

## Critical Pedagogy: A Tool for Social Transformation

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### Abstract

Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that allows students to observe **power** structures and patterns of inequality within the status quo. In **critical pedagogy**, a teacher encourages students to question and challenge inequalities that exist in families, schools, and societies. The purpose of this research paper is to explore deeper into faculty perspectives on critical pedagogy, and how they deal with it and making their students think creatively in social transformation. As my teaching carried me into engineering colleges, it became clear that critical pedagogy must be taught in the classroom not only for literature students but also for all those courses where English language is compulsory. I began to further immerse myself in fundamental literature, reading the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Khaled Housseni, Leo Tolstoy, Ruskin Bond, R.K. Narayan and many more writers prescribed in the syllabus of Rajasthan University and Rajasthan Technical University. However, as I continued to gain a deeper understanding of the theory of Freire, one question still remained largely unanswered: What is critical pedagogy *and how it works?*

**Key words:** Critical Pedagogy, Critical thinking, Social Justice

**Paulo Reglus Neves Freire** a leading advocate of critical pedagogy was a Brazilian educator and philosopher. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is one of the best works by Freire which is generally considered one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement. He was born on September 19, 1921 to a middle-class family in Recife, the capital of the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco.

*"The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves." – Paulo Freire*

A teacher faces many difficulties when they as they plan to enter the work drive and become formal educators. They are confronted with the undertaking of learning instructive hypothesis and making down to earth applications. To become an effective, productive and professional teacher one needs to be focused on critical thinking which improves their various skills. A teacher who seeks to apply critical pedagogy aims to expose students to these issues of racism, sexism, hatred, bigotry and oppression because by acknowledging them, students can begin to

change them and through this change one can transform the society. Critical pedagogy is the theory that makes students conscious of the many institutions that exist to make possible and achieve systematic forms of oppression, both within and outside the classroom. Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire was among the first to articulate critical pedagogy in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1970. Freire discussed the conditions he encountered while educating peasants in Brazil and used these experiences to formulate his theory of a critical pedagogical approach to education. Through critical pedagogy the inequalities in education are brought to the surface to bring about positive change in society. (Ahlquist, 1990)

It is very important to educate youth that exist in a very complex and constantly changing world. It is the moral duty of teachers to prepare students to live in this world. With the practice of critical pedagogy, teachers can help students develop the essential skills they will need to deal with a complex and ever changing world, making them better prepared citizens, participants, and human beings.

As an area of academic study, social justice in education falls into a relatively undefined category, where scholars and educators loosely agree on various methods and goals but there are few definitive volumes or texts devoted to social justice in education (Brueing, 2011; Giroux, 2007). Scholars engaged in social justice within the realm of education concentrated their efforts on pedagogy and practice, based on the theories provided by Paulo Freire (1970).

Simon (1992) asserts that critical pedagogy is best described as an educational “project of possibility.” This “project” constitutes a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society (McLaren, 2003). Jodi Kaufmann (2000) asserts that “critical pedagogy focuses on educating the subject to think, to reflect, and to act, in order to create a more democratic egalitarian society” (p. 432). The main purpose of critical pedagogy is to use education as a means to bring about a more socially just world (Kanpol 1999; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004). According to Giroux, “Critical thinking attempts to understand how power works through the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge within particular institutional contexts and seeks to constitute students as informed subjects and social agents” (2010, p. 717).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire, describes the condition of the oppressors–oppressed, applies the difference to education, also define the importance of education. According to Freire education should allow the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity, in turn overcoming their condition. He further focuses on the condition of the oppressed and says that the oppressed individual must play a role in their liberation. No teaching method which is really freeing can proceed with far off from the oppressed by regarding them as unfortunates and by introducing for their imitating models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own model in the battle for their freedom, oppressors must be eager to reexamine their lifestyle and to inspect their own function in persecution if genuine freedom is to happen.

