

Critical Pedagogy: A Journey from Its Origins to Critical Pedagogy in Colombian Education

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ABSTRACT

A great revolution in the way teachers and educators see language teaching and learning, and its scope has started to gain weight in the last decades, all brought about by the extraordinary emerging research and theories to change this traditional view. Language teaching and learning have moved from the classroom settings, where the focus was just on what happens in the classroom, to more pressing matters, and now they aim to develop more than language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and the like). Instead, they intent to develop critical thinking, critical and political consciousness, and social justice awareness through what some educators have called Critical Pedagogy (CP hereafter), which leads to the transformation of the individual, the learning environment, and society (Freire, 1970). What follows is by no means definite about Critical Pedagogy but an attempt to introduce and conceptualize the origin, definition, principles, view of teachers and learners, and the current situation of CP in Colombia and end it with our understanding of what has been presented throughout this paper, along with some general conclusions.

Key Words: *critical pedagogy; language teaching; Colombian education*

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Pedagogía Crítica: Un Viaje por los Orígenes de la Pedagogía Crítica en Colombia

RESUMEN

Una gran revolución en la forma en que profesores y educadores ven la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas y su alcance ha comenzado a ganar peso en las últimas décadas, todo ello provocado por las extraordinarias investigaciones y teorías emergentes para cambiar la visión tradicional de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas. La enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas han pasado del entorno del aula, donde la atención se centraba únicamente en lo que sucede en el aula, a asuntos más apremiantes, y ahora apuntan a desarrollar algo más que habilidades lingüísticas (escuchar, hablar, leer, escribir y similares). En cambio, intentan desarrollar el pensamiento y la conciencia crítica, la política y la conciencia de justicia social a través de lo que algunos educadores han llamado Pedagogía Crítica (CP en adelante), que conduce a la transformación del individuo, el entorno de aprendizaje y la sociedad. La información que se presenta a continuación no es de ninguna manera definitiva sobre la Pedagogía Crítica, sino un intento de presentar y conceptualizar el origen, la definición, los principios, la visión de docentes y alumnos, y la situación actual de la Pedagogía Crítica en Colombia y finalizar con nuestra comprensión de lo que se ha presentado a lo largo de este artículo, junto con algunas conclusiones generales.

Palabras clave: pedagogía crítica; enseñanza de idiomas; educación colombiana

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INTRODUCCIÓN

Critical Pedagogy, as mentioned before, is directly concerned with social transformation in the individual and the society, and educational change through what Freire (1970) called “conscientização”. With this in mind, it is of great importance to examine briefly and identify the origin of CP and its very foundations to fully understand its purpose and scope, the principles behind it, and what it aims to change in educational contexts.

Origins of CP

Understanding Critical Pedagogy means going back to roots and foundations that serve to the emerging of the approach. CP has its roots in Critical Theory and long before critical theory was considered as one major theoretical field, intellectuals exercised critical thinking as a way of viewing and analyzing reality (Abraham, 2014).

Critical theory, which is the very foundation for CP, has its roots in Hegel’s work (1777) and Kant’s (1781) critical philosophy, which was introduced in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*, (McKernan, 2013). It is mostly related to the Frankfurt School (Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Mein), established in 1923. According to McKernan (2013), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Eric Fromm (1900-1980) were considered the first to present a critical theory of society. Indeed, Horkheimer advocated the vital distinction between “traditional theory” and “critical theory” which had, above all, a practical or utilitarian purpose. For Horkheimer, a theory is critical to the extent that it not only seeks to explain, understand, and interpret society but also to the extent it seeks to change and “to liberate human beings from circumstances that enslave them” (McKernan, 2013, p.424-425).

Paulo Freire followed the traditions of the Frankfurt School with a focus on education and from his work in poverty-stricken northeastern Brazil in the 1960s critical pedagogy emerged and amalgamated liberation theological ethics and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany with the progressive impulses in education (Kincheloe, 2007). In fact, CP gained a huge international audience with the publication of the book “*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*” this book was translated into English in 1970. In addition to Freire, scholars such as Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Ira Shor have contributed to enriching Critical Pedagogy (Abraham, 2014).

