

Critical Pedagogy in an EFL Teaching context: An ignis fatuus or an Alternative Approach?

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1. Introduction

Language teaching has, for much of its history, been subject to the heavy "evangelical zeal" of the centers who have exported their theories, methods derived from these, approaches, materials, and books to the developing countries "often with doubtful relevance to the sociological, educational and economic context of the Outer Circle" (Pennycook, 1994, p:690).

Second language acquisition theory has prompted methods from the Audio-Lingual Method, through Communicative Language Teaching, to Task-Based Teaching, all of which seem to be effective and authoritative for the classroom. But there are some problems with these approaches; they are to be implemented in EFL situations. First, they view language as "object" or merely focus on "methodology". Second, they often fail to link language with local socio-cultural, political and linguistic environment and neglect student student's needs, objectives and interest. They are often concerned with the what (grammatical and communicative competence) and how (methodology) of teaching, rather than the "why", "how", and "who" of instruction.

Some SLA research views classroom as detached from larger historical, political, and social conditions, e.g. classroom is considered to be a self-contained minisociety, insulated and isolated from outer world. It is thus unable to capture the complexity of language socialization, socio-cultural perspective of learning, and learners' multiple identities. Thus, none of them have offered the optimum multi-variety approach to

teaching demanded by diverse learning conditions (Lantolf, 2000). As Canagarajah (2002, p: 134) poses:

Methods are not value-free instruments, but cultural and ideological constructs with politico-economic consequences. There is no "apolitical neutrality of English", therefore it is unwise to overlook the issues of power and social inequality that lie behind English teaching and are manifested frequently in the forms of sexism, classism, and racism in classrooms.

This paper aims to scrutinize some complexities of EFL teaching in an urban environment in southern Iran (Bandar Abass) by focusing on the partnership between critical pedagogy and an indigenous way of thinking in which both teacher and learners are aware and proud of their traditions, beliefs, priorities and collaboratively work to create a richer pedagogical context. In Ilan Gur-Ze'ev words (1998, p:463) "it also suggests possibilities for identifying, criticizing, and resisting violent practices of normalization, control, hegemonic education and reproduction practices in a system which uses human beings as its agents and victims". Because according to Freire (1998, p:75), language which does not claim to empower the marginalized and the controlled to conceive and articulate their knowledge and needs, or is not devoted to their emancipation, is mere "verbalism".

2. What is Critical Pedagogy? "Marketing interests from centers to the periphery"

Hall, G (2000) argues

The globalization of ELT is often perceived as an inevitable, unproblematic, and 'natural' development which contributes to people's lives and helps develop international communication. However, writers within the broad and somewhat diverse 'Critical Pedagogy' tradition (e.g. Canagarajah, Pennycook, Phillipson, Wallerstein) have criticized these views, accusing ELT of helping to maintain unequal core-periphery relations in the capitalist world-economy, and of suppressing diversity of language and thought in the world.

Paulo Freire, "the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy", though he seldom used the term, is known as the most celebrated critical educator (Morgan, 2000). He tried to develop students' ability to think critically about their situation and allow them to recognize connections, between their individual problems and experiences and the social context in which they are embedded. Freire believed voice, social transformation and agency should be major goals of education. He argued against

traditional methods where educators perpetuate the relations of power and domination and authority in the classroom, while the learners remain passive recipients of knowledge. Materials alienate learners from learning and facilitate a process of cultural invasion, because the learner is uncritically exposed to ideas imposed from above, from the dominant culture.

Considering the complex sociohistorical and political aspects of language teaching and learning many researchers suggest that critical pedagogy should be the vital essence of teaching. Critical pedagogy in EFL maintains that both learning and teaching are political processes and language is not simply a means of expression or communication, but "a practice that constructs the ways learners understand themselves, their sociohistorical surrounding and their possibility for the future"(Norton & Toohey, 2004). Critical pedagogy sees learning as locally-situated, personal, sociohistorical and political. Thus, any language syllabus must be negotiated, challenged and appropriated. In this way, the students begin as a member of a group (religion, minority,) and reach the point of revelation (wisdom), meaning they gain their own voice, point of view, personal way of thinking and challenge social issues.

