

The practicality and relevance of second language critical pedagogy

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The paper reviews eight topics in the area of second language critical pedagogy: (i) historical inheritances and lines of development associated with critical pedagogies; (ii) advocacy (and the need for critical language teachers to engage in it); (iii) the diverse institutional contexts that could be explored for critical language pedagogy; (iv) the range of languages within which critical approaches have been explored; (v) EFL critical pedagogy; (vi) the broad range of categories of oppression addressed by critical language pedagogy; (vii) materials for critical language pedagogy, and (viii) the role of the 'imaginary' in encouraging critical language pedagogy. I suggest that these constitute matters which if given attention by critical language pedagogy specialists could enhance the perceived practicality and/or relevance of the area.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I address eight areas associated with critical language pedagogy which deserve consideration under the general headings of 'relevance' and 'practicality'. My intent is partly to highlight the practical relevance of critical pedagogies of second languages (L2) in several areas where work of this sort is less in evidence than it might be. In addition, I want to emphasize where more work needs to be done if the practical usefulness, defendability, relevance and so on, of critical pedagogy in language teaching is to continue to grow. I link the term 'relevance' with the word 'practical' because a sense of the real relevance of critical pedagogies is enhanced if they can be seen as practical, and if an understanding of what is additionally needed to put them into practice can be obtained.

First, I will address the diverse historical inheritances and lines of development associated with critical pedagogies of second or other languages. I then spend time on advocacy. I draw attention to the diverse institutional contexts that could be explored for critical language pedagogy. I point to the broader than appreciated range of languages within which critical approaches have been explored, then discuss aspects of EFL (English as a foreign language) critical pedagogy, as this is one of the more challenging, but basically positive, developments. A very practical matter is that of materials, and perhaps the most abstract of my topics is the one I close with, the role of the 'imaginary'. To some extent, the structure of the paper is

linear in that I will begin by looking backward to overlooked ancient history, and I will end with the need for an uncolonized imagination that enables better looking forward.

In beginning, let me note a representative early definition for the area under discussion:

There is by now a fairly large body of work under the rubric of ‘critical pedagogy’ . . . Viewing schools as cultural areas where diverse ideological and social forms are in constant struggle, critical pedagogy seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society. (Pennycook 1990: 24)

At one point in the emergence of critical pedagogy of second and foreign languages, say in the early 1980s and before the first appearances of critical applied linguistics, it might have been said that it was of relevance to only a small sector of applied linguistics or language teaching, primarily that associated with adult ESL (English as a second language) immigrant populations. I think at that time it would also have been seen as irrelevant to most other instructional contexts, or inappropriate, or incompatible with them (as indeed was said of far less challenging developments, including communicative approaches). This is no longer the case, as I will suggest below by reference to its increasingly wide provenance, encompassing diverse languages, curricular domains, geographical areas, and sites of oppression. Proponents of the wider area of critical applied linguistics have suggested similarly that a critical perspective is no longer an ‘add on’ to applied linguistics, but a perspective has become infused into the field of applied linguistics as a whole.

2. Historical traditions of practice not generally recognized or acknowledged

One of the reasons for spending some time on historical traditions is that this move emphasizes the relevance and practicality of the area by heading off responses that such work is impossible. In some cases, the things that ‘can’t be done here’ have already been done here but were discontinued for some reason; alternatively, they may have to some extent been taken up and become part of the scenery. Historical analyses can also focus attention on what enabling factors allowed for early radical pedagogy. In addition, a review of the history suggests that the theoretical inheritances in this area are less unitary than might be alleged – that is, not all critical or radical education derives from Marxist-inspired theory.

What are some of the inheritances that critical language specialists should be more familiar with? An easy¹ first option is that of Dewey. Dewey is important because he put an activities-based curriculum in the mainstream (cf. task-based language teaching (TBLT); Samuda & Bygate 2008), and advocated for schools a central role in the improvement of society, and because the Progressive Movement, which he was associated with, for a time was a major element in American education. We should note that, in practice, Dewey obtained much from pre-existing models, the ‘schools of to-morrow’ (Dewey & Dewey 1915) such as the Parker school which was already running on principles we would recognize as progressive for their time (Stone 1999). Dewey’s two years in China and the uptake of his ideas by Chinese

¹ But see Manicas (1982).

educators in the late 1920s, including their critique from the left by Tao Xingzhi (Wang & Zhang 2007), also suggest that any idea that activity or task-based approaches with a social justice orientation are somehow purely ‘Western’ is questionable.