On the other hand, Freire’s work was primarily influenced by his historical, social, and economic

context, the history of Brazil, and his own experiences at school and university times. Freire experienced firsthand the socio-political instability in Brazil –Dictatorship- as well as the economic hardships of the 1930s. When Freire was young he forced himself by the circumstances to steal food for his family, and he ultimately dropped out of elementary school to work and help his family financially. It was through these hard times that Freire developed his unyielding sense of solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

Vision of Critical Pedagogy

One of the major contributions of CP was a discussion about critical consciousness, (*conscientização*); a consciousness beyond understanding which leads to action (Freire, 1970). To have a better understanding of CP, it may be valuable to enrich this paper with some definitions given by some of the most notorious exponents of it in order to have different perceptions and points of view of CP. By doing so, we can identify noteworthy commonalities among them that reveal some of CP's core terms and underlying aims.

Freire (1970) has the vision of CP as the students are no longer docile listeners, now they are considered critical co-investigators who work hand in hand with their teachers and education, as a humanist and liberating praxis. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and alienating intellectualism.

Furthermore, McLaren (1998) states that: “Critical pedagogy is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structure of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and, nation-state” (p. 345). In the same line of thought, Giroux (2010) describes CP as an “educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (p. 67).

In McKernan (2013) we read “Critical pedagogy is a movement involving relationships of teaching and learning so that students gain a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and take appropriate action against oppressive forces” (p. 425).

Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinburg (1997) attest, “critical pedagogy is the term used to describe what emerges when critical theory encounters education” (p. 24)

Samacá (2012) concludes that:

“CP can be considered as an opportunity to re-evaluate what we teachers are doing in our classrooms, how we are treating our students, how we are implementing methodologies and strategies that really fit in our students’ contexts, and how we are integrating teachers and students into a mutual “re-creation of knowledge framed in a dialogic pedagogy” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8)” (p. 200).

Kellner (2000) asserts that

Critical pedagogy can promote multicultural education and sensitivity to cultural differences, it involves teaching the skills that will empower citizens and students to become sensitive to the politics of representations of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other cultural differences in order to empower individuals and promote democratization. (p.197).

In just these few definitions, in short, many of them focus on students’ empowerment, social justice, liberation, culture, democracy, and responsible citizenship. These are the concepts that lie in the corners of our classrooms. In general, we can say that based on the definitions given above, CP is directly concerned with social transformation and educational change but it also has definite social-political roots that aim to challenge education from its traditional practices-Banking education a term coined by Freire- on the way to social change rejecting traditional systems. Given these points, when discussing Critical Pedagogy, then, we usually talk about a theory that intends to move beyond the walls of the Academy (schools, classrooms & universities) and does so as part of its central purpose not only to transform classroom practice but also as a way to transform society.

In general”...critical pedagogy... encourages critical thinking and promotes practices that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions or social relations (Breunig, 2005, p.109).

Principles of Critical Pedagogy

When speaking of CP there have been extensive studies and research that focus on CP (see Giroux, 1997; Freire, 1970, 1985, 1998; McKernan, 2013). Generally, these studies have concentrated on the theoretical grounding of CP or analyzed the reach and benefits of CP for education, social transformation, and communities. In this section, we aim to look at the CP principles established by some authors and reach agreements on the basics and essential principles for the development of CP and how they influence what happens in classes based on CP.

McLaren (2003a) offers a clear description of the very basis for Critical Pedagogy. The first pillar is connected to politics in the classroom, the second is culture, and the third has to do with economics. Then, it can be said that McLaren sees the principles of CP in education as a way for learners to raise awareness of politics, culture, and economics to make an impact in their society.

Emilia (2005, 2010; see also Emilia & Safrina, 2010) establishes three CP principles. They are dialogic education, democratic classroom, and reading the word and the world. With this in mind, we can state that through dialogic education and democratic classrooms, students learn about their world, and the importance of the words in it. Dialogue is quite important for CP for it liberates students.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues that CP links classroom activities to the teachers' and students' real lives to push away classroom boundaries. In this view, CP aims to break the boundaries set in classrooms by using real-life contexts and a link with what is done in the classroom. This process can help students become more aware of what is happening in their immediate reality.

Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) reported some principles for CP: “problem-posing education (supporting humanity), political education system, use of authentic materials (linking students' knowledge to existing problems in society), and paradigm shift in the assumed roles for teachers and students, learners' empowerment, avoidance of marginalization, and development of critical consciousness” (p. 77). Aliakbari and Faraji go beyond in their proposal of principles for CP adding important aspects that other authors did not, and that gives CP a bigger scope.

According to Riasati and Mollaei (2012), theorists like Giroux, McLaren, Delpit, Ladson-Billings, Dillard, Hooks, and others identify three tenets about the CP: a) Reflection of the individual's experiences; b) Development of voice through a critical look at one's world and society, which occurs while interacting with others; c) Transforming the society toward equality through active participation in democratic.

In this view of the principles, CP tries to respond to the local needs and lived experiences to create consciousness and develop a voice in learners through dialogue and active participation in politics and democracy with the commonality of all the principles already mentioned, transforming society.

In Piosang (2017) we read that:

Six principles constitute CLP, namely: (1) Critical language pedagogy is a political process; (2) Critical

language pedagogy is student-centered; (3) Critical language pedagogy makes classes democratic public spheres, (4) Critical language pedagogy is highly dialogical, (5) Critical language pedagogy employs emancipatory authority, (6) Critical language pedagogy is aimed at social transformation. These principles explain the essential characteristics of CLP as posited in the various studies that have been reviewed (see Giroux, 1997; Freire, 1970, 1985; Sacadura, 2014; Santa-Williamson, 2000; Kanpol, 1998, Vandrick, 1994). (p, 105)

Piosang makes a distinction between Critical Pedagogy and Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) , the latter as an offshoot of CP. In this case, the principles of CLP are similar to the ones established by some authors of CP, though, CLP reaches the role of the students when it comes to talking about the CP and its principles. Based on it, CLP is rooted in the solid theoretical basis of Critical Pedagogy.

As shown above, CP and its principles have different definitions and scopes, but at the same time, all those definitions have something in common which is CP's very purpose. Furthermore, this can be summarized in the following tenets: (1) CP intends to develop a voice in learners through a dialogic education for students to read the world and read the word, (2) CP is student-centered which means that teachers are not know-it-all in classes, neither are they the sole controller of authority and power in the classroom, and the focus on classes are students and their lived experiences, social-political context to raise awareness on cultural, political and economic matters. All the authors stated that (3) CP seeks transformation and liberation for the authorism and the Banking Education models to transform the lives of the oppressed.

Teacher's and Students' Roles in CP

In contrast to traditional teaching, which considers students as just receivers of knowledge and teachers as knowledge holders, without taking into account their contexts, critical pedagogy looks at learners as independent and active human beings. This being said, CP has a different view of teachers and learners, this premise is worthwhile analyzing to see the different roles and views of teachers and students where the CP is used.

Based on the premises of CP, teachers who were seen as unquestioned authorities and holders of knowledge have descended from their sanctified places to a friendly environment where they can (have to) negotiate the class procedures, structure, content, grading criteria as well as their own roles

concerning students. Dardar (2003) emphasizes the uniqueness of love for CP. She considers that teachers in critical pedagogy do not need a one-size-fits-all curriculum, but should move beyond to discover their students' needs, by helping them to look for their own power and potential, and "the spirit of hope", thus, allowing students to liberate and make impact in society.

Similarly, teachers have been encouraged to be 'Transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1988) and rethink the assumption that they are simply transmitters of knowledge and students are empty vessels but they are political beings that need to be freed from what has been imposed. In other words, CP invites teachers to be socio-politically conscious and strive not only for educational advancement but also for personal and social transformation (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). It is worth saying that currently not all students and teachers are lucky enough to enjoy these positive changes. In fact, in Colombia, there are still lots of institutions where the traditional schooling system rules and students receive merely knowledge, and many teachers still believe their one and only responsibility is to impart knowledge.