Postmodern, anti-racist, post-colonial and queer theories play a role in further explaining Freirean conceptions of critical pedagogy, shifting its focus on social class to include issues such as: race, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, globalization and other elements.

Canagarajah (1999, p:145) reviews two important theories underlying critical pedagogy. First, the concept of reproduction captures "how students are conditioned mentally and behaviorally by the practice of schooling to serve the dominant societal institution". He describes a vicious cyclical process where the dominant social arrangement passes its values to the school, the school through its curriculum and pedagogy passes on those values to the students and the students subsequently uphold the status quo. Thus, the first task of teacher, from a critical-pedagogy viewpoint, is to raise students' awareness of the reproductive process and to empower them to challenge the system. The second concept is resistance theory, which "explains how there are sufficient contradictions within institution to help subjects resist and subvert such reproduction, gain agency, conduct critical thinking and initiate change".

The role of teacher is also redefined in critical pedagogy as "transformative Intellectual", a term coined by Henry Giroux to describe educators who possess the knowledge and skills to critique and transform structural inequities. Traditional roles must be abandoned.

3. Key Concepts

3.1. Banking vs. Problem-Posing Education ^[1]

In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire challenged the separatist, "Banking Model of Education", in which the literacy is taught as a set of cognitive skills or a decontextualized body of knowledge divorced from learners lives, with the consequence that learners cannot be reflective or bring their own experiences to the learning process. It inhibits creative power and submerges consciousness. Freire explains that banking education is generally characterized by the following oppressive attitudes and practices:

- the teacher teaches and the students are taught
- the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
- the teacher thinks and the students are thought about
- the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
- the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply
- the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
- the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it
- the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students
- the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are objects

He suggests instead a liberatory, "problem-posing education" that rejects the Banking Model or education as the process of transferring information, and embraces a view of education as consisting of acts of cognition that take place through dialogue. Students and teachers become critical co-investigators in dialogue with each other^[1]. According to Freire (1998), with problem-posing education, "no one teaches another, nor is

anyone self-taught. Men teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are 'owned' by the teacher". It makes literacy relevant and engaging by focusing on problematic issues and examining common-sense knowledge through critical manner and constant unveiling of reality. Knowledge must be shared through authentic dialogue with an emphasis on conscious-raising and anti-authoritarian teaching. Thus, "realizing our consciousness" is the first step in praxis. What is praxis, then?

3.2. Praxis: "critical reflection and action"

Praxis is the power and know-how to take action against oppression while stressing the importance of liberating education. Praxis involves engaging in the cycle of theory, application, reflection and then back to theory. Social transformation is the product of praxis at the collective level (Freire, 1998).

Action
Reflection } word =work=praxis

The key in praxis is the ongoing partnership between action, reflection and dialogue. It is through this partnership that Freire advocates problem-posing education, as a construction of knowledge through "invention and reinvention", in relationship with people and the world, enacting a particular kind of inquiry (the pedagogy of the oppressed).

But how can we practice this praxis? The answer is through a dialogical process.

3.3. The Dialogical Process in Critical Pedagogy: "Enacting praxis"

The dialogical approach to learning abandons the lecture format and the banking approach to education in favor of dialogue and open communication among students and teachers. According to Paulo Freire (1972), in this method, all teach and all learn. The dialogical approach contrasts with the anti-dialogical method, which positions the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge, a hierarchical framework that leads to domination and oppression through the silencing of students' knowledge and experiences. Hones, D (2002, p:163) assumes that

Dialogical process uses students' linguistic and cultural understanding as sources of knowledge and motivates social participation. As an integral part of critical pedagogy, dialogue can engage teacher and students in an interactive exchange about their lives, where social, economic, political and cultural issues are

addressed critically and an opportunity to challenge the power relationships within the community is provided.