Dewey’s left wing, the social reconstructionists, should also be remembered (identified as precursors by critical pedagogy specialists such as Giroux e.g. 1983) because they at least offer the possibility of showing how matters critical have a long history in US education. In particular, the case of the Rugg social studies textbooks, a success story of the social reconstructionists, should be looked into. Indeed, given the influence he had on a substantial portion of American education in the middle of the 20th century, Harold Rugg was a remarkable figure. It is hard to imagine someone with a similar orientation having equivalent influence in the present conditions of the USA (e.g. Rugg 1931; Evans 2006).

On the other side of the left during the 20th century, there were various anti-authoritarian, non-Marxist inspired developments in alternative education. I want to mention a strand that was not necessarily political in a class sense, but which presaged the ‘personal is political’ line. By the 1930s, Ferrer’s New Schools (cf. Ferrer, 1913) and other dissident strands had developed into a range of free schools, of which A. S. Neill’s Summerhill became the most famous. Its direct democracy, with all students and teachers having each only one vote on all matters of school policy, and its extreme emphasis on individual autonomy and choice remain striking, though also quite typical of free schools. Directly or indirectly, the model of Summerhill was part of the sudden mushrooming of alternative schools of the 1960s. These are a good example of things that were radical at the time, which were even criticized by some on the left (e.g. Wright 1989: 114; or for their *laissez faire* character, see Freire in Shor & Freire 1987: 46), but many of whose practices have become part of the mainstream, and with the growth of non-formal online education are becoming even more so.

Of course, if anti-progressive forces seriously outnumber, outfinance, and outgun progressive forces, the latter will at least temporarily have to back down. This is pretty much what happened to the progressive movement in the USA towards the end of the 1930s. But somewhat like other individual progressives in a later period, it did not die out; it just moved overseas, taking up temporary residence in, among other places, the British primary school tradition, from which it later returned to the USA or – in some versions of this story – from which hideout it then went on to set up new homes in communicative language teaching (Crookes 2009: 69–71).

3. Advocacy

It should be a matter of concern that young professionals in our field are generally trained only to be employees (whether as teachers or researchers). Gradually we are seeing the rise of programs that also educate our people to be administrators². These courses mainly draw on established practice (e.g. the running of private language schools) and on established literature (the managerial tradition of educational administration). But certainly, critical

² For example, the ‘Language Program Administration’ certificate at Monterey Institute of International Studies, and see Christison & Murray (2009).

pedagogies within applied linguistics do need individuals who can set up, run, and maintain fairly non-mainstream operations. They need to network and fundraise – they may not be able to inherit or become part of a pre-existing conventional operation. They may have to engage both more fully and more oppositionally, with existing political systems. Accounts of theory and practice in our field pertinent to this are very rare, as also is critical educational administration literature (Crookes 2003; but see Foster 1986).

In our field, McGroarty (1998) is a path-breaking review and analysis of some aspects of this matter (see also Auerbach et al. 1996). In Crookes & Talmy (2004), partly as a result of reviewing what WASN'T working during an effort by Hawai'i ESL teachers to pressure their legislators for funds, we arrived at a simple set of headings that represent matters that need to be addressed by practitioners in this area. Perhaps they are just common sense.

ORGANIZE: Develop institutional networks, develop connections with parents, develop networks in the community.

ADDRESS LEADERSHIP, but try to see that all are leaders, if provided with the right orientation and skills.

FUNDRAISE: There is a literature on fundraising in education, mainly targeting the post-secondary level but little guidance for the rest of us.

ENGAGE IN ACTION: The old slogan 'direct action gets the goods' is relevant because in many places conventional politicking will not provide what a critical language teacher might need.

