroom that contribute to the reproduction process. For example, Apple (1990) points to the existence of a hidden curriculum whereby students are socialized and behaviorally conditioned to accept hierarchical structures of power. In the same sense, Shor (1992)

describes the authoritarian classroom where students are conditioned to become passive, conformist, and obedient members of society, thus generating easily manipulated workers and passive, apathetic citizens.

Reproduction also occurs when teachers promote a set of cultural ideologies that serve to legitimate existing class dominance. For example, students are often taught in schools around the world that individual decisions and actions (individualism) are the basis of success and upward mobility. The lesson here is that people are ranked in society according to their relative merit and that inequalities in income, wealth, and power are the result of their individual actions.

Giroux (2003) pointed out that another example is the promotion of free market competition or the belief that individual pursuit of profit will produce collective benefits. It is an obvious cornerstone of capitalist ideology. In addition to advancing consent through discipline, curriculum, and ideological content, schools also reproduce the established social order by omitting certain forms of knowledge, including serious analyses of inequality, oppression, exploitation, imperialism, revolution, class struggle, and labor movements that might raise critical questions about capitalism in people.

From the mentioned above, I strongly believe that all the decisions made by teachers regarding programs and classes, the contents, materials and activities to be implemented, and the interaction patterns that are proposed, must be considered as ways of exploring or negotiating knowledge

over different beliefs, interests or values which could be validated or abolished at schools.

According to Canagarajah (1999; 2005), reproduction models of education explain how students are mentally and behaviorally conditioned by the practices of schooling to serve the dominant social institutions and groups; resistance theories explain how there are sufficient contradictions within institutions to help subjects gain agency, conduct critical thinking, and initiate change.

English Language and Critical pedagogy

Kazmi (1997) mentioned that during the past several centuries, English has become a language of power, mass communication, and cultural domination. As an elite language, English has made its way into foreign language education programs in universities around the world. Thus, as EFL programs become more prevalent throughout the world, the cultural implications of English teaching are more often debated.

In such sense, English teaching has been considered potentially imperialistic and it is thought that it can be used to subjugate EFL students' languages and cultures. As a result, I strongly believe that teachers bear a responsibility to use a critical lens for English education. Such a lens could empower learners through reflective dialogue and a curriculum that mirrors the students' goals and interests. It could be achieved considering the inclusion in the EFL classroom of issues such as: the paradigm shift in the assumed roles for teachers and students, critical awareness

development, learners' conscientization and empowerment, critical thinking, among others. Thus, it would be possible that EFL students and teachers examine their perspectives and experiences under meaningful inquiry, which could open students' understanding of why people act in the ways they do.

Ladson-Billings (1994), proposed what is called a "cultural relevant teaching» as using students' culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture.

In the same way, Banks (2001) proposed a "cultural pluralism model of education» as one of multiple paradigms for teachers with a democratic view of instruction. This innovative model looks for focusing on the maintenance of cultures and traditions and promotes the liberation of ethnic groups; to educate ethnic students in a way that will not alienate them from their home cultures». Thus, instructors would not simply briefly acknowledge the diversity of their students; they would actively learn about that diversity by making it an integral part of the curriculum, which is possible through the implementation of pedagogical proposals that look for reducing prejudice in students, language diversity analysis, the planning of units that focus on social issues, etc.

According to Pennycook (1994) language teaching has, for much of its history, been subject to the heavy "evangelical zeal» of the centers which have exported their theories, methods derived from these, approaches, materials, and books to the developing countries "often with doubtful

relevance to the sociological, educational and economic context of the Outer Circle».

Teaching methods view language as "object» or merely focus on "methodology». Second, they often fail to link language with local socio-cultural, political and linguistic environment and neglect students' needs, objectives and interest. They are often concerned with the "what» (grammatical and communicative competence) and "how» (methodology) of teaching, rather than the "why», "how», and "who» of instruction.

According to Freire (1998) language which does not claim to empower the marginalized and the controlled to conceive and articulate their knowledge and needs, or is not devoted to their emancipation, is mere "verbalism». Thus, the issues of power and social inequality that lies behind English teaching are manifested frequently in the forms of sexism, classism, and racism in classrooms.

From the above mentioned, the idea of incorporating different changes in the style of instruction and learning, which actively incorporates learners' cultures into lessons, should be expanded to all educational settings, particularly into EFL ones. The main reason is that foreign EFL teachers' worldviews often differ greatly from those of their students. As a result, a culturally relevant approach could simultaneously inform both instructors and students in a reciprocal way through a mutual exchange of ideas and opinions. It is also important to take into account that the cultures of people are fascinating and complex in their linguistic and ethnic diversity, communist values and relatively foreign cultural symbols.