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests "dialogic pedagogy helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenges inequities in society". Dialogue journals are valuable tools for literacy development which grows out of personal knowledge, diverse experience, interests involving interaction with others, or in Vygotskys' words "a private channel of communication".

Reed (1993) summarizes the benefits of dialogue journals as follows:

- 1- an aid to lesson planning
- 2- a way to individualize instruction
- 3- a source of information about students' culture, activities and needs

When a word is deprived of its dimension of actions, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle character, into verbalism, into an alienated blah. On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter _ action for action sake_ negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible (Freire, 1998).

4. Problem-Posing, Critical Intervention, Critical Consciousness

The qualitative study described in the following sections of this paper is participatory in nature. Participatory action research views human as co-creators of reality and emphasizes experiential knowing, fosters authentic dialogue and reflective action (Freire, 1970). This study incorporated Freire's empowerment model of reflective inquiry, consciousness, and critical intervention whereby each student narrated a personally experienced critical incident in their lives. To help teachers accomplish what Freire did, Wallerstein (1987, p:33) created a systematic process that teachers can modify to deal with students' lives. After identifying a particular problem, a teacher presents a code which can be a text or objects that stimulate discussion of the students' experiences with the problem. The teacher can then introduce other codes to help the students understand social forces that affect their lives. As the last step, the teacher encourages the students to create solutions and act on them.

First, we investigated how the problem-posing process of learning helped students maintain discussion, dialogue and raise critical consciousness. As was mentioned, learning and education are essentially the individual's responsibility and possibility is conditioned by an individual's competence to transcend the "father image", prejudices, habits, and external power relations that constitute the collective in order to attain full personal and human growth. To determine the extent and ways in which the experience of taking the course affected students' critical consciousness, we focused on ongoing dialogues and interviews.

Data were triangulated from five sources: in-depth daily observations, field notes in the classroom, audio-tapes of interviews, exchange of dialogue journals between the teacher and students, and authentic materials brought into the classroom by the teacher and students.

This study was conducted in a language institution, in Bandar Abass in the far South of Iran. It is a colonial city, flooded every year with more than 22000 immigrants from different cultures, who hold a variety of important jobs. What made this city an intriguing case, yet a rich and appropriate context for this study, was the minority of native residents. Another reason was the unique culture, costumes, customs, values, dialects, traditions, and beliefs of the native inhabitants. 22 EFL learners, both male and female, who seem to be diminished and held in minority by the dominant culture of the non-natives were involved. Their ages were between 18 - 29, they were from different educational backgrounds (e.g. engineering, language translation, nursing, law) and different cultures (Tehrani, Shirazi, Kermani, but in the main Bandari). All of them had passed 12 levels of study in language Institutions and were participating in a "Chat Course", a free discussion class, to improve their general proficiency and fluency (in the four skills and other components of language learning). The course was held on 4 days a week, each session lasting 90 minutes. The overall purpose of the study was to discover whether in a one-semester course designed to acquaint students with issues of social justice students experienced a change in their: **a)** definition of social justice, **b)** recognition of practices relevant to social justice in their organizations, and **c)** sense of responsibility for contributing to change in the distribution of justice.

The first step in teaching was finding a socio-politically relevant cultural theme in students' lives. Topics selected were the following: gender discrimination, cultural invasion and internet filtering, anomie, religion, job opportunity, the society's view of Azad University, prohibition of traditional dress, army service, prohibition of Bandari songs and dance. To guarantee maximum learner engagement, we used a menu approach. In this approach, the content of course was negotiated, and the learners were given an opportunity to choose from among topics. This enhanced learners' motivation, sense of responsibility and autonomy. Furthermore, learners were invited to bring their own texts, pictures and audio-tapes into the classroom. Group discussions considered different ways to respond to the dilemmas presented, based on students' lives. At the end of the course, they were asked to write about their impressions of, feelings towards and opinions about the experience.