Besides these matters, crucially, shifts in perspective and self-image are needed. It is no good saying that teachers do not do this sort of thing and do not involve students in their struggles (see Smoke 1998). It is important for critical practice in our field that teacher education, teacher re-education, and teacher in-service programs place greater attention on these areas.³

4. Implications of newer institutional developments

In working with young language teachers, I have noticed that the aspirations of these individuals are often far more humanistic than the institutions from which they themselves graduated. If they have, or acquire a broader, more sociopolitical dimension to their thinking and pedagogy while they are doing advanced professional studies, they also sometimes acquire greater frustration. For example, if they are coming from, say, an existing high-school practice, it becomes increasingly clear to them that they cannot simply return to it with enhanced 'skills' and then carry out 'improved' English language teaching.

In response, I urge them to consider the broadest range of possibilities that exist for educational practice involving language. It is hard for young teachers to see right out to the margins of educational practice in their societies, and also how fast things are changing. Within

³ The AERO (Alternative Education Resource Organization) network has much useful information on starting up and maintaining alternative schools; see www.educationrevolution.org.

this range, the margins have often been good places for those with a critical orientation.⁴ Margins are places where the established order is weak and the writ of law or regulation less effective, so they should be places where experiment and boundary-crossing can flourish.

The full range of institutional change and alternatives that deserve to be put before potential critical language teachers is too great for me to discuss in detail here, but includes

- the break-up of monolithic state education⁵ (as in the USA, the UK: Fuller 2003; or China: Xu 2002)
- alternatives in the private sector (e.g. private alternative schools: Appleton 2000)
- charter schools (Fuller 2000; Buchanan & Fox 2004)
- online education, particularly the so-called ‘virtual school’ (e.g. Berge & Clark 2005)
- informal education (streets, museums, e.g. Mayo 1999)
- community schools (Morgan 1998, 2004)
- other formats and host structures for critical practice (community organizing, social work, NGOs)
- possibilities within conversation schools⁶

Just a couple of comments on these points. First, one of the matters on which the libertarian or anarchist left in education traditionally divides from the authoritarian or statist (Marxist) left has been trust of, or willingness to work within, the state sector. Apparently it was not always the case; at the time of Proudhon, anarchist educators in France apparently thought that they could reform the state sector from within using syndicalist or trade union force (Smith 1983). Later, of course, reproduction theorists seemed to argue against any such possibility (e.g. Bowles & Gintis 1976), then with Giroux (1983) we have resistance theorists being more optimistic. At the present time, certain nation-states have allowed a greater degree of flexibility into their state sectors, with charter schools in the United States. Some states have always had this sort of thing (e.g. Holland). The left’s initial fear of charter schools as driven solely by right-wing fundamentalists has modified, and many indigenous Hawaiian schools in my home state have taken advantage (Buchanan & Fox 2004).

Second, McMahon (2001) presents a good example of the sort of thing one might hope for in a critical language teaching entity on the margins. McMahon describes a feminist English class in Japan. One of many, ‘the class termed “Colors of English” started in 1996 and is organized by a women’s counseling service and publishing house called Femix. It is held weekly in a meeting room in a women’s center in Tokyo’ (p. 312). My interest in this case at present is not so much the content of the course as the fact that this English class was not in a school, and my question is, what was institutionally or resource-wise necessary for it to run? The answer is, among other things, that there was a women’s center, a counseling service, and some source of funds – presumably the publishing company, not to mention the students.

⁴ Cf. Guevara (1961/1985); or consider an interstitial slogan like ‘we are forming the structure of a new society within the shell of the old’, from IWW (n.d.).

⁵ This phrase has been used to describe initiatives begun in the UK, Australia, and the USA during the 1980s; but it has also been applied to recent initiatives in the UK related to the establishment of ‘academies’. See <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/>.

⁶ Given the size and worldwide extent of this institutional entity, it is under-researched.

5. Other languages?

It would be strange if forms of critical practice could not manifest themselves in the teaching of languages other than English. If they could NOT, it would be an indication of impracticality. Such reports do exist but they are sufficiently scarce to deserve every opportunity to be publicized.