At this point, Norton & Toohey (2004) pointed out that considering the complex socio-historical and political aspects of language teaching and learning, many researchers suggest that critical pedagogy should be the vital essence of teaching. Critical pedagogy in EFL maintains that both learning and teaching are political processes and language is not simply a means of expression or communication, but “a practice that constructs the ways learners understand themselves, their socio historical surrounding and their possibility for the future». As we can note, it is relevant to discuss the ideological implications of English language teaching and advocate the use of critical pedagogy in English language courses.

It is important to take into account that in an English class much more than grammar or language skills are transmitted and socio-cultural conditions always influence the cognitive activity of the students.

Critical Pedagogy into Practice

Any serious application of critical pedagogy must at some level take steps to facilitate greater dialogue, critique, counter hegemony, and praxis. These core elements of critical pedagogy are generally lacking in the traditional classroom. Darder, Baltodano, & Torres (2003) pointed out that **dialogue** refers to the active participation of student and teacher in discussion and analysis. By transcending the conventional culture of silence proposed by Freire (1974), students gain a sense of empowerment, especially when interaction is directed toward a critical examination of actual student experiences. Dialogue seeks not only to increase active student participation in the classroom, but

also to develop a critical social consciousness among students.

Thus, I reckon a possibility teachers have to incorporate critical pedagogy in the classroom is to use dialogue, which played an important role in engaging learners as active participants in their learning process. Wink (2005) also defined dialogue as: “communication that creates and recreates multiple understandings. It moves its participants along the learning curve to that uncomfortable place of relearning and unlearning. It can move people to wonderful new levels of knowledge; it can transform relations; it can change things “ (p. 42).

By **critique**, these authors meant the systematic analysis of both self and society with a focus on inequality, exploitation, oppression, and domination. An examination of class exploitation is crucial to most advocates of critical pedagogy, but equally important is the consideration of race, ethnicity, and gender-based oppression.

Besides, critical pedagogy advocates the construction of a **counter-hegemony** in opposition to a bourgeois hegemony. Exposing class contradictions in student lives, showing how dominant ideologies may work against their own material interests, facilitates this construction. According to Beyer (1996) it also involves the development of a counter culture where oppositional values, attitudes, and behaviors are promoted. Thus, individualism and meritocracy might be countered with communalism and egalitarianism, while authoritarian and hierarchical forms could be countered with democratic and participatory structures.

Finally, **praxis** refers to the actual application of knowledge to the transformation of society. It moves the curriculum beyond the classroom and connects critical reflection to action in the community. Shor (1987) mentioned that from a critical pedagogical perspective, praxis distinguishes itself from service learning or community-based volunteerism with a more explicit emphasis on collective efforts at social transformation.

Role of the teacher

According to Morgan (2000) the first task of the teachers, from a critical pedagogy viewpoint, is to raise students' awareness of the reproductive process and to empower them to challenge the system. Thus, the main idea is that teachers make teaching a form of practical, social, political, and intellectual accomplishment, or what Freire (1998) called "praxis». For him, praxis without the regulative ideas of emancipation and social justice is blind; and critical reflection without some concrete content from our practical interest in communicative practice is empty.

In such way, the most important questions for teachers are not only about mere technical and individual evaluation of efficacy of their practices, but also about the potential social, moral and political value of what they do. In order to accomplish this task, teachers have to understand complex and messy situations, ask penetrating questions, provide insight into the implications of their actions and events, and to advise appropriate courses of action.

For Giroux (2003), the role of teacher is redefined in critical pedagogy as

"transformative intellectual», a term he coined to describe educators who possess the knowledge and skills to critique and transform structural inequities. The teacher, as a transformative intellectual, has a crucial role in the problem-posing process which is referred to learn from learners, to welcome and appreciate their perspectives and engage in the dialogical process, which is related to avoid the hierarchical framework, the lecture format and the banking approach, and give an opportunity in favor of dialogue, interaction, communication and exchange of knowledge and experiences among students and teachers.

All in all, it is expected that teachers in both schools and higher education will have to assume their responsibility as citizen-scholars by taking critical positions, relating their work to larger social issues, offering students knowledge, debate, and dialogue about pressing social problems, and providing the conditions for students to have hope and believe that civic life matters, that they can make a difference in shaping it so as to expand its democratic possibilities for all groups. It means taking positions and engaging practices with fundamental ideologies. Educators now face the daunting challenge of creating new discourses, pedagogies, and collective strategies that will offer students the hope and tools necessary to revive the culture of politics as an ethical response to the demise of democratic public life.