On the other side of the coin, we have the view of students in CP, Giroux (1997) sees students as active participants who together with their teachers have the chance to correct the curricula, set objectives share their ideas, and learn to challenge assumptions. In this very first view, we have that students are seen as active participants in the decision-making happening in class, and a change in the view of students as merely empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, rules, and the like.

Truthfully, the view towards students has changed. Students in CP are characterized not as those who would docilely allow themselves to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1970), but rather as critical and autonomous learners, who can analyze, criticize, and question issues concerning the materials they are studying, also the context they are living in so that they can improve themselves, strengthen democracy, create a more just society, and, thus, deploy education in a process of progressive social change (Kellner, 2000). Based on the earlier statements, it is definite to say that, CP rejects the view of students purely as objects without a voice in the classroom, who are just waiting to imbue with knowledge based on what teachers think is needed. Rather, students are subjects that can express themselves and work with teachers together to meet what students feel they need based on their lives, contexts, and experiences lived, thus, becoming aware of their social, political, and cultural realities, which eventually takes them to a liberation process.

Students have been invited to be active and critical members of their society and to critique and challenge oppressive social conditions (Freire, 1970). In this view, students should behave in such a way that allows them to develop some features (think critically and develop a critical consciousness) that are needed to transform their societies which is best achieved through emancipatory education.

Critical Pedagogy in Colombia

Critical pedagogy has been penetrating educational contexts all over the globe since the publication and translation of Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Latin America has not been an exception. Hence, it is worthwhile taking a glance at the current development of CP in Colombian Educational contexts, either research papers or books.

In Colombia, CP seems to be relatively new since the first research paper was founded dates 2012. Some authors like Samacá (2012; 2014), Dueñas Macias (2014), and Ortega (2014) have attempted to analyze and delimit concepts, principles, roles of teachers and students and the incorporation of CP in classrooms and the benefits this provides to Colombian Teaching Contexts.

Samacá (2012) besides conceptualizing core terms of CP also intends to reflect on the importance of it and awareness rising in classrooms – either at schools or at university levels- to rethink what schools and universities are today and, thus, become scenarios where different representations and visions of the world are shared. To put it differently, Samacá invites teachers and students to reconsider the teaching and learning process and adapt them to new realities keeping in mind that education is in constant change and now it is affecting social and political contexts, consequently, students and teachers need to reflect and offer opportunities to develop politically and become aware of reality.

By the same token, Samacá (2012) also gives the following implications on the complexity of teaching from the perspective of CP: (1) the responsibility we as teachers have in our communities; (2) the view of teachers as transformative intellectuals; (3) the need to create an environment that helps pre-service and in-service teachers both understand, and reflect upon their roles as society's transformers and generators of change; (4) preparing pre-service teachers not only to know what, how, and why to teach, but also on the helping them to consider learners, their contexts, their needs, and interests, asking also about what, how, and why these learners would like to learn; and, (5) the creation of more communicative classrooms. The principles aforementioned somehow summarize CP, and what intends

to change in education.

Another Colombian author who works on CP is Dueñas Macias (2014) who focused on some issues of consideration when adopting critical pedagogy in EFL classrooms. The author delimits the concept of CP in general but also connects it to the English language stating that English is potentially imperialistic and it can be used to subjugate EFL students' language and culture. He believes that teachers bear the responsibility to use critical pedagogy for English education to empower learners to include in EFL classrooms issues such as critical awareness, learners' conscientization, and critical thinking among others. To summarize this, we can say that Dueñas Macias sees English education as an oppressor and claims to use critical pedagogy in classrooms to avoid subjugation of learners' native tongue and culture.

Finally, Ortega (2014) directed her research to answer the question of what Critical Pedagogy contributes to Colombian Education. She concludes that CP helps Colombian education by showing the effects of what she called "depedagogization" and "deprofessionalization" that affect the school. In this case, "depedagogization" and "deprofessionalization" refer to the deprivation of the teacher from his critical and public performance, as well as his role as a democratizing agent of knowledge at the school (p, 84). In other words, those two terms refer to the degrading view of teachers in Colombia due to the neoliberalism agenda and the fact that Education has become a business, which sees teachers merely as "flexible salaried workers" rather than an important factor in education.

