

# **A Transformative Experience: The Influence of Critical Pedagogy Studies on Teachers<sup>i</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*Neoliberalism, the dominant ideology which covers almost all areas of life, has transformed education/ In Turkey as well as the whole world, and all aspects of education, including teacher training, have been faced with marketisation. Teacher education has started to aim to “train” teachers, and as a result , individuals who have gained teacher identity work as passive technicians in their professional lives, rather than as as transformative intellectuals. In this process, critical pedagogy, which is committed to resisting neoliberalism and all the forms of oppression that come with it, becomes a powerful tool in teacher education, and in all levels of education. However, the prerequisite for resisting the system is the involvement of teachers in critical pedagogy studies. The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers were influenced by the critical pedagogy studies after engagement with the a critical pedagogy lesson for the first time. The study was conducted using with the interpretive qualitative research method. Seventeen (17) teachers, who took the Critical Pedagogy course offered as a Master’s degree course in the Educational Management Department in a university in Turkey, participated the study. Each teacher was asked to write a reflection paper at the end of the 14-week course period, and these papers were*

*subjected to with thematic content analysis. As a result of the analysis, 13 categories and 3 themes were developed through the codes obtained from the teachers' statements. Based on their meanings, all categories and themes were named after Freire's concepts in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. After the teachers' involvement in critical pedagogy studies, they stated that they became aware that the teacher education they had received and the education they had been providing in schools were in the service of mainstream education. They expressed how they realised that they had never questioned the system until their exposure to critical pedagogy. Moreover, they claimed that they were starting to take action to resist the system even with small steps, and they emphasised that they were hopeful for the future. At the end of this study, critical pedagogy was shown to have real transformative power, and the importance of participating in critical pedagogy studies for teachers to become transformative intellectuals was clearly demonstrated.*

**Keywords:** *Critical Pedagogy; Transformation; Mainstream Educators; Teachers*

## **Introduction**

People today live their lives in the shadow of neoliberalism, which has become a dominant ideology that embraces almost all areas of life. This lifestyle affects different sectors of society in different ways according to their class positions. This effect mostly appears as inequality and exploitation for the oppressed, who can be easily categorized as the lower/middle social class. Today, during an era when the dominant ideology uses all kinds of means to maintain its existence, a great struggle against it is also on display. Efforts towards critical pedagogy, which is one of the indispensable areas and tools of this very struggle,

contribute towards the fight through education policies and teacher transformation.

Neoliberalism can be defined as “the set of discourses, practices and devices that determine a new model of government of men according to the universal principle of competition” (Dardot and Laval, 2018, p. 2). Neoliberalism is the ideology underlying the new capitalism, which claims that human well-being can only be ensured with the guarantee of individual freedom, entrepreneurship and free competition. The state’s role in this situation is to create and preserve theoretical frameworks for protecting free market rules (Harvey, 2005, p. 10).

While some theorists attribute the starting date of neoliberalism to a community of thought that began with the Mont Pèlerin Society established around the Austrian political philosopher Friedrich Von Hayek in 1947 (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009, p. 4), others move this date back to the Walter Lippmann Colloquium organised in 1938. The latter consider the Mont Pèlerin Society to be a continuation of this aforementioned colloquium (Dardot and Laval, 2018, p. 141). Despite these debates about the date when this ideology was formed, all theorists attribute the consolidation of neoliberalism as a new economic order, especially in developed capitalist countries, to the policies conducted in the United States and Great Britain in 1979 and thereafter (Harvey, 2005, p. 17; Dardot and Laval, 2018).

In 1979, when the Conservative Party came to power in Britain under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, privatisation, monetarism (Friedman, 1988, pp. 94–95) and reduced state and welfare state policies were preferred. With the election of Ronald Reagan in the USA in 1980, the same policies also began to be applied in that country (Crouch, 2014, p. 30). Hence, the names of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher symbolise the implementation of new policies

claimed to overcome the disengagement of social democracy from ‘welfare socialism’, galloping inflation, decrease in profits and slowdown in growth (Dardot and Laval, 2018, p. 245). Neoliberalism, which has developed since the 1980s until the present day and has become a widespread management rationality all over the world, operates as a ‘normative order of reason’ that transforms every human domain and enterprise into an economic one (Brown, 2015, pp. 9–10). In this sense, neoliberalism is a “politically imposed hegemonic discourse of western nation states” (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Major international institutions and organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) established after the Second World War were effective in imposing the neoliberal discourse on the whole world (Dardot and Laval, 2018, p. 327). The components of the structural adjustment programme and the stabilisation policies imposed on a number of underdeveloped countries by the IMF, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank in the 1970s had a direct impact on the decisions made in the programme put into effect in Turkey on the 24th January 1980. With the 24th January Decisions, the aim in Turkey was to open up the economy to foreign trade based on market forces (Başkaya, 2015, pp. 193–194; Boratav, 2019, p. 164).

During this period, when these neoliberal policies were accepted and began to be implemented in Turkey with the 24th January Decisions, the fact that conservative approaches were gaining prestige in economic policies, the change in strategies of multinational companies and advanced capitalist nations towards underdeveloped countries, and the ‘success’ of certain countries, such as Japan and South Korea, that were industrialising outwardly in the 1970s, played a compelling role in the process. The coercion of international organisations such as the IMF, World Bank and OECD also became one of the most effective

methods in the ascent of neoliberal policies in Turkey as well as in other countries (Başkaya, 2015, pp. 207–208). In fact, these ‘economic stabilisation measures’, referred to as the 24th January Decisions, were decisions producing results that altered Turkey’s course, not only in the area of the economy, but in almost all other areas. In order to implement these decisions, Turkey was forced to suspend democratic life with the military coup of 12th September 1980. In this way, it was easier for the neoliberal policies that were the basis of the decisions to be fully implemented in Turkey. Thereupon, the 24th January Decisions cannot be evaluated merely as a stabilisation programme; rather, they are also economic policies that have had lasting consequences in their political and social dimensions (Kepenek, 1987, pp. 28–29).