Freire believed that "education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing—of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't". (Freire, 2004, p-15) In terms of pedagogy, Freire is best known for his attack on what he called the "banking" concept of education, in which students are viewed as empty accounts to be filled by teachers. He notes that "it transforms students into receiving objects [and] attempts to control thinking and action, lead[ing] men and women to adjust to the world, inhibit[ing] their creative power." John Dewey was also strongly critical of the transmission of mere facts as the goal of education. Dewey often described education as a mechanism for social change, stating that "education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction". Freire's work revived this view and placed it in context with contemporary theories and practices of education, laying the foundation for what would later be termed critical pedagogy.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a revolutionary work by Paulo Freire's should be a required reading in not only literature course but in all other studies. To read Freire's work is a challenging task. The profound intellectualism with which Freire writes makes his work difficult to understand, particularly for those unfamiliar with critical scholarship. Freire text gives an impact of magic, his words spoke to the reader, just like they spoke too many of the South American peasants which he mentioned in his narrative. His words are revolutionary and his writing has created a history in transforming the society. His writing is based on reality which described a reality darkened by injustice, oppression, and vast inequality. His words have a power to encourage the oppressor, educators, scholars etc. which helps in transforming the society through proper education.

"There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

— Richard Shaull, drawing on Paulo Freire

Bell Hooks, a feminist and educationist who comprehensively writes about education as "the practice of freedom". Her work, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), comprises of a series of essays on gender, class and race in the classrooms. She critiques the system for creating education that divides and controls, and emphasizes the need for classrooms and teaching based on trust and hope, which she calls "engaged pedagogy". According to Bell Hook:

To educate as a practice of freedom is a way of teaching that everyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach and also believe that ... our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the soul of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (Hooks, 1994, p. 13)

Being a teacher, I believe in critical education. Education is a medium for social transformation, and only education which allows students to think critically can change the society. I have gone through my scholastic time on earth considering what makes an engaging instructor and most as of late with my research I am contemplating what teacher educators hold on critical pedagogy, student empowerment and how those conceptions may relate to their classroom.

It's been just over ten years since I taught my first class and since then I have never halted. I have worked dependably as an associate educator in instruction and humanism educates virtually every class accessible immediately or another simultaneously reflecting and refining my preparation and sharpening my abilities. Over these years and through my teaching experiences, I built up the thoughts and questions that would frame the reason for my research. These ideas are that education is significant, education is not necessarily schooling, and teachers must have some way of thinking on schooling if they understand it and most importantly I have learned that I am an educator and I believe in the transformative power of education; I trust it is the medium by which social treachery can be mitigated.

Though I had yet to hold a job as an English teacher, my 10 years of teaching experience had led me to scores of classrooms in a several colleges. During my teaching career I was given both Literature and Grammar to teach the students of Literature and Technical students, and during the classroom cultures I routinely observed, there was little I witnessed that reflected the liberator language from my reading.

Subsequent to looking into different writings critical pedagogical practices, I was left with various queries concerning how critical pedagogy and social transformation inside the study hall really happen. The phenomenon for this study exists within faculty interpretations of critical pedagogy and social justice and their actions in the classroom.

Then I decide to work on a research where I could hopefully *see* critical, a research that not only enhance my own learning and understanding, but also that could be useful to students and teachers, students and teachers who were interested in and passionate about critical pedagogy and social justice. It is my hope that in this research paper, I can provide a contribution to those teachers and students seeking to do such work, and continue the efforts of more experienced scholars who have laid the foundation in bridging the theory-praxis gap in critical pedagogy, particularly not only for the literature students but also for language students. After learning about critical pedagogy and its use which requires individuals to question and expose hidden power structures, as well as attempt to facilitate change, I became excited about the possibility of creating a better world through the use critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy is an issue which deserves a great deal of consideration from language educators. The aim of critical pedagogy is to facilitate education in such a way that it attempts to make students aware of the inherent inequalities and oppressive systems in the world (McLaren, 2003). Critical pedagogy encourages students to acknowledge the inherent inequalities that exist and go forward and attempt to change them through social reconstruction (McLaren, 2003).

Critical pedagogy could lead to social justice, or it could lead to oppression; we hope that it's building towards justice, but there are so many factors that go into each situation and we don't

know what the effect will be or when the effect will happen. Critical pedagogy provides us with a way in which students and people can empower themselves and transform the world through education.

When speaking of critical pedagogy and social justice, it's been established in this study that a major component is action. While effective teachers can have a variety of strategies and goals in the classroom if transformation is not among them then they're not meeting the criteria for practicing critical pedagogy. Most of the teachers believe they encourage action through making students aware of the issues in the world and of the options students have for getting involved.

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