Finally, Canagarajah (2005) points out that when teaching turns around critical pedagogy teachers have the ethical responsibility of negotiating the hidden values and interests behind knowledge, and

are expected to help students to adopt a critical orientation to learning. Since everything that already comes with values and ideologies that have implications for students' social and ethical lives, teaching is always problematic. It is part of a teacher's responsibility to help students interrogate the hidden assumptions and values that accompany knowledge.

Incorporating Critical Pedagogy in the classroom

Beyer (1996) suggested that it is possible to identify three main approaches to critical pedagogy. One approach is to take local situations seriously and negotiate with students about teaching / learning. Another approach is to address the issues of power, discourse and knowledge. The last approach is to connect the content, students' lives and the larger context of students' lives through engaging dialogues.

It is also crucial to bear in mind that critical pedagogy is best realized throughout the curriculum under conditions of cooperation and commitment among teachers, what means that if all of them share the same educational objectives and expectations, positive and transformative changes can occur benefiting social transformation. I strongly believe that it would be achieved through an integral curriculum based on the implementation of authentic materials (TV programs, commercials, newspapers, movies, etc.) which help students link their knowledge to the real problems in their society, and at the same time, to examine, reflect and discuss about their representative culture.

The introduction of English language in the classroom has the potential to align with students' goals and interests or further impact the rift between students' values and those of the school curricula. Thus, the purpose must be aimed at analyzing the mismatch between values taught in school and those taught at home.

Umbarila (2010) stated that by implementing critical pedagogical practices, learners are enabled to ask questions about aspects of the dominant culture. They examine the surrounding power structures of the dominant societies through history, and learn how sometimes these kinds of power structures are reproduced when a person assumes the role of the prevailing culture. Moreover, students analyze critically why they have no voice in their relationships in the society and why they may have feelings of isolation and powerlessness.

In such sense, McLaren (2003) stated that critical pedagogy would be the tool to prepare students to be critical agents of transformation in their own lives, as well as allow them to act on the larger social and political struggle rather than be voiceless and passive citizens. Within this framework, students are invited to analyze critically the reasons behind the maintenance of some of these practices through the years. In this way, teachers can help students understand how coercive relations of power limit the opportunities for educational, social, and cultural advancement in subjugated groups and, to discover their voices that have been silenced in order to empower their role of becoming patriotic and responsible citizens to transform the status quo.

Summing up, different authors and researchers who have been working on this topic, suggest different kinds of activities which can be incorporated and implemented in order to contribute to the inclusion of critical pedagogy in the classroom and the educative practices, such activities are: dialogue journals, role-playing exercises, self-reflection journals, dialogues about peoples' lives experiences, problem solving exercises, students' portfolio, a diary of their personal thoughts and experiences, among others.

The inclusion of critical pedagogy in the classroom would aim not only at enlightening and transforming both teacher and students, but also at resisting and challenging the social inequities taken for granted that surround affects our lives so massively. Thus, it requires a classroom environment that is totally democratic where the different viewpoints are highlighted through discussion and debate, allowing a shared dialogue and power among teachers and students.

Finally, just when personal background of the learner influences how something is learned, what is learned shapes the person: our consciousness, identity, and relationships are implicated in the educational experience. Teachers should consciously engage the influences, consequences, and implications of the personal in the learning process.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that schools and classrooms are one of the most important places where students can enrich

themselves, but unfortunately, those conventional places do not have a transformational effect on learners, because they do not address underlying and systemic societal issues such as social inequity, discrimination, violence, and poverty, among others.

Pedagogy as a critical practice should provide the classroom conditions that offer the knowledge, skills, and culture of questioning necessary for students to engage in critical dialogue with the past, question authority and its effects, struggle with ongoing relations of power, and prepare themselves for what it means to be critical, active citizens in the interrelated local, national, and global public spheres.

Critical pedagogy is an ethical referent and a call to action for educators, parents, students, and others to reclaim education as a democratic sphere, a place where teaching is not reduced to learning how to either master tests or to acquire low level jobs skills, but a safe space where reason, understanding, dialogue, and critical engagement are available to all faculty and students.

The crisis of education must be understood as part of the wider crisis of politics, power, and culture. Education should be divorced from politics. Public services such as health care, childcare, public assistance, education, and transportation are now subject to the rules of the market. Giroux (2003) mentioned that forsaking the public good for the private good and representing the needs of the corporate and private sector as the only source of sound investment, neoliberal ideology produces, legitimates,

and exacerbates the existence of persistent poverty, inadequate health care, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor. Commonplace features of classroom life and everyday experience may be charged with ideological implications. Teachers and theories have to negotiate in terms of the material conditions and social practices of one's community.

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