The first topic students read and discussed dealt with the prohibition of traditional dress. A reading passage, taken from the Internet, in which two Sierra Leone girls talked about being ashamed of using their traditional dress in public, was used. Later, some pictures depicting the traditional dress of Bandar Abass were brought into the classroom by a student. At first, I as teacher presented my own personal experience of being the object of symbolic violence due to my parents' traditional dress. This exercise strengthened our dialogues and indicated we were in the same boat. Although many students were surprised to read about my experience of the issue, they showed appreciation for my sharing a possibly embarrassing experience, and they became more open to sharing their own experiences. The depth and length of their written journals showed how students became more engaged. As one of them said:

I know what you are saying. Once, when I was a child, I, my mom and my sister went to market. They were wearing a Bandari veil. And you know, it is very fine and thin and hair and hands are exposed. Suddenly, I saw a group of cars arriving there and they harassed my sister for not observing hijab (full covering of the face and head). My mom begged them, even cried. It was one of my worst things that I remember. Why should our society treat us like this? *Isn't it a social inequity?*(my italics) (Zeinab's journal, 22, from Bandar Abass).

Another topic was religion. This took three sessions. The first session was dedicated to presenting two texts in which two people narrated their stories, about the Holocaust and discrimination among religions in the world, respectively. After posing some reading comprehension questions, students were asked their opinions. A student

(Mohammad, 29 from Bandar Abass) responded (transcription of a tape recorded in class).

S₁: Excuse me, why should we talk about Jewish, Christian and Moslem, while we are living in a country in which Sunni is minority?

T: Well, why do you think so?

(loud talk in the classroom in response)

T: O.K, see. First, we must finish this text. Later we can discuss about Mohammad. Now students, you have to write a summary of the texts and determine the main idea, topic sentence and supporting sentences for your writing activity.

(After a while, the teacher allowed them to discuss the issue)

S₁: Just look at our mass media: TV, radio, newspaper and so on. Have you ever seen or heard anything about Sunni people. There are even some movies about Christians, or sometimes there are some documentary movies about Jewish (pause & hesitation) - _what is the exact word for "religious ceremony"?

S₂: Rituals

T: "Liturgy" is also used

S₁: Oh, yeah, Jewish rituals, liturgy...whatever, on TV. We are here, in Iran. But we are neglected... this is too unfair!

S₂: It is not true; you have your own mosques, schools. You even have the right to study your own books both in schools and the Konkoor national examination. So, what bothers you?

S₁: Oh, thanks for your comment! 80 percent of Bandar native residents are Sunni! What bothers me is what Michael Jackson says" They don't really take care about us"

Class: That's a fantastic song!!!!

The class was asked to reflect on "religious liberty" and wrote about it. Here is an excerpt from one journal:

Of course, I am Iranian and I'm proud about it. But I feel more sympathy with Arabs than Iranians, because I'm Sunni. Once I went to Mecca. And when the guard tried to push me away from Mohammad's shrine, I shouted I'm Sunni, I am not Iranian. I really felt it that time. Look, we are so different from each other in ideology. They are too *superstitious*, and sometimes... (my italics). (Sanaz's journal, 19, from Bandar Abass)

In the second session, we used two pictures of murdered men. We asked them to guess who had done these crimes. They had a hot debate: Americans, Israeli soldiers, Al-Qaida radicals, Iraqi terrorists. There was a heavy silence when we informed them that the pictures had been taken in Iran (the murders were perpetrated by Malek-Rigi, a Sunni terrorist and a Shiite terrorist group in Zahedan). We had a discussion about respect, liberty, tolerance, and negotiation among religions. In the third session, we listened to a song about peace, described a photo taken in Mecca showing Shiites and Sunnis praying together, and read a text about "humanity and religion". After a week, the same student wrote in her journal:

Although, I am still proud of my religion, I think the matters are not as I thought. I am really sorry to say such a thing about my countrymen. I mean, Shiite people are good and respectable, because they follow their own path. I think we are different, but it doesn't mean we should humiliate, murder or kill each other. I told my parents: we need to reflect about how we think about Shiites (we never invite Shiites to our ceremonies). I'm sure I can convince my family that we are *all human and Moslem* (my italics). My father promised me to participate in "Sunni-Shiite Unity Celebration" this year. (Sanaz's journal.)

