

Critical Pedagogy and Materials Development; Content Selection and Gradation

Ali Rahimi*

Bangkok University, Thailand

Ali Kushki & Ehsan Ansaripour*****

Shiraz University, Iran

Ardeshir Maki****

Yasuj University, Iran

Abstract

The study aimed at presenting how materials developers can design materials based on the tenets of Critical Pedagogy (CP). Having reviewed the literature on CP, the present study attempted to propose ideas for the selection and gradation phase of Materials Development in line with the tenets of CP. The distinguishing feature of the study was to exemplify a critical class with critical materials by drawing upon Freires' Problem Posing, Generative Themes, and Concentric Circles concepts. Additionally, the study proposed Immediacy and Comparison to be employed as tools to select and grade the content of critical materials.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, Content selection and gradation, EFL learners, Materials development.

***Ali Rahimi** is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Bangkok University, Thailand. He is the author of 13 books. Four recent titles are *Critical Discourse Analysis*, *The Art of Communication*, *Roadmap to Meaning*, *Textbook Evaluation: Analysis of ELT materials*. He has translated 12 books on *Creative Intelligence*, *Psychology*, *Sociolinguistics*, and *Pragmatics*, etc. He has run workshops throughout Asia and Europe on Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication Skills, Critical Discourse Analysis, Language and Culture, and Research Designs. He is the editor-in-chief of *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*.
Correspondence: rahimi_cda@yahoo.com

** **Ali Kushki**, Department of linguistics and foreign languages; Shiraz University; Shiraz; Iran

*** **Ehsan Ansaripour**, Department of linguistics and foreign languages; Shiraz University; Shiraz; Iran

**** **Ardeshir Maki**, Department of English language and literature; Yasuj University; Yasuj; Iran

Introduction

The general question one faces before launching a project, even in our daily lives, is to see a justification for that start. Why do and should we rethink our current position? Why are we after making things happen differently? The barrage of questions to these effects can run continually. However, answering these questions is not endless like the questions themselves. The answer is this: the need to bring about a change is most felt when things are not the way they should be. The same story occurs in our educational system. The system is not fulfilling its commitments to nurture souls which are meant to be at the service of social change and equality while economic concerns are of top priority (Kanpol, 1999). So, an attempt should be made to rectify the unwanted situation. Narrowing down our debate, SLA field of study is no exception to this *unwanted-ness*. It has been leading a cloistered life and its main concern has been language and how it is mastered by language learners from other linguistic backgrounds. Is it all that our current SLA should be looking for? Theoretically the answer is no since the philosophy of education, no matter what field of study we are taking on, goes beyond the walls of schools and serves broader scopes. However, to favor activism and pragmatism, our answer is that current SLA maybe detached from wider social scopes. To bring a change in society has not been any of SLA choices before the introduction of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) and Critical Pedagogy movement. The major point of departure for the proponents of Freire and Critical Pedagogy is to cement micro level of education and macro level of society together (Akbari, 2008). Following, comes the rationale for introducing Critical Pedagogy as the way to militate against the “effects” of practicing SLA as it is being practiced currently.

Critical Pedagogy and SLA: A luxury or a necessity?

Pennycook (1990, 1989) argues that a main gap in second language education is its separation from broader issues in educational theory. He believes that the nature of second language education demands us to understand our educational practice in wider social, cultural, an political terms since ESL is ideological. Although the ideological dimension of education may not be clear and we may not be aware of that, it is in fact, and is far away from neutrality (Benesch, 1993; Shor, 1992; Pennycook, 1998, 1990, 2001; Kanpol, 1999; Akbari, 2008). Benesch (1993) claims that the notion that some kinds of teaching are ideological while others are not has been questioned by a number of L1 and L2 educators like Cummins (1989), Pennycook (1989, 1990), Shor (1992), and Simon (1992).