As a last thought, we can say that CP is gaining importance in Colombian Education due to some teachers, educators, and researchers have already started pointing out the benefits and achievements one can reach by applying CP in classes, and this is a big step in Colombia having in mind that we are a third world country that needs CP.

DISCUSIÓN

After presenting the origins, concepts, principles, and roles of teachers and students, and the current state of Critical Pedagogy it is worthwhile discussing what was presented and relating that to the Colombian educational context, and my own experience.

Critical Pedagogy, as mentioned before, was born from the work of Paulo Freire in Brazil. In 1946, he became the minister of education and Brazil started to go through some changes in education. One of

us could experience firsthand the benefits of CP when teaching English in Brazil. Students were eager to discuss politics and social injustice, they were really aware of what was happening in Brazil and all over the world, and they discussed it naturally with great interest, which helped them a lot with the development of their communicative skills and the expansion of vocabulary. Additionally, teachers also learned a lot from students so it is necessary to offer the spaces and opportunities for them to discuss and express ideas. Now that we are familiar with CP, we understand why those students in Brazil were so critical in classes, and it makes us think that this can be reached when we have the Ministry of Education and all the government institutions helping for this purpose.

Talking about the Colombian educational context, critical pedagogy offers great changes in education, social justice, and critical consciousness, and helps students become political beings, which is great and necessary for a country like this one. Nevertheless, we find it very difficult to achieve critical pedagogy in classes because the government and society have stigmatized teachers in Colombia. In fact, they see teachers as people from the left whose task is to make students part of the left movement, this thought might come from teachers' behavior in class, and the fact that some take political and cultural positions in discussions and express them throughout the classes, and are usually treated as the ones who never work. Within this thought, we wonder how teachers can adopt critical pedagogy in schools when we have everything against us when the Ministry of Education is not even a teacher and this person seems to know nothing about what really happens in class, when the development of CP itself is seen as a danger for government and society.

Moreover, since education is constantly changing (approaches, methods, techniques) and we, as Colombians, love to import what other countries are currently developing in the field of education; we wonder if for some CP is another trend and fashion way of teaching and as time goes by, it will eventually be forgotten and teachers will choose a new trendy one. If that is the case, we have to say that teachers and educators would be making a huge mistake because here in Colombia a transformation is needed, and education, in our opinion, is the only way it can be done. As a matter of fact, I dare to say that every single teacher in Colombia should start adapting and adopting CP in classes if we want a change in all the spheres of the country. Time will tell the future of CP in Colombian education.

Finally, we would like to analyze CP when it claims that learners have to liberate themselves from the

oppressed. We consider this statement can lead to anarchy in the sense of not being subjugated and this should be addressed carefully in classes. Learners can feel oppressed by their families, schools, teachers, and so on. In addition, by using CP wrongly we could encourage them to make bad decisions and defy family. If that is the case, the use of CP could be more harmful than beneficial.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, CP is closely connected to the Critical Theory and related to the School of Frankfurt and originated from the work of the Brazilian Paulo Freire. CP, different from other “approaches” for teaching that have arisen, tries to provoke a transformation in learners, and this transformation can be in social, cultural, political, and educational spheres through what Paulo Freire (1970) called *conscientização*. Theorists of CP have proposed different principles depending on their understanding and view of CP. Still, they can be summarized in three (1) develop a voice in learners through a dialogic education for students to read the world and read the words, (2) CP is student-centered (3) social transformation and liberation from the authoritarianism and the Banking Education models. As mentioned before, CP is student-centered and this defines the view of teachers and students in CP, stating that teachers are no longer seen as the holders of knowledge and students as the empty vessels who receive it, rather they are critical autonomous learners. In general, this paper attempted an organized synthesis of the origins of CP, vision, principles, roles for teachers and students, and the current state of CP in Colombia.

On the other hand, it is of great importance to research and share experiences of CP and its application in classrooms to have a better understanding of how it works in the classroom, and at the same time motivate other teachers to develop such projects in classes and start changing and rejecting the banking models of education.

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