With privatisation, which is the golden rule of neoliberalism, the state privatised all sectors that used to be run by the local or national state, and created new markets in sectors that not previously been marketised, such as education and health, and opened up these markets to free market rules (Harvey, 2005, p. 10). For this reason, since the 1980s, education has become one of the most important free market sectors. With the “businessification of education” (Hill *et al.*, 2015), schools and universities at all levels of education began to be privatised. Together with the economic policies conducted jointly with the IMF and World Bank in Turkey, the handover of services in the field of education that had previously been provided by the state (course books, accommodation services needed for access to school, and others) to the market economy was accelerated due to neoliberal policies (Gök, 2003, p. 108).

Education became one of the most important institutions serving the commodification and capitalisation of labour power together with capitalism (Ünal, 2011, p. 5). Increasing the productivity of labour in the industrial workforce particularly became an area prioritised by the state and capital. Along

with the neoliberal policies actively implemented in Turkey in the 1980s that had a negative effect on income distribution in the country, the restriction of public spending resulted in a reduction of resources set aside for services such as education and health in particular (Ercan, 1998, p. 31). The provision of education services, which had until that period been accepted as a responsibility of the state, was pushed into the background with the 24th January Decisions, equality of opportunity in education seriously deteriorated, the resources allocated for education by the state were decreased, expenditure made per student was reduced, and the number of private schools steadily increased (Gök, 2003, pp. 100–102). This negative scenario has continued increasingly up to the present day.

In spite of the reduction in the shares of state's expenditure on education, a reduction of its roles in defining education policies was not apparent. The role of states in education appears before us as the exact opposite situation to the liberal understanding which speaks of restricting state interventions. Hence, it cannot be said that education is politically neutral anywhere in the world. Moreover, education is in a multiple correlation with sovereignty and exploitation (Apple, 1999). Neoliberalism's control over state education programmes in the education policies of countries where it is implemented has begun to be more powerful than usual. The 'new governmentality' that has developed as a result of these policies has produced new forms of accountability in the monitoring of teachers that grants them lower degrees of freedom in their classrooms (Hursh and Martina, 2003; Apple, 2006, p. 232, 2011; Hill, 2007, 2010; Prendergast, Hill and Jones, 2017). With the test evaluations, standardised education programmes and strict accountability processes that emerged with privatisation, teachers are forced to deal with brutal competition, and their salary increases are made subject to performance evaluations (Apple, 2011). With this new management panopticon and these new types of control, the act

of teaching and the notion of being a teacher have changed to the fullest extent (Ball, 2003). What has been done to education with the ‘new governmentality’ are explained by Ball (2016) as follows:

They change what it means to be educated, what it means to teach and learn, and what it means to be a teacher. They do not only change what we do; they also change who we are, how we think about what we do, how we relate to one other, and how we decide what is important, what is acceptable and what is tolerable. (p.1050)

As Hill (1991) stated, mainstream teacher training programmes intend to establish an ideological hegemony over ideological state apparatuses with the idea of enabling an ideological superiority that will shape the future. With neoliberal education policies, education has become almost meaningless and distanced from intellectualism, and has become “banking education” as Freire (2005) also put it:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing deposits. (p. 72)

These radical changes occurring in education have naturally caused changes in teacher education programmes. Due to the focus of neoliberalism on professional work-based practices in all areas, a new type of teacher education has emerged (Olssen and Peters, 2005). This change has also led to a shift in the name of the programme. Formerly named ‘*teacher education*’, this programme is at present entitled ‘*teacher training*’, since teachers are now *trained*, not to

become intellectuals, but to become technician teachers (Hill, 2006). Teachers have been trained with mainstream teacher education for about forty years, and still serve in mainstream education.

With the Higher Education Law no. 2547 enacted in 1982 in the light of the 24th January Decisions and the military coup administration in Turkey, teacher training was also brought into line with the status quo, and the duty of teacher training, which had priorly been dependent on the Ministry of National Education, was transferred to the universities. The three-year education institutes which trained subject teachers were converted into four-year education faculties. The two-year education colleges which trained teachers for elementary education were extended to four years in 1989, and were affiliated to the education faculties in 1992 (Sağlam and Kürüm, 2005; Ünal, 2011, p. 19). In this way, all teacher training programmes began to be implemented in a single centre by means of the Higher Education Council.

The changing of all teacher training programmes in 1997 in Turkey, however, can be interpreted as an effort to change the identity of teachers. A teacher trained with these programmes is not permitted to direct the education process with his/her own professional understanding and pedagogical knowledge, and is expected to perform a defined technical task. The situation of teachers trained with mainstream teacher training programmes is expressed by Ünal (2011) as follows:

...an insecurely employed teacher will be forced to compete in terms of student success (especially based on the results of central exams), and will be put under pressure and directed by parents' 'teacher preferences' and 'school preferences'.  
... A teacher in Turkey today is in a position where he/she can be directed externally, regulated and unskilfully employed, and furthermore, insecure



employment conditions are imposed on teachers and the teaching profession is steadily being banalised and proletarianised. (pp. 14–18)

The situation of new teachers beginning their career is much worse than that of experienced teachers. In the 15th clause of the Teacher Appointment and Relocation Regulation of the National Education Ministry, enacted with a complete revision on 17th April 2015, a provision is included to the effect that candidate teachers shall earn the right to enter the written or written/oral exam to be conducted by the Ministry, on condition that they actually work for at least one year and that they are successful in the performance evaluation (Ministry of National Education, 2015). According to this legal norm, teachers appointed to the profession are first required to perform successfully. Only if they fulfil this requirement can they earn the right to enter the oral and written exam held by the Ministry.