The ideological character of ESL has been proposed to manifest itself in the form of a “hidden curriculum” of which students, teachers, and other educational staff are not aware. This refers to a collection of the messages and intentions of academic institutions that are not detailed in the official curriculum (Freire, 1970; Slattery, 2006; Giroux, Penna, & Pinar, 1981; McLaren, 1989). As mentioned above, many scholars hold that SLA is ideologically laden and is not a neutral enterprise. Therefore, an attempt should be made to militate against the adverse effects of an ideological SLA. That is where a curriculum based on the implementation of CP might help.

Norton and Toohey (2004) observe that CP considers education as a political undertaking and aims at raising learner’s critical consciousness to be aware of their sociopolitical environment and equips them against the status quo. However, although the body of literature on an ideological ESL abounds, not much attempt has been made to nullify this educational system

which perpetuates and gives voice to the dreams of a special group (Simon, 1992). In line with the foregoing, in the introductory chapter to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Macendo (2000) complains of the marginality of Freire's work as one of the key originators of CP. He says that although it has been internationally acclaimed, it is still peripheral to most educational curricula. Though stated 12 years ago, Macendo's complain holds true even now. A great cause of such marginality can be attributed to the absence of material specifically designed in line with the spirit of CP tenets. That is why Crookes (2009) puts that not much research has been carried out on materials development with a view on CP. To our knowledge, no published study has attempted to propose guidelines to base Materials Development on the components of CP thus far save for the study conducted by Rashidi and Safari (2011). However, the study can be critiqued from at least one perspective. First and foremost, as the researchers themselves rightly predict and make a mention of that, their study remains at the level of theory and does not provide tangible examples and clear cut ways of how their 11 proposed principles can be put into practice. Therefore, they have added to the available pile of theoretical ideas on CP. They believe that this is not a pitfall to their study in that it can "... be excused. The reason is that every situation and reality differs" (Rashidi & Safari, 2011. p. 258).

We do not intend to prove their justification unsatisfactory since one of the purposes of the present study is to show how this theoretical stagnancy can be compensated for and in the last section of the study we will take up the point. This study aims at filling the gap in the literature by first extracting the main tenets of critical theory and then, proposing principles to be followed by materials developers to make current ESL materials come closer to the spirit of CP. But, before going squarely to the tenets, current ideas on Materials Development are dealt with and then, the position on which CP stands within the Materials Development literature is addressed.

Materials Development and Critical Pedagogy

Richards (2010) alerts that Materials Development is not receiving the attention it should receive in second language teacher-education and sometimes, its position is underestimated within graduate education. This is confirmed by Harwood (2010) when he asserts that although there are disagreements, most of those active in the realm of Materials Development consistently believe that materials design should play a part in teacher education. The point doubles in importance when it is looked upon in the light of Allwright's (1981) argument holding that no pre-prepared materials can fit any class exactly and some level of adaptation in line with the given context is deemed necessary since materials represent at some level the world from which they spring and are considered to be cultural artifacts due to their thematic content. However, it stands to reason that cultures and contexts are not universally defined and their demands are inherently distinguished. This locality, as Tomlinson (2003, 2005) maintains, should be taken care of by relating materials to the very context of learners and their lives. But the question that can be raised aptly here is how to take account of this contextuality in our materials and not be accused of engaging in an "essentially a theoretical activity", as many believe Materials Development to be so (Samuda, 2005. p. 232).

CP can bolster the purpose of any educational system by bringing about changes which aim at making students more aware of their immediate situation and existence besides making a link between the macro-level of society and micro-level of classroom in order to transform society (Akbari, 2008). To do this, the curriculum and syllabus should be *criticalized* first. The

way to do this is to design materials based on the tenets of Critical Pedagogy, this is what the present study sought to fulfill. Before dealing with the tenets of Critical Pedagogy, reviewing the position of Critical Pedagogy in works on Materials Development is in order. A good point of departure is Nation and Macalister (2010). The researchers propose a model of materials design process the outer circles of which, they point, have a major effect in steering the actual process of course production. Their model has 8 components with 'Evaluation' in the surrounding circle which includes other seven circles of 'Principles', 'Needs', and 'Environment' as outer circles and 'Content and Sequencing', 'Format and Presentation', and 'Monitoring and Assessment' as inner circles. The last surrounded circle is that of the 'Goals'. The elements included there influence directly course content selection and sequencing. Environment, needs, and principles are related to the present study in that the analysis of immediate environment and need of learners are of paramount importance within the framework of Critical Pedagogy.