Radical language teaching of the Freirean variety was from the beginning associated with languages other than English. Freirean L1 literacy instruction continues to be documented under conditions somewhat similar to those in which it originally emerged (e.g. Purcell-Gates & Waterman 2000). The foreign language (FL) field within English-speaking countries has been less active in taking up these ideas despite their early development by Crawford (1978; Crawford-Lange 1981, 1982). Newer proponents (notably Reagan & Osborn 1998, 2002; Osborn 2000) have provided useful analyses and advocacy but have few actual instances of radical FL pedagogy to report on. Over the last 10 years, the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language has produced some reports and discussion (Kubota, 1996; Siegel & Okamoto 2003) containing advice, critique, and occasional accounts of actual short pedagogical initiatives (e.g. Ohara, Saft & Crookes 2001; Kumagai 2007) or analyses that focus on the effects of power in FL learning. There is, however, an overlapping area in the study of FL learning and teaching which is focusing on the effects of globalization and particularly interested in matters of identity, sometimes having a somewhat critical focus though perhaps more directly informed by post-structuralist ideas (e.g. Block & Cameron 2002).

6. Critical EFL

From FL or world languages, I turn now to the much larger area of EFL. Even much less provocative approaches to language teaching than critical pedagogy have been dismissed, by some specialists, as culturally inappropriate for the East Asia contexts. However, historical explorations (Shin & Crookes 2005a, b) of the past of Korean educational culture and patterns in the broader aspects of Korean sociocultural history suggested that activist positions were possible and indeed had been adopted at various times and locations in Korean education; that accordingly, dialogue and critical inquiry were entirely possible, and even quite explicitly political positions, including of course anticolonial positions during the colonization of Korea were natural, though extremely dangerous, for educators. Within the admittedly often oppressive or constraining state education system, nevertheless, Shin's explorations of more than usually inquiring or dialogic English language teaching further supported our position that critical perspectives in English teaching were possible within educational systems whose cultural contexts had been presented by some as unpropitious. Shin's actions were small-scale interventions within existing institutional arrangements: one within an actual high-school English class, the other within an after-school English-speaking club, but still with high-school students. Thus, they are what we could call proof of concept initiatives.

From elsewhere in Asia we have now a variety of reports, more from the most developed parts (e.g. Hong Kong: Lin & Luk 2002; Singapore: Kramer-Dahl 2001); though also from South-west Asia too, that is, Iran (Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini 2005), and Central and North-east Asia: Mongolia (Cohen 2005) and Tajikistan (Fredricks 2007), of implementations and initiatives in EFL critical pedagogy of one kind or another (see also Sung 2001, 2002, 2006, 2007).

I emphasize Asia because of assertions that things critical in language teaching cannot be done there. By contrast, one might assume that there should be a lot of critical pedagogy in, for example, Brazil. After the renewal of democracy in Brazil, Freire himself guided initiatives when in the Ministry of Education of the state of Sao Paulo (O'Cadiz, Wong & Torres 1998). But these were in many cases not continued under succeeding administrations. Cox & de Assis-Peterson reported (in 1999) that the outlook for critical pedagogy in Brazil was not positive⁷ (see also Busnardo & Bertoli Braga 2001). In a recent overview of critical language pedagogy in Brazil, Jorge (2009) explains that familiarity with and action concerning this concept is split across elite and grassroots sectors in Brazil, including across language teachers. On the other hand, writing about EFL in Chile, Farias (2005: 216) notes, 'as Clark & Ivanič [1997] have suggested, the empowerment of learners constitutes the main purpose of CLA [Critical Language Awareness]. This concept will not be foreign to Chilean eyes or ears given our familiarity with the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire'. The assumption of familiarity with Freire by virtue of being Chilean teachers is not what one would find in an introduction to critical language awareness written in, say, Vietnam or Korea. Overall, on the basis of these studies, the argument can be made that critical pedagogies of EFL are just as relevant and possible as those of ESL.

7. Getting beyond the class base: 'post-structuralist' understandings enhance relevance

My quick look at the past at the beginning of this paper was intended to suggest not only that critical pedagogies of some kind have been practical possibilities in the past, but also to remind us in a preliminary way of their diversity. At the present time, too, there are different strands of critical pedagogy, and indeed there may be a growing diversity. The more that this area can tackle the range of interests, groups, and issues that the early 21st century produces, the more relevant it could be.