As mentioned earlier, together with the changing conditions of capitalism, teachers' labour processes are being steadily subjected to more inspection. In this process, both the freedom that teachers have and the transformative potential possessed by their teaching are being suppressed. As a result of this, teaching is losing the meaning and value attributed to it in a social sense (Buyruk, 2015, p. 16). The personal authority that previously belonged to the teacher has become a part of the bureaucratic structure of the modern school. In contrast to the teachers who were on duty at the beginning of the 19th century, modern teachers use their personal powers less and mostly rely on regulations generalised by higher authorities (Bowles and Gintis, 2011, p. 39). While teachers, who arguably had prestige beforehand as they were employed with the public budget and had a socially secure profession, now have been transformed into waged workers recruited from the market carrying out an ordinary job devoid of privileges (Durmaz, 2014).

In societies dominated by neoliberalism, the conversion of schools into businesses transforms the individual into a human resource by forgetting that teachers need to give meaning to their actions, and that their psychological needs are as important as economic and financial ones. If they are treated as objects – as just another production variable – they are reduced to being no more than a tool of power (de Gaulejac, 2013, p. 13). These business methods in schools mean that teachers' status is reduced to that of a simple worker with very little control over the curriculum, activities or discipline. These teachers' accountability to managers involves their authority in the classroom rather than the quality of their classroom experience (Bowles and Gintis, 2011, p. 44). Since authoritarian power subjects teachers to pressure and fear, "teachers begin to internalize the dominator's shadow and the authoritarian ideology of the administration" (Freire, 2019, p. 58).

Neoliberalism's transformation of education and the school in this way has, as also stated by Freire, been accompanied by the transformation of the teacher. Since the teacher training system in a society is formed on building a teacher identity defined as suitable for instructional design, both in the West and Turkey, teacher identity has changed since the first stages of capitalism up to the present day (Ünal, 2011, p. 4). When the transformation of the act of instruction is considered from a historical perspective, Kumaravadivelu's (2003) three-way distinction of teachers' roles can herein be shared: the teacher as a *passive technician*, whose only role in class is to convey knowledge to the student, the teacher as a *reflective practitioner*, who thinks reflectively while making plans before the lesson and evaluating the instruction at the end of the lesson, and the teacher as a *transformative intellectual*, who strengthens his/her students and educates them as critical individuals for social transformation (pp. 8-14). By arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle for power relations, the term transformative intellectual refers to an

intellectual who tries to place instruction and learning directly in the political sphere and to a person who uses pedagogical implementation styles (Giroux and McLaren, 1986). Teachers who possess these characteristics are described as political activists (Liston and Zeichner, 1987). It is obvious that together with neoliberal policies, mainstream teacher training is pressured into training teachers as technician teachers rather than as transformative intellectuals (Giroux and McLaren, 1986; Hara and Sherbine, 2018; Tezgiden-Cakcak, 2019). The teacher of the past, who was defined with an intellectual identity, has seemingly been replaced by a competitive teacher who is oriented towards solving their own daily problems, doing their job well and seeking ways to obtain as high a salary as possible, and who is not interested in the problems of the country (Ünal, 2011, p. 20). As stated by Yıldız and Ünlü (2017) in their metaphor study related to the transformation of teachers, “Yesterday, we [teachers] were a majestic waterfall, but today, we are a stream that is drying up”.

“For capital, the function of education, consequently the function of teacher education as the producers of teachers, are ideological production and reproduction, and labour power production and reproduction” (Hill, 2007), since contrary to the claim of mainstream education, Hill (2006, 2007) claims that “teachers’ work is the production and reproduction of knowledge, attitudes and ideology”. Thus, having control over teacher education programmes also means having control over teachers in the reproduction of the ideology of the state.

Critical pedagogy, which undertakes to be an alternative voice to the effects of neoliberalism on education, “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 the nation state” (McLaren,

1997). Examining this from a more general and abstract viewpoint, Shor (1992) defines critical pedagogy as follows:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal circumstances of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media or discourse. (cited in Rikowski, 2011, p. 123)

Critical pedagogy claims that “the purpose of education should be to develop a more socially just world” (Kincheloe, 2018). However, according to Apple (2011), intellectuals of critical pedagogy are not sufficiently connected with the realities of school. As Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) have also suggested, to strengthen classroom practices, critical intellectuals and teachers need to be in cooperation with each other, because “even though the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is built on a critique of reproduction processes, the most significant defining feature of critical pedagogy is its emphasis on the emancipatory potential of education” (Braa and Callero, 2006). Hence, critical pedagogy must not be kept out of classrooms. The big words of critical pedagogy theorists must not remain in their books or articles, and must be implemented in classrooms. According to Ball (2016), “this involves re-imagining the teacher as an intellectual, rather than as a technician or as a bundle of skills and competences”. This is the only road to reaching a fairer world.

Examples of the application of critical pedagogy principles in the classroom can be found in the related literature. To cite an example, Sadeghi (2008) examined how a critical lesson had an effect on Iranian students’ critical consciousness. In a similar vein, Braa and Callero (2006) aimed to argue for the inclusion of

critical pedagogy in sociology education, and attempted to reveal the transformative potential of the sociology class. Moreover, it is also possible to find action research conducted towards transformational pedagogy in the relevant literature (Cammarota, 2017). As Asakereh and Weisi (2018) emphasised, teachers do own a central role in critical pedagogy, since they are responsible for raising students' awareness towards inequalities in society and for creating a new identity.

### **Aim and Importance**

The aim of this study is to understand how teachers are affected by critical pedagogy studies, based on the transformative effect of critical pedagogy. According to Giroux (1997), teachers at every level of schooling constitute a potential force for social change (p. 28). Being aware of this power and acting accordingly are primary steps taken on the road to social change, since teachers can develop pedagogic methods for the aim of changing society (Breunig, 2005). Hereinafter, intellectuals of critical pedagogy must aim to transform teacher candidates and teachers so that they will criticise ideologies and work towards achieving a more equal society (Hill, 2006).