However, a most relevant issue here is that we should not erroneously equate the need and context talked about by Nation and Macalister (2010) and other scholars like Tomlinson (2003, 2005) and the *Need and Context* within the framework of Critical Pedagogy. The former is limited to linguistic levels and not something beyond that meaning that linguistic needs of students are of top priority. On the other hand, the latter is more than a linguistic level and encompasses social levels, as well, and how this link can result in social change, equality, and empowerment. What has already been proposed regarding context characterizes the first meaning explained above? A case in point to justify our argument is Nation and Macalister (2010). The most relevant part of their model of the parts of the curriculum design to our discussion is where they talk about the effect of need and environment. In describing needs analysis of their model, Nation and Macalister (2010. p. 1) put that the results of this need analysis is a "realistic list of language, ideas of skill items, as a result of considering the present proficiency, future needs and wants of the learners". Regarding the effect of environment, they add that this has to do with the environment constraints like whether the teachers of a given context are trained. No trace of the tenets of CP can be found in their model!

This absence of the inclusion of CP principles is not limited to Nation and Macalister's work. In the introductory chapter of his reference book on Materials Development, Tomlinson (1998) lists sixteen principles he thinks most SLA researchers agree upon to be most related to the development of materials for teaching languages. But, none is related even indirectly to the tenets of CP.

In another seminal study on curriculum development, Graves (1996) proposes a framework for course development and its components. The same critique leveled at Nation and Macalister (2010) is rightly applicable here since all Graves's proposed components are primarily and mainly linguistic concerns and nothing more. Even when Graves talks about culture what she has in her mind is the affective impact of culture. Goals and objectives of a course are determined, in Graves's model, by the level of mastery target learners are expected to reach. Here, social change and transformation are not the focus. As for the content of a course, social relevancy is not intended to be covered and determining factors are structural, tasks, communicative needs and so on. Therefore, as reviewed, it is clear that no curriculum model available now has taken account of the tenets of CP and that is why an ideological SLA needs more critical evaluation. The accrued situation, of course, is in a sense given since for decades educational curriculum and syllabus design have been informed by thoughts like what follows.

Yalden (1987, as cited in Richards & Renandya, p. 76) asserts that three principles that can affect syllabus design are 1) a view of how language is learnt, which would result in a structure-based syllabus; 2) a view of how language is acquired, which would result in a process-based syllabus; 3) a view of how language is used, which would result in a function-based syllabus. Hence, all the stuff pivots around language itself and nothing else should adulterate this purity. Moreover, as Pennycook (1990, 1989) puts it, mainstream SLA is not linked to other wider social theories whose mission is to change the society through educational systems. To live this out, Freire and Macendo (1987) are very unambiguous and succinct. They hold that an educational program should be something more than learning how to read and a critical curriculum aims at making learners aware and critical to “read the world” while they “read the word”.

The present study reports on only one part of a comprehensive study on how curriculum design can be informed by the tenets of CP. Since material design is composed of different components (Richards, 2001), our study is a report on the content section and how it can be selected and graded since addressing all the components is not possible within one single article and falls prey to incomprehensiveness and reductionism. In addition to the literature presented, the present study, also, draws on Freire’s work (1970) and exemplifies how Immediacy and Comparative Texts can be employed as ways to select and grade CP materials.