Another hot topic discussed at length was cultural Invasion. In spite of calls for enhanced collaboration between societies and different cultures, there is still conflict between groups and nations. The use of mass media and the internet could be very deterministic. But it has the danger of jeopardizing many traditions, values, beliefs and blind adaptation of other cultures. Many Iranians are fascinated by Anglo-Saxon ideologies and their style of life. They take everything about them for granted, for instance, they believed: Americans are more intellectual, liberated and respectable than their own countrymen. The goal of this session was to promote critical communication activities for engagement in democratic decision-making by reconciling the pressures for diversity and difference with engaging in anti-racist social activism and alternative communication practices. Many students assumed that it could be achieved through online- communication with distant web users in other parts of the world. Still, they had to overcome the serious obstacle of "filtering":

Internet is very useful in understanding different cultures. Before filtering, I became familiar with people from different countries. But, it didn't mean I accepted every aspect of their cultures. I think cultural invasion is too strong. *Why don't we think about cultural interaction instead?* (my italics) (Ali's journal, 28, from Shiraz)

Not only did Ali question the status quo that keeps him subjugated, he also he indicated how problem reformulation and attitude change could provide a solution to the dilemma.

Another student showed she was aware of the hidden agenda of the mass media to impose ideas on our mind. She challenged this:

I always thought cultural invasion is an American effort to take our identity, but now I understood it is more complicated. I hear from radio, TV, newspaper that anything that that resembles American life is cultural invasion. Now I know it is not so. My idea was so constrained. I think I accepted everything they told us blindly, without thinking about it deeply and fairly" (Mehrnoosh, 24, from Bandar Abbas)

"Gaining one's voice" is a critical concept which develops over time with critical consciousness. Fariba, 28, from Shiraz assumed "it is something natural that women are deemed inferior to men in our society, because they are not appropriate for many jobs and their feeling dominating over their thinking". But, during the term, she declared her voice in resisting the dominant discourse instead of accepting it as natural. As she continued to develop "critical consciousness", she developed an awareness to withstand, to gain her own voice, and act in her own interest. In Freire's terms, we restored to marginalized groups their stolen "voice", identity and name.

Another interesting case was that of Marzieh, 26, from Shiraz:

.....I always thought being a good person is equivalent to being a good an obedient person accepting everything my dad said blindly. But it is not correct. They deserve respect and difference but I need to develop my own identity too. I am tired of being a good girl. But I don't want to be a radical rebel. I changed my attitude towards what it means to be a good girl: when my dad asked me to go with him to the Kish Islands, I answered: with all the respect I have for you, I'm afraid to say NO. Because I have a physics test. He looked at me unbelievably and said: who cares? I think he understood that his daughter has *her own ideas, choice and rights*" (my italics).

It was discovered that gaining personal voice is not enough in the development of the students' consciousness. They also have to develop caring by being receptive to others' voices, world views and contradictory ideas in a more complete and fair way.

At the end of the term, the students were asked to write their ideas and feelings. Most of them commented that it was "a really different classroom: effective and interesting", "the teacher's comments encouraged us to think better", " topics were very helpful, real and motivating". One of them wrote:

Before this class, I always thought, knowledge and language learning mean: studying, memorizing, attending to class and doing our job well to prepare for a future job and life in society. But now I see there is much more to knowledge. This class was really unique. I never had such an experience during my Diploma, B.A and M.A courses. I not only learnt many expressions, words and reinforced my skills, but also learnt to talk to others to gain an insight into other perspectives that could illuminate my own. I also learnt to think critically, fairly and to do my best to make a better society.(Meysams' journal, 27, Bandar Abass)

Considering the three types of learner autonomy proposed in post-method pedagogy, academic, social and liberatory autonomy, we could see how this student reinforced his autonomy through the course. Social autonomy that is interpersonal, "the learner's willingness to function as a cooperative member of classroom community", was manifested through Meysam's willingness to interact with others and deal with their opinions. Liberatory autonomy, defined as " the learner's ability to critically think about sociopolitical impediments to the realization of full potential human and the tools to cope with them", was also achieved through recognizing the failure of the society and educational system to prepare him to deal with real life, "my Diploma, B.A, M.A". He also acknowledged he was becoming a more critical thinker.