As can be seen above, it is possible to find studies concentrating upon the application of critical pedagogy in classrooms (Braa and Callero, 2006; Sadeghi, 2008; Asakereh and Weisi, 2018). These studies are mostly those conducted with the aim of implementing critical thinking in classrooms and creating awareness of the subjects discussed. However, no study can be found in the literature which deals with what teachers or students *feel* or what they *think* when they encounter critical pedagogy studies. This study carries significance for that reason, and it can give an idea about what critical pedagogy means for teachers and students, and about the importance of critical pedagogy courses

and their resources, and lastly what can be done with them. Hill (2007) pinpoints teacher education in this regard:

Teacher education (both initial teacher education and professional development courses) should enable teachers to develop knowledge and skills to critically examine the ideological nature of teaching and the nature of teachers' work. Here, teachers, teacher educators and student teachers should develop an understanding of the potential role of teachers in transforming society.

In Turkey, especially since the military coup administration until the present, it can be understood that because of the continuing depoliticisation process, a significant portion of teachers are lacking in critical reactivity. For teachers to be aware of the increasingly accelerating proletarianisation and to fight against this, they must struggle in terms of taking the production and circulation of knowledge/education outside the process of capital accumulation, by defining their own positions in class. Therefore, there is a need for critical pedagogy studies (Ünal, 2011, p. 21). Students receiving teacher education and teachers involved in practice need to acquire a much more sophisticated conceptual understanding of the multiple contexts in which education is carried out and the multitude of powers that shape the process (Kincheloe, 2018, p. 184).

## **Method**

This study was conducted with an interpretivist qualitative research method in order to be able to understand how teachers – their way of way of thinking and beliefs - are affected by critical pedagogy. Interpretivist qualitative research assumes that reality is accessed through social constructions. There is no single observable reality; reality is plural or can be interpreted in different ways by people (Merriam, 2015, pp. 8–9). Since the aim in this study, too, was to comprehend the reality of how teachers were affected by critical pedagogy

based on the experiences they had constructed, an interpretivist qualitative research design was used.

The participants of the research comprised 17 teachers who took the “Critical Pedagogy” course provided as a master’s course in the Education Management Department of a university in Turkey, in 2018. Ten of these participants were female, while seven were male. All participating teachers were employed in various branches at public schools. Their seniority ranged between 3-15 years, while four of them worked as managers in their schools. The foremost characteristic of the participants was that none of them had encountered studies related to critical pedagogy prior to the course mentioned.

The purpose of this course is to familiarise master’s students who are already teaching with critical pedagogy literature, to inform them about discussions related to the basic concepts of the field, and to support them in forming their own educational philosophies. During the course, it is planned to support students’ competences in comprehending, explaining, interpreting and examining the implications and relationships of the concepts of humanity, culture, society, government and education. It is expected that each student, who is a component of the course, will be able to contribute to the course process at the level of basic actions like thinking, reading, observation, comprehension, explanation, speaking, writing, discussion, inquiry, criticism, rejection, suggestion and operation. It is acknowledged that each component of the course, which will be conducted in an environment of equality, freedom and peace, will display humanistic attitudes and behaviours such as love, respect, solidarity, cooperation and sharing.

This course was conducted over a period of 14 weeks for 3 hours per week. As the method of running the course, the Socratic method was utilised as

appropriate for the problem-defining educational approach proposed by Freire (2005). In accordance with the aims of the course, major and secondary resources included in the course syllabus were presented for the students to read, consider, criticise, investigate and discuss. During the course procedure, methods such as research, group discussion, brainstorming, question-answer, Socratic discussion, and presentation were used. In using these methods, numerous resources from the field of critical pedagogy were used. For the selection of these resources, it was first ensured that they could serve as an introduction to the course. The reason behind this is that the students taking the course had not previously taken a critical pedagogy course so the critical factor in choosing the resources was that they were considered to constitute the best introduction to the subject. The fact that the great majority of the resources had been translated into Turkish also influenced the selection phase. Some of these resources can be enlisted as follows:

- Paulo Freire – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
- Antonia Darder, Marta P. Baltodano & Rodolfo D. Torres - *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*
- Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels – *The Communist Manifesto*
- Dave Hill – *Critical Education and Marxism*
- Michael W. Apple – *Education and Power*
- Peter McLaren – *Life in Schools*
- Peter Mayo – *Liberating Praxis*
- Paolo Vittoria – *Narrating Paulo Freire: Towards a Pedagogy of Dialogue*
- Don Lorenzo Milani – *Letter to a Teacher by the Schoolboys of Barbiana*
- Louis Althusser – *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*
- Ivan Illich – *Deschooling Society*
- Herbert Marcuse – *One-Dimensional Man*



- Joel Spring – *A Primer of Libertarian Education*
- Ayhan Ural – *Hafif Ağır Denenceler (“Light Heavy Hypotheses”)*

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Reflective texts requested from the participants at the end of the course were used as the data collection tool. At the end of the course that took for 14 weeks, the participants were asked to write a reflective text in which they were to express what they had learnt, what they felt, how they had changed, and what they had experienced. The participants were informed that these reflective texts would be used as data by researchers, and their consents were taken. At the end of the course, 24 reflective texts were collected. In their study dealing with the characteristics of a good reflective text, Walling, Shapiro and Ast (2013) stated that the two main features of a reflective text are that it tells a story and that it is based on a personal experience or idea. Due to the fact that seven of the texts obtained from the participants were not based on personal experiences or ideas, and contained only written explanations about what critical pedagogy is, these were not accepted as reflective texts. Accordingly, these seven texts were eliminated, and the remaining 17 texts were included in the study. While these 17 texts belonging to the participants were being analysed, single code names such as T1, T2 (Teacher 1, Teacher 2) were given to each text in order to protect participants’ identities.

These reflective texts written by the participants were subjected to thematic analysis. During the thematic analysis process, first of all, the inductive content analysis technique was used. The inductive content analysis process is initiated with coding, and this coding is a process that proceeds in the form of classification-identification and identification-classification. Examples that include similar theoretical and descriptive views start with the creation of a thematic framework by placing them in data sets (Glesne, 2011, pp. 268–269).