Short Words on Content: Selection and Gradation

To be on clarity’s side, we first provide short definitions for selection, and gradation. Selection has to do with answering the question; what material should be selected to fit the purposes of a given course (Nunan, 1998; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Gradation, on the other hand, is associated with how the selected materials can be sequenced so as to reach the best possible results. Traditionally, complexity has been the criterion for sequencing material. It has been a process of going from the simplest linguistic units to the most difficult ones (Nunan, 1998). In a most recent work on Materials Development, Nation and Macalister (2010) propose linear and modular approaches to sequencing and grading of material. By the former they mean the same traditional one, i.e. “beginning with simple frequent items that prepare for later more complex items” (p. 82). By the latter they mean that a course is divided into independent non-linear units. What we aimed to do in this study was to intermingle these two approaches with Freire’s ideas, namely “problem posing”, “generative themes”, and “concentric circles” to provide an example of how CP materials can be selected and sequenced. Therefore, providing a background of the ideas we drew upon is pertinent here.

Freire’s (1970) conceptualization of educational systems as “banking” ones led him to propose “problem posing” as the way to counteract the situation. According to Freire (1970):

The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality. Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as

committed. Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. (p. 81)

It is readily understood from the long quotation that one of the main features of problem posing education is to relate the micro world of education to the macro level of society (Akbari, 2008). But how to create the link between the two levels is important. To do that, Freire (1970) put forward a methodology whose nub is “Generative Themes”. Freire (1970) observes that:

It is to the reality which mediates men, and to the perception of that reality held by educators and people, that we must go to find the program content of education. The investigation of what I have termed the people s "thematic universe", the complex of their "generative themes"—inaugurates the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom. The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover Generative Themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes. (pp. 96-97)

Therefore, a generative theme is termed so because it corresponds to the people's concerns and ideas (Roberts, 2000). In other words, a generative theme is a central social and political issue that looms large in a context for a given community. That is way Generative Themestrigger conversations.

The last Freire' concept to explain is concentric circles. For Freire, Concentric Circles are where Generative Themes can be positioned. They can move from the general to particular. In this study, the researchers have created a nexus between Concentric Circles (layered Generative Themes) and the idea of Immediacy. By that is meant that the Generative Themes can be gradated according to their tangibility and familiarity to the people of a given people. The most tangible and familiar generative themes are put in the most inner circles and then, they increase in their scope.

Social transformation and social justice

Freire (1970) believes that reality is really a process of undergoing constant transformation. In problem-solving education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* (original italics) they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation. Therefore, students and teachers with critical views are prepared to situate learning in the relevant social contexts, unravel the implications of power in pedagogical activities, and commit themselves to transforming the means and ends of learning, in order to construct more egalitarian, equitable, and ethical educational and social environments. A central aim of critical pedagogy is changing society; seeking to build and develop a more equitable, hospitable, and humane place (Freire, 1970). Kellner (2007) asserts that for Freire, the pedagogy should nurture revolutionary subjects, i.e. capable of rebelling against oppression and battling for a more democratic and fair social order. To this end, Freire (1970) defines a transformative role for education to play. Kellner (2007, p.171) puts this transformative theme in the following way: “Freire's pedagogy of

the oppressed seeks to transform individuals from objects of educational processes to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation.” To put it another way, education should be at the service of self-emancipation rather than a tool to perpetuate oppression in its social and legitimate forms. This transformation and social justice can be bought about through a couple of ways. One is to reconcile micro-level education representative of macro-level society. Akbari (2008), for example, argues that “Critical pedagogy (CP) in ELT is an attitude to language teaching which relates the classroom context to the wider social context and aims at social transformation through education. However, this reconciliation is not fulfilled without transformation.

Therefore, a lot of different and new thought is required. Quintro (2011) observes that thinking in a new way always necessitates personal transformation; indeed if enough people think in new ways, social transformation is inevitable. He defines CP as a process of constructing and critically using language as a means of expression, interpretation, and/or transformation of our lives and the lives around us. This process of personal transformation leads to empowerment. From critical perspectives teachers in traditional methods have been disempowered because they have become increasingly positioned as classroom technicians employed to transmit a fix body of knowledge, to implement set curricula. Instead, CP theorists argue