Feminist pedagogy is probably the first and clearest example of a perspective related to critical or radical pedagogy, arising generally after Freirean critical pedagogy had established itself as a concept in academia, whose proponents wanted to not only draw from Freirean ideas but also critique them and be separate from them. Without waiting much for the development of 'identity theory', other curricular or practice strands also struck out on their

⁷ 'Considering that critical pedagogy has its roots in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, we investigated what 40 Brazilian English teachers knew about and thought of critical pedagogy in ELT. Our findings showed that they were unaware of it.' (Cox & de Assis-Peterson 1999: 433).

own. Attention to a range of possible sources of oppression beyond that of class is one positive interpretation of what is signaled by the use of the term ‘post-structural’ (e.g. Morgan 2007). Clearly, the increased sensitivity to diversity, to the different tropes of oppression, is indeed likely to make radical pedagogical initiatives of all kinds more practical and more relevant to a variety of groups. Yet at the same time, perhaps there is less of this out there than one might think, when it comes both to analyses of how race, gender, etc. play out in language learning and to language teaching. More reports of practice are needed. Let me quickly allude to some of the areas I have in mind.

Race is perhaps quite belated on the language teaching scene. The publishing of the *TESOL Quarterly* special issue on the topic (Kubota & Lin 2006) can be taken as a turning point perhaps, though Curtis & Romney (2006) dates from a TESOL convention panel from 2001, so perhaps that is a better indicator of increasing attention in our field to this matter. It is not the case, however, that there has been a rush of developments subsequently, and general critical pedagogy has been criticized for ignoring race (Leonardo 2005).

Gender orientation as a focus of oppression is present, but its manifestations in the PRACTICE literature of applied linguistics needs to be greater. Obviously gender as a research focus has increased enormously over the last twenty years. But reports of responses to sexual-orientation-related oppression with a practical orientation are uncommon; the matter is indeed challenging. It is important to say, and say repeatedly, that in this day and age, oppression on the basis of non-heterosexual gender orientation is still an enormously extensive, pervasive, and corrosive form of oppression. Indeed, it is almost certainly because of the strength of oppression, and associated feelings of taboo in this area, that there is comparatively little language educational and applied linguistics work in it. However, I would urge applied linguists to note the substantial amount of research and publication in neighboring disciplines with a sense of a burden of responsibility, so that Nelson’s 1999 article ‘Sexual identities in ESL’ can be seen as a turning point (see also Vandrick 2001; Nelson 2006, 2008; O’Mochain 2006, inter alia).

Another curricular strand I would like to identify and at the same time encourage more of, is ‘Green’. Green, peace, and global education are strands in critical pedagogy (broadly defined) that actually have a long existence in curriculum theory. There is less development of their L2 manifestations in our academic literature than one might perhaps expect (but see Cates 1990; Lopez, Santamaría & Aponte 1993; Brown 1994; Jacobs et al. 1998). Brown, as early as 1994, gave a good short statement of a whole variety of publishing initiatives that indicated mainstream action in this area. Concerned scholars in our field have raised these matters in the past (e.g. Cates 1990 cites Rivers 1968: 262), but it could be argued that as a result of growth in mainstream curriculum in these areas, resources are greater than they used to be and also that this is an area where what was more radical before has become somewhat more mainstream. That is to say, the green/environmental line is occurring so widely that to use curriculum material that advocates peaceful citizen action to decrease global warming is not going to get you into trouble.

Finally, I should note that English for Academic Purposes, as a long-standing distinguishable curricular domain, has also increasingly been treated as subject to critical analysis and practice. The classic work of Benesch exemplifies more than a decade of development and growth in this area (e.g. Benesch 1993, 2001, 2009).

8. Materials

I want to raise the topic of materials from my point of view as a language TEACHER EDUCATOR with an interest in critical pedagogy. It is rare to be able to offer an entire semester-long graduate course on the critical pedagogy of language teaching. It is more likely that a teacher educator can run a short course or workshop on the topic. The shorter the course, the more likely it is that the instructor will feel pressed to cut the theory and tell participants what this perspective looks like in practice and give them something tangible to go away with. But a classic tenet of critical pedagogy is that, to a fair extent, students and teachers make or bring in the ‘materials’. This is an oversimplification and does not do justice to the role of codes and codification⁸, but consider points #8, #9, and especially #12 of Crawford’s (1978: 90–91, 99) 20 principles of Freirean critical pedagogy: ‘[8] dialogue forms the context of the educational situation; [9] ... the organization of curriculum recognizes the class as a social entity and resource; [12] ... the learners produce their own learning materials’. This last point is quite challenging to the beginning teacher in this area. The relevance and practicality of critical L2 pedagogy would be enhanced by greater availability and diversity of fully worked out sample materials, including ones which demonstrate how theories of language play out in critical L2 pedagogy classrooms. I have often shown teachers extracts from Auerbach & Wallerstein’s classic (1987) textbook (reprinted as Auerbach & Wallerstein 2004) – on the outside like a normal commercial ESL textbook, hidden within is a manual for social transformation.⁹ Recently I have been using extracts from Janks’ (1989) critical language awareness series for the same purpose. But this whole area is rather under-developed.¹⁰ And, of course, it is almost impossible to get well-known publishers to produce materials of this orientation.