On that account the codes obtained from the participants' statements were categorised as to their meanings. According to Merriam (2015), at this stage of inductive content analysis, a change towards the deductive occurs in the analysis. By naming the sets, certain categories are formed, and the researcher checks whether or not these categories are in also in their later data. As the researcher discovers new sets/categories, they verify them with the other data, and as the data is verified, it is tested and validated through the literature (pp. 175–176). At the analysis stage of this study the researchers also gathered the codes in categories, verified these with their other data, and tested them with the literature. Upon the completion of the analysis, the researchers obtained 13 categories, and 3 themes from these categories.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The participants' statements included in the reflective texts were categorised by the researchers, as explained in the data analysis section, and in the process of verification with the literature, it was determined that the meanings of the categories corresponded directly to Freire's concepts. As the categories corresponded to Freire's concepts, it was considered appropriate to name all the categories that emerged, and the three themes created by combining these categories, with the concepts in Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which the basic concepts are included. Consequently, in the naming of the categories that were obtained inductively from the data, naming was done deductively by following the path directed by the data. The model obtained from the data is shown in Figure 1.

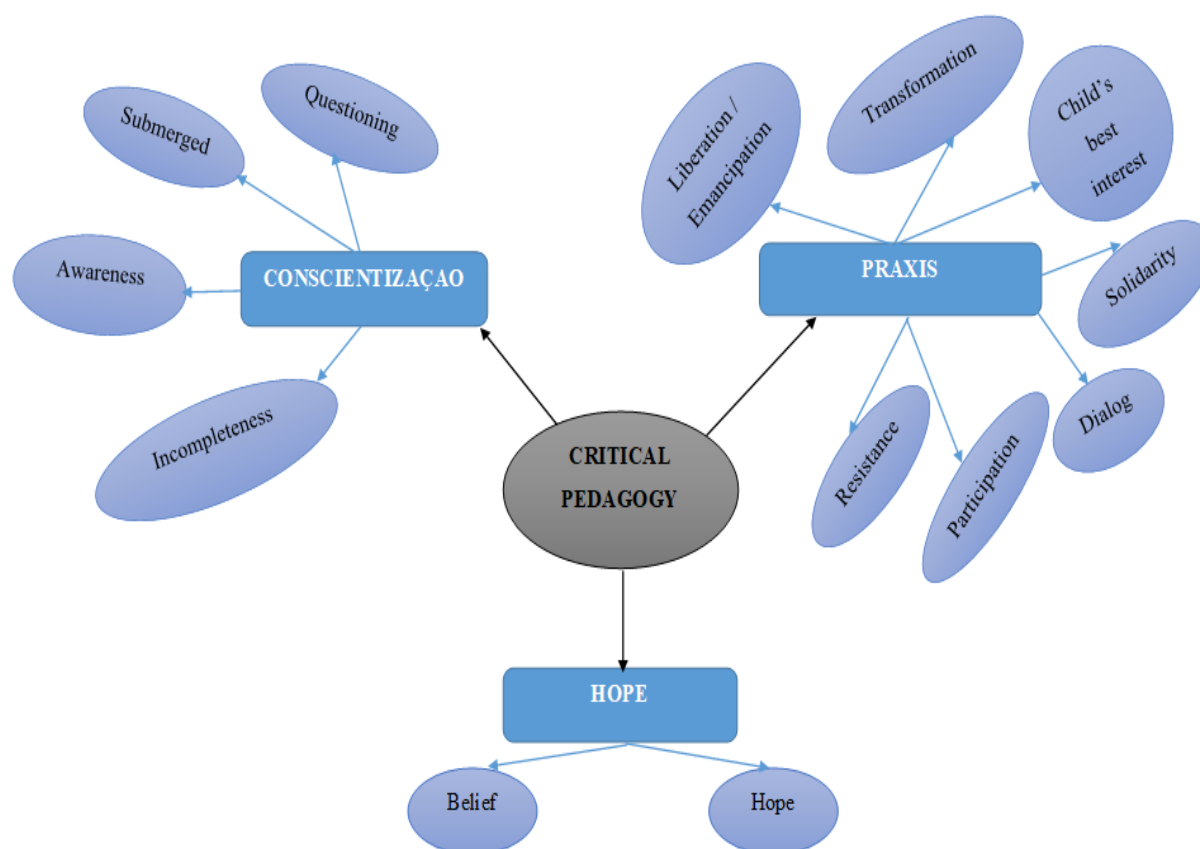


Fig. 1. Model generated from the data

The way in which the participants weighted the 3 themes and 13 categories shown in Figure 1 in their reflective texts can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 *Weights of Categories and Themes Created from Data in Reflective Texts*

Theme	Category	Frequency
Conscientização	Questioning	17
	Awareness	17
	Incompleteness	11
	Submerged	10
Praxis	Transformation	10
	Solidarity	5
	Resistance	4
	Liberation/Emancipation	4
	Dialogue	3
	Child's Best Interest	3
	Participation	3
Hope	Hope	8
	Belief	5

As can be seen in the table, when the theme named *conscientização* (critical consciousness) is examined, at the end of the 14-week Critical Pedagogy course, all of the participants stated that their awareness had increased and that they had begun to inquire accordingly. Whereas 11 participants articulated that they recognised how incomplete their understanding of this subject was, 10 participants reported that they had been protected within the mainstream system prior to taking this course. Examining the theme of *praxis*, it is seen that the participants' codes in this theme consist of categories related to their action. It was stated by 10 participants that their teaching activities had been transformed; by five participants that they had shown examples of solidarity at the schools where they were employed; by four participants that they wished to resist the system; and by four participants that they had displayed behaviours towards liberating themselves and their students. Three participants reported that they had begun to attach importance to dialogue in their relationships in class and at school; three participants stated that they now observed the child's best interests in class; and three participants declared that they had begun to give importance to democratic participation in all their actions. As for the categories gathered under the theme of *hope*, eight participants reported that after becoming familiar with the subject of critical pedagogy, they looked forward to the future with hope, while five participants expressed their belief that everything could change. These categories and themes given in the table, as well as quotations by the participants related to these categories, are discussed in detail below.