4.1. The Silence of the Lamb: an Exceptional Case

The most astonishingly painful experience during this course was a girl we will call Sara. She was reclusive and aloof. I did my best to encourage her to participate but to no avail. She remained reserved and reluctant to take part in discussions. But one day something very strange happened. We had a discussion about patriarchy and the father image and the unquestionable authority of the father in our life. I took the first step in the discussion, and narrated my own painful experience with my father, who was severe, dictatorial, and how that influenced my life: I had no choice even about

cutting my own hair, selecting friends or choosing an educational major. There was a welcome debate. Everyone asserted that all of them had experienced something similar. In the second session, a written text taken from the internet "Take the blue pill or red pill, an effective approach to question parents' unfair authority", I asked them to read the text and see if we could adapt it to our own society, and also propose some genuine solutions. Everyone proposed an idea. Their alternative solutions were examined and analyzed in terms of appropriateness and feasibility: e.g. "escaping home as a sign of objection is quite useless, since it adds further problems to society." Or, "moving to another apartment was unpractical". Sara was completely silent. After two sessions, suddenly she said:

I think the author of this text is naively positive towards this problem, since he hasn't got any clue about the real world. He seems to be in a crystal world and never left his armchair.....

I commented: well, it's a problem in our life and we can talk about it to find the solution. Do you have anything to say Sara?

Sara: (after a heavy silence), NO

Two sessions later, at the end of class she came to me: (the conversation was in Farsi)

Sara: Miss Sadeghi, we need to talk about something very important, if I tell you, would you please promise me to ask all students to change their attitudes towards their parents?

Teacher: well, what do you mean?

Sara: look, I escaped with my boyfriend to Teheran, because my dad didn't allow me to marry him (I had to marry my cousin in keeping with traditional custom), and one day.....(hesitantly continuing) - I went back to home, because my mom tried to commit suicide. Though she survived, but I tarnished my family name, broke my mom's heart. Yeas, I have actualized myself, gained my own identity. But at what cost? I hate you, your class, and your ridiculous ideas. Because you have no idea of what it means.

Sara showed great resistance to the text, as well as the author's voice, something that all of us took for granted as being correct. She believed what was good for youths in the UK was not necessarily appropriate or applicable for us as Asians. She subconsciously discovered that there is no universal rule or set of generic procedures

to be applied to every context "to ignore local exigency is to ignore lived experience..." (Kumaravadivelu, 2001)

She never came to my class again. But, I myself radically changed my ideas toward my parents. I worked with my heart, not mind, just to honor a girl who taught me: actual experience is quite different from hypothetical solutions!

4.2. The Teacher as Intellectual Transformative

Liu Qian, (2007, p:45) believes

As transmitters of knowledge, the role of teachers has never been neglected, since they have been given absolute authority and students are not expected to challenge this kind of authority. As a result, students are not encouraged to form their own opinions and thoughts. They are used to looking for keys to questions from their teachers and textbooks. We teachers, as both victims and practitioners of this kind of long-term educational practice, often find that it is very difficult to hear original and fresh ideas from our students and ourselves as well.

multidimensional view of teaching requires deliberation and dialogue, and the exchange of ideas where reflection is shared through socio-political discussion, requiring teachers to discuss their beliefs and practices within the routines and outside of their daily work. It makes teaching a form of practical, social, political, and intellectual accomplishment, or what Freire (1972) calls "praxis." For Freire, praxis without the regulative ideas of emancipation and social justice is blind; and critical reflection without some concrete content from our practical interest in communicative practice is empty. The most important questions for teachers are not only about mere technical and individual evaluation of efficacy of their practices but also about the potential social, moral and political value of what they do. In order to accomplish this task, teachers have to understand complex and messy situations, ask penetrating questions, provide insight into the implications of their actions and events, and to advise appropriate courses of action. Teachers can also help adolescents consider how power is distributed in society. Despite Delpit's assertion (1988) that teachers from privileged groups in society can lack awareness of their power, they can become transformative intellectuals, engaging themselves and their students in a process like Wallerstein's (1987, p:44) to solve problems caused by society's unequal distribution of power.