However, given current technological resources, we may be in a position to think in terms of accumulating student-made materials and student revisions of initial teacher-made samples of materials. Mason & Rennie (2008) discuss the application of social networking perspectives to ‘user-generated content’ in online course structure and materials. They note that ‘observers speak of a “gift culture” on the web whereby users contribute as much as they take. ... The essence of social networking is that the users generate the content’ (pp. 4–5). They also comment that

1. Users have the tools to actively engage in the construction of their experience, rather than passively absorbing existing content.
2. Content will be continually refreshed by the users rather than require expensive expert input.
3. Many of the new tools support collaborative work, thereby allowing users to develop the skills of working in teams.
4. Shared community spaces and inter-group communications are a massive part of what excites young people and therefore should contribute to users’ persistence and motivation to learn. (p. 5)

⁸ A term of art in this literature that refers to the projective devices that Freirean teachers use to elicit commentary and content from students on central topics (Auerbach & Wallerstein 1987; Shor 1987: 126; Peckham 2003; Taylor 2003: chapter 5).

⁹ Reprinted in a new edition (2004), though no longer with a mainstream publisher.

¹⁰ In the sense that there is less research on materials development in applied linguistics overall than might be expected. For critical pedagogy materials, see also Shor (1987); for FL critical materials see Osborn (2006: chapter 4), and for recent critical EAP materials see Benesch (in press).

Finally they remark that

One of the key lessons of the Web 2.0 era is this: Users add value. But only a small percentage of users will go to the trouble of adding value to your application via explicit means Through appropriate course design, we can help learners to pursue their ‘selfish interests’ of passing the course, while at the same time adding value to the learning of other students. (p. 5)

We still may need a core of materials to start with, and given that critical pedagogy implies a form of learning that most students and teachers have never experienced, it may be asking too much for them to effectively create new learning materials from scratch. In addition here, let me note that the availability to teachers of supplementary materials of a critical orientation tuned to state-required materials could be a productive strategy (see Konoeda & Watanabe 2008).

9. ‘The imaginary’: institutional (and political) models?

The last issue I want to tackle is the role of statements of the broader outcomes of educational programs of the sort I have been discussing (see Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005: 279). If we intend to attempt language teaching of a critical kind, we would presumably be doing so in the hope of broader social change.¹¹ Should we not say something about this target? This is a point that has been made obliquely by Pennycook (2004: 330) citing Foucault (1980: 190): ‘the problem is not so much one of defining a political “position”. . . but to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of politicisation’.

Looking at what the present literature of critical pedagogy generally has to offer my students, I notice a lack of tangibility concerning the broad goals. It seems that through critique alone it is hoped that there would be general improvement. Perhaps, on the one hand, critical pedagogists are reluctant to prejudge the situation but perhaps they have some models in the back of their mind as well as a sense of the dangers they face if they state them too explicitly. However, more seriously, I would suggest that the entire realm of ‘the imaginary’ has been colonized by the forces of globalization. Critical pedagogy needs it back, or, we need one that will serve our purposes.

‘The imaginary’ is a term used by a few philosophers (Sartre 1940/2004; see also Castoriadis, 1974/1987; Costa Lima 1984/1988), and its importance should not be neglected by optimistic critical educators. From a Sartrean point of view, it adds the concept of ontological freedom on to our capacity to imagine things. It is because we can imagine that we can reconstitute the world.