### Theme 1: Conscientização

As a result of their critical pedagogy studies, the participants stated in the reflective texts what they felt, specifically when they first encountered *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, how they were aware of what they had done until that day, how they had thought incorrectly until that day, what they had learnt, how they had 'awakened', and how they had been protected in a comfort zone

until that day owing to being a part of the mainstream education system. Four categories emerged from the participants' statements: *Questioning*, *Awareness*, *Incompleteness* and *Submerged*. These four categories also make up the theme of *Consciousness* – the category of *Conscientização* in Freire's conception.

The concept of *conscientização* indicates a learning process that requires understanding of social, political and economic conflicts and going into action against the conditions of the reality that oppresses people. Becoming conscious incites people to seek to authorise themselves by enabling them to enter the historical process as responsible subjects (Freire, 2005, pp. 35–36).

*Questioning*: Questioning is important for the oppressed, since the “tranquillity of the oppressors rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created and how little they question it” (Freire, 2005, p. 76). In their reflective texts, the participants underlined how they had wished to question the system until that time but that they were unable to do so. Now, however, they stated that it was time to question everything related to the system.

*Awareness*: “The oppressed, whose duty is to struggle for liberation with people who show true solidarity must acquire a critical awareness about oppression through the praxis of this struggle” (Freire, 2005, p. 51). According to the statements obtained from the participants, after they had begun to study critical pedagogy, their awareness of mainstream education, neoliberal policies, critical pedagogy enhanced, and so did what critical pedagogy offered them .

*Incompleteness*: Incompleteness refers to a person's inability to complete one's development, to meet the opportunities that they have (Freire, 2018, p. 232). In their reflective texts, the participants stated how little they had known previously, and had never considered that there could be an alternative

perspective towards education. They stated how inadequate they felt since they began to learn critical pedagogy.

*Submerged:* The term submerged means that a person's consciousness is enveloped by reality. Submerged regards reality as something that cannot be changed and that is conformed to (Freire, 2018, p. 229). The participants reported that they noticed how they had been a part of the mainstream system until that time and how they had conformed with the system. As stated by Freire (2005), one of the biggest barriers to achieving emancipation is the crushing reality that swallows up everything within and in this way, envelops human consciousness and takes the oppressed to a new submerged state in the 'culture of silence' (pp. 33-51). In this study, too, the participants stated that they were 'protected' by mainstream education. They stressed that until that time, they had not experienced reality and that they had been protected in order to feel 'normal'.

Some of the participants' statements included in the categories gathered under the theme of conscientização are presented below:

*«...I thought I was a good role model for children, that I was an elite...I wonder how many children's lives I have ruined over the years... » (T3)*

*«I noticed how many questions I had in my head, but that however much I wanted to, I was unable to ask those questions... » (T6)*

*« I grew up protected; I have isolated myself too much... » (T12)*

*«I never felt uncomfortable for being a part of the system... » (T15)*

*«How was I able to stay protected until this age?» (T15-T17)*

*«Mainstream was very easy...Obey the rules, do what you have to do...Now I realise how wrong I was... » (T12)*

*«I am trying to tell everyone what I've learned.» (T7)*

As can be understood from the quotations, following their critical pedagogy studies, the participants began to realise how they had been educated by mainstream education, how they had behaved in compliance with mainstream policies, and how inadequate they felt. As stated by Freire (2005), education must be regarded as a movement which includes people who are aware of their own deficiencies (p. 84). Likewise Hill (2010) claims, there have always been awakenings, sometimes small, sometimes large, for teachers. “It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their roles as a subject of the transformation” (Freire, 2005, p. 127). The participants were aware that they felt comfortable within the boundaries of mainstream education, since ‘it was extremely easy’, but due to their study of critical pedagogy, they felt guilty about being a part of this system. As Asakereh and Weisi (2018) claimed, “critical pedagogy requires teachers and students who can get out of their comfort zones and challenge the unsatisfactory state of affairs”.

Based on these findings, one can divulge that studies in critical pedagogy support participating teachers in three ways of knowing: knowing that, knowing how, and knowing by direct acquaintance (DeNicola, 2017, p. 23). Teachers who gained consciousness were aware of their roles as a part of the system, and recognised the problematic nature of the situation defined by Bauman (2015) as “security without freedom” (p. 61) that teachers encounter in their professional lives.

### Theme 2: Praxis

The participants’ statements in which they expressed how one should go into action against mainstream education, and what they did and what they considered doing for transformation and change, were gathered in seven categories: *Transformation, Solidarity, Resistance, Liberation/Emancipation,*

*Dialogue, Child's Best Interest and Participation.* These seven categories were then grouped under the theme of *Praxis*, since all participants' statements were about how they went into action or considered going into action.

As Freire (2005) suggested, “praxis is the new reason for being of the oppressed”, and an action can only be a real praxis if its results are the subject of critical reflection (p. 66). The participants stated that they were aware of what they had to do to bring about the transformation needed for themselves and their students. This became their goal and they began to act towards this. As Freire (2005) also stated, to be able to analyse the relationship between the oppressor and oppressed, the oppressed must confront reality in a critical way, and must also objectivise this reality and go into action against it (p. 52).

*Transformation:* For the individual who thinks critically, the most important thing is to transform the reality to continue the humanisation of people (Freire, 2005, p. 92). The participants also enunciated that transformation was a fundamental step for applying the principles of critical pedagogy in the classes that they taught and for changing their environments as much as possible, since “true commitment to people requires transformation of the reality in which they are oppressed” (Freire, 2005, p. 126).

*Solidarity:* “True solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these ‘beings for another’” (Freire, 2005, p. 49). Similarly, the participants in this study stated the necessity to be in solidarity with their students in order to be liberated together, and also with their colleagues as a means to transform the environment. As Freire (2005) stated, an understanding of humanity cannot be achieved with individualism; it can only be achieved with solidarity (p. 85).



*Resistance:* Resistance is a prominent concept for Freire. He believed that the freedom of the oppressed cannot be obtained by chance, and that they need to fight for this (Freire, 2005, p. 45), since for Freire (2005), the pedagogy of the oppressed is the pedagogy of those who struggle for their own emancipation (p. 53). The participants of the study stated in their reflective texts that resistance was the mere mechanism to achieve emancipation from being part of mainstream education. They emphasised that it was necessary to struggle as much as possible against neoliberal policies.