I have to admit this course was the most direct and enlightening teaching experience that I have had, although it had some contradictory effects on me. First of all, I felt isolated, destitute, and high and dry; since my colleagues were quite reluctant to even share their ideas (the course was radical and dealt with taboos and forbidden topics). Ignorance is not a blessing, but critical reflection made me dissatisfied and skeptical about everything. Every text seemed to be biased and served a particular group interest. I saw power, dominance and social inequality more clearly than before, and I felt futile and incompetent to change the world around me. But there was something else: I changed myself a lot and when a person changes, there is a chance for the world to change too!

Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (1998, p:463) argues that:

Praxis education of this sort is conditioned by the possibility of developing people's competence to demystify reality, decipher its codes, and critically reconstruct the demolished potential for human solidarity, cooperation, and the realization of their dialogical essence. This transcendence can receive its meaning only within the framework in which a dialogue is immanent, and might change it and enable the self-realization of individuals as part of a collaborative partnership, a socially responsible member within the community, with other reflective politically-oriented human beings. This conception of praxis is very far from the one which is common in today's standard versions of critical pedagogy; and it is committed and conditioned by spirituality, conceptual possibilities, and socio-cultural conditions that are described by standard critical pedagogy as "elitism".

These are the accomplishments of a critical pedagogy course that aimed not only at enlightening and transforming both teacher and students, but also at resisting and challenging the social inequities taken for granted that surround and affect our lives so massively.

5. Conclusion

Conventional language classrooms do not have a transformational effect on learners, because they do not address underlying and systemic societal issues such as social inequity, discrimination, violence, and poverty. But people can only change and develop by rethinking their personal assumptions and actions and these "processes of reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" are what Freire called praxis. It is possible to identify three main approaches to critical pedagogy. One

approach is to take local situations seriously and negotiate with students about teaching/learning. Another approach is to address the issues of power, discourse and knowledge. The last approach is to connect the content, students' lives and the larger context of students' lives through engaged dialogues. This study has tried to consider all of them. As the activities showed, students began doubting what is taken for granted in their own lives. Some became more critical and reflective about themselves and others became critical about the society surrounding them. In sum, the class engaged in discussing issues that were derived from their own living experience, instead of practicing decontextualized exercises, or in Freire's (1972) words: "grounding class activities in the students' thematic universe". Topics were contextually and locally situated. In addition, the elective cultural issues the course described were not shallow ones. Rather, students engaged in examining social issues that raised critical consciousness. The teacher, as a transformative intellectual, has a crucial role in the problem-posing process: to learn from learners, to welcome and appreciate their perspectives and engage in the dialogical process. Dialogical journals increased literacy and writing proficiency. Yet problem-posing has another dimension; it means challenging common-sense knowledge, questioning and sometimes disagreeing with students to develop their critical consciousness. One might argue that critical consciousness does not necessarily lead to critical action. However, in some cases, critical consciousness allowed the students to resist or change. Thus, instead of reproducing the dominant discourse, they challenged the unequal predominant ideology. As Morgan (1998) states: "the teacher, through problem-posing, can help students see issues in critical ways that promote their participation and sensitivity to issues".

Note:

¹ This section is adopted from: " Critical Pedagogy on the Web: Key Terms and Concepts Related to Critical Pedagogy" <http://mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu/~stevens/critped/terms.htm>

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Notes

¹ This section is adopted from: "Critical Pedagogy on the Web: Key Terms and Concepts Related to Critical Pedagogy" <http://mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu/~stevens/critped/terms.htm>

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