Let me also make a connection to works of the imagination in education. These have often been as effective as empirical research in promoting change in education – if not more. The most obvious case is Rousseau’s (1762/1963) best-seller, *Emile* (cf. Pestalozzi 1781/1910). Critical pedagogues (such as Giroux and Shor) have not shrunk from using the term ‘utopia’ – though they do not say clearly what one or ones they want. More recently, the

¹¹ A caveat: Freire did not expect to see social change solely as a result of educational change. He did advocate that critical teachers involve themselves with social movements, i.e., that social movements were needed as well as educational change.

role of the utopian imagination in education has been discussed by Halpin (2003). A handful of specialists are using literature in professional education (e.g. Nussbaum 1995; Florio-Ruane 2001). For example, Kurth-Schai & Green (2006) interestingly combines an entirely fictional narrative about school reform with academic essays, and is on particularly strong ground in a chapter on the role of intuition and vision in the education of young teachers with school reform in mind.

What about the role of the imaginary more specifically, in terms of the relation between a critical or radical form of education and a transformative outcome for society? How would one express the goal? Does it make sense to talk about it as a unitary entity? When class was the primary term of analysis, a political system was the primary expression of the goal of critical work. It was almost certainly to be expressed using a totalizing term like 'socialism'. That is what, for example, Dewey expected the USA to become. Yet historically, most socialisms have been inhospitable to diversity; pluralism of some kind perhaps seems to be necessary if some future state, or other nexus of power, such as a mega-church or a multinational corporation, is not to exert a greater degree of control than criticalists would be comfortable with. If we are in a condition of post-modernity, we are likely to value and recognize non-homogeneity rather than assume some unitary progress (cf. Gibson: 'The future is already here, it's just unevenly distributed' – www.brianstorms.com/archives/000461.html). Moreover, there seems to be no reason to suppose some final end-state. On the basis of the history we have so far, a continuing struggle seems most likely, with local solutions rather than grand narratives being looked out for. Thus, at the political level, instead of saying we need socialism, or anarchism, or any other specific general '-ism', we should consider local solutions, which possibly involve local instantiations of a diversity of mixes; mash-ups, I suppose. Here I want to draw attention to the encouraging work of Gibson-Graham (2006), which also uses the term 'imaginary' when calling for a 'feminist imaginary of possibility' (p. xxvii).¹² In the analysis of geographically-located networks of economic exchange presented in this work, the emphasis is on those that are non-homogenous and thus open possibilities. Employing a discursual strategy, the work aspires to make contribution to the literatures of non-capitalist exchange systems, particularly by emphasizing the non-homogenous nature of political economy.¹³

It is an enormous job to imagine alternative social structures, so let me draw back to alternative educational institutions. Perhaps critical (language) teachers should attempt the less challenging task of imagining alternative (critical language) schools or programs. Within this sort of context I would encourage critical language teachers to begin imagining their ideal school, then, as an entity manifesting alternative values and acting as a model institution with a mandate to assist critical (or radical) change in society. Many details would have to be worked out in practice, but as a beginning, perhaps the community school might be a partial inspiration – a community NOT located only in geographic space but also partly located in cyberspace, administered with a radical administrative philosophy certainly involving direct democracy of teachers, students, and staffers and connected to supportive federations of like-minded institutions, probably cooperatives. Undoubtedly, it would involve a Deweyan critical task-based curriculum. Like an NGO, it would be engaged in educational work in many

¹² See also Schecter (2005, 2007).

¹³ Gibson-Graham's paradigm case is the cooperative networks of Mondragon in northern Spain.

countries, integrating language teaching with ecological projects and developmental studies. It would take into account the critical psychologists' (Sullivan 1984; Tolman 1994) emphasis on wellness (Prillettensky & Prillettensky 2006); but it would be prepared to compromise (Crookes 2009) with mundane demands for credentialling and exam training. Yes, it is a dream of course, and space does not really permit development here – but I would assert that some sort of imaginary goal is better than nothing. I hope readers can allow me the possibility of suggesting at least that the imagination, and an entire realm of the imaginary, is what finally is needed to help dreams become reality AND enhance the practicality and relevance of critical pedagogy in our field, in our time.

A concluding note: It has been there in the past, it is here in various forms right now; it is not something just for the future, it is something relevant all the time. The relevance of any approach to teaching in our area of language and culture that addresses social justice is obvious to anyone who sees the world as failing under an ethical analysis, but the practical relevance of such an approach is something that has continually to be struggled for.

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