*Liberation/Emancipation:* For Freire (2005), “liberation is praxis” (p. 79). It is an action and reflection for people to transform the world where they live. The participants in the study expressed how they felt they were liberated and that they also wished to liberate their students. As Freire (2005) also asserted, “pedagogy of the oppressed must be forged *with* the oppressed, not *for* them” (p. 48). Therefore, unilateral liberation is not liberation for Freire; the participants in this study also recommended that this process should advance bilaterally.

*Dialogue:* Critical and emancipatory dialogue must be conducted together with the oppressed at every stage of the liberation struggle (Freire, 2005, p. 65). The participants also mentioned that dialogue is one of the most important elements of critical pedagogy, since in the opinion of the participants, dialogue is an essential first step for putting the principles of critical pedagogy into practice and for being a part of real education. As Freire (2005) stated, without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there is no real education (p. 93).

*Child’s Best Interest:* In the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Freire especially stressed the negative aspects of ‘banking education’. He argues that education is

not something that should be done for students, yet is something that must be done together with students in a collaborative way. Students are the subject of education, not the object. They should not be passive recipients. Teachers must recognise the undeniable fact that students are at the very centre of education. Thus, teachers must always observe the best interests of their students throughout the teaching process (Freire, 2005). The participants in this study also stated how they came to realise that education was for children and that they pondered observing the best interests of their students. They reported that at least in their own classes, they gave more priority to the students.

*Participation:* “Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building” (Freire, 2005, p. 65). As can be understood from Freire’s words on the value of participation, the participants also mentioned the merit of ensuring the participation of students and colleagues in the liberation process. In line with the participants’ statements, nothing in a real sense can be achieved by unilateral action.

Some of the participants’ statements included in the categories gathered under the theme of praxis are presented below:

*«We must be representatives of Socrates’ gadfly metaphor» (T1)*

*«As an administrator and a teacher, I am trying to create a school culture based on participation, sharing and horizontal dialogue with teachers and students.» (T2)*

*«I am determined to prefer to be with the children and to take the children’s best interests.» (T7)*

*«I have written a children’s book on children’s rights and enabled this book to be distributed free of charge to preschool children.» (T3)*

*«I have altered the seating order in my classroom.» (T4 – T13)*

«Now, mostly children are leading my class.» (T13)

«I have written my first piece on 'the problem of inability to educate people'»

(T9)

As can be understood from the above quotations, after their awareness was raised, the teachers began to apply the principles of critical pedagogy in their classes. The teachers changed, and they also initiated changes in their classrooms, albeit small changes such as altering the seating arrangement. As Hill (2006) also stated, there are large barriers that prevent teachers from implementing emancipatory pedagogy in their classes, and therefore, teachers begin to act with small steps. The participating teachers began to give priority to their students in their classes, and henceforth began to resist the system with these 'small' actions. As Hill (2010) asserted, there are people who realise that they want resistance and a different version of education. There are people who realise that they want a more equal society. As they expressed in their reflective texts, these teachers were now some of these people.

### Theme 3: Hope

Almost all of the reflective texts were concluded with the belief that everything could change and with hope for a better future. Thus, these codes obtained from the participants' statements can be grouped in two categories: *Hope* and *Belief*. These categories were grouped under the theme of ***Hope***.

*Hope*: In the words of Freire (2005), "hope does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait" (p. 92). In a similar manner, the participants stated that they were hopeful that there could be a better education, a better future for their students and for themselves. Correspondingly they stressed that in order to maintain this hope, they had to continually go into action.

*Belief:* The participants believed that everything could change with people who believe in the transformative power of critical pedagogy. As Freire (2005) emphasised, the oppressed must believe in the necessity of struggle for their emancipation, but the oppressed should acquire this belief as subjects, not as objects (p. 67).

Below are some of the participants' statements included in the theme of hope:

*«A different classroom, a different school and a different society are possible, provided that there is a different teacher...» (T1)*

*«My learned helplessness transformed into hope. » (T9)*

*«I hope that by starting with a little snowball, we can change into a big snowdrift.» (T12)*

*«Knowing that there are people like us in this society and that they do their best, gives hope for the future.» (T17)*

*«Now is not the time for hopeless. We do not have time for this.» (T2)*

The philosophy of hope is an overriding theoretical approach that has potential as a productive theoretical tool in education (te Riele, 2010). As Halpin (2003) proposed, hope holds a creative role in encouraging the development of creative solutions to problems regarded as uncontrollable – and it can be a vital resource and theoretical tool for education (p. 16). Based on their statements, it can be clearly stated that the participants began to be hopeful for a better future after this course. As a result, as Halpin (2003) stated, hope can be directed in an educational context – in fact, it can be taught (p. 27).

## **Conclusion and Suggestions**

This study has revealed important results related to the transformative power of critical pedagogy. In terms of training and study, this transformation experienced by the participants who took part in the mainstream education

process firstly gave them the chance to understand the process that they themselves were involved in. At the later stages, however, the participants, who found the opportunity for self-evaluation, took the road that led to the act of consciousness. Although the period –42 hours in 14 weeks was relatively short, as a result of the readings and evaluations that they made regarding the field of critical pedagogy, the effect levels from the critical pedagogy studies were high. The participants generally attained a level at which they could dwell on the task that they performed or the task performed in a sophisticated way. They had the opportunity to see the effect of neoliberal education policies on themselves and their fields of study in more detail. All of these took place based on the transformative power of critical pedagogy. As a result of the study, with the support of the transformations, as Hara and Sherbine (2018) also stated, teachers discovered the effect of neoliberalism on the standardisation of the curriculum with which they were trained, on the quality of teachers, on the definition of professional knowledge, and on the future of teacher education.

The participants realised the effects of neoliberalism on teacher education, which is “under attack from this ideology” (Sleeter, 2008) and on the teaching activities that they conducted at school at the time. They became aware of how they conformed to the system, that they carried out only the duties given to them, that they never questioned what they did or how they did it, and that on the grounds of this, they each worked as technician teachers. Besides, they are not alone in this respect. In another study conducted in Turkey, it was also revealed that participating preservice teachers were mostly trained as technician teachers (Tezgiden-Cakcak, 2019). As Bartolomè (2004) stated, critical pedagogy strengthens educators since it encourages them to “see through the dense fog of ideology” and to defend oppressed students. In dark and oppressive times, the act of instruction is a matter of awakening and strengthening for young generations as it enables them to imagine and go into action. Imagination

enables people to believe that everything could be different, and makes it possible for them to picture alternative realities through a real window (Greene, 2009).

It can be said that the teachers who took part in this study were aware that there are alternative voices for a better education and a more equal and just society. The teachers also recognised the relationship between the action to change themselves that they directed and the change in the general system. They stated that they were now well aware of mainstream policies, what these policies meant for themselves and their students, and that they could resist these policies at least in their own classrooms. This study reveals that critical pedagogy is an important means of resistance against neoliberal education policies and a significant tool for supporting teachers who live, in the words of Giroux (2018), “in the age of imposed amnesia” (p. 129).

As a result of the study, the participants grasped through the Critical Pedagogy course that there is a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed to which they were subjected throughout their education lives. While they were in the role of the oppressed as students, they adopted the role of the oppressor when they became teachers while also continuing to be the oppressed. According to Freire (2005), the radical change required for people who realise that they are both oppressors and oppressed is to transform the situation that generates the process of oppression (p. 50). For this reason, all educators must develop political and ideological transparency that will aid them in exposing discriminatory school conditions and practices (Bartolomé, 2004). In consequence, it can be said that with this change that they had undergone, the teachers participating in the research took steps towards a radical change that will contribute to the process of transforming educational and social inequalities.

What offers hope is the fact that the teachers in this study, despite all the learning experiences they had acquired from mainstream education throughout their lives, revealed that due to their new-found relationship with critical pedagogy studies, they were directed towards theoretical and praxical forms such as comprehension, explanation, thinking, inquiry and criticism. This change observed in the participants points to the key role of supporting teacher training programmes with the principles of critical pedagogy (Bartolomé, 2004).

It is evident that teachers, who have a vital role within the education system as transformatory intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) and culture workers (Freire, 2019), are amongst the most effective components of the system. However, even if teachers are included within the education system that Althusser (2014) describes as an ideological device of the state, they are not teachers of the state and can struggle as teachers of humanity -of students (Ural, 2005). Althusser (2014) expresses this struggle of teachers by addressing them in this way:

I beg the pardon of those teachers who, in impossible or appalling conditions, are striving to turn the scientific and political weapons that they manage to find in the history and knowledge that they 'teach' back against the ideology and the system and practices in which they are trapped. They are heroes of a kind. But they are very rare. How many others (the immense majority) do not even begin to suspect the 'work' that the system (which overwhelms and crushes them) forces them to do, or, worse, put their whole heart and all their ingenuity into performing it with extreme conscientiousness (the celebrated new methods!): in, say, the 'pilot' classes of nursery school and elementary school, secondary school and trade school. So little do they suspect it that they are helping, by their very devotion, to sustain and cultivate this ideological representation of the school, which makes the school today as 'natural' and useful-indispensable or even beneficial for our contemporaries as the Church was 'natural', indispensable and generous for our ancestors of a few centuries ago. (p. 223)

This identification should not mean that neoliberal/neoconservative states' interest towards the teacher has decreased. On the contrary, in societies where neoliberal ideology is dominant, states continue to make teachers useful by turning them into technicians and to use them for the reproduction of their ideologies. This means at the same time that neoliberal/neoconservative states are also aware of the importance of teachers. As a consequence, they repress teachers for the reproduction of their ideologies. This pressure has spread to such a wide area that teachers are not given the chance for freedom or the development of freedom (Ural, 2005). For this reason alone, intellectuals of critical pedagogy and teacher educators must familiarise teachers with critical pedagogy, and must encourage them to develop critical ideas about what they come across and the policies that they will face in their professional lives. As Hill (2006) stated, “teachers without the capacity to stimulate critical inquiry leave education always on the edge of indoctrination and quiescence”.

According to Mason (2007), teachers must encourage their students with regard to asking critical questions and thinking critically instead of educating them as passive recipients. However, as Hill (2007) and Asakereh and Weisi (2018) emphasised, this can only be achieved by making radical changes in teacher training programmes. These programmes must aim for preservice and in-service teachers' awareness of critical thinking and its effect on their students.

Therefore, awareness of the importance of critical pedagogy for teachers and Critical Pedagogy courses should be extended to all undergraduate and postgraduate teacher training programmes. Books and articles on the subject of critical pedagogy should be used as a resource in courses such as Philosophy of Education and Sociology of Education, which are currently compulsory teacher education courses in Turkey. In addition, the methods and techniques suggested by critical pedagogy should be used in all courses so that critical thinking and inquiry can be developed, since, as Bartolomè (2004) stated, educators should



be conscious of potentially harmful ideologies and practices that they may encounter in the classrooms where they work. In order to prepare for questioning these, the introduction of critical pedagogy principles into teacher education programmes is of great importance. The basic principles of critical pedagogy can be implemented throughout all education programmes. All traditional subjects can be used as a vehicle for change by placing emphasis on dialogue, criticism and praxis (Braa and Callero, 2006).

In opposition to Thatcher's statement that "there is no alternative", Apple (2011) claimed that there are alternatives that can work effectively for a better education process and for lesser alienation of teachers and students. In that respect, all teachers and teacher educators must recognise that there are alternatives and everyone should assume responsibility for a better education and a fairer and more equal world. As Freire (2019) stated, the people who take this action, form organisations, and deepen and strengthen democracy against all types of authoritarian venture, are also the people that will shape the discipline necessary for the functioning of democracy.

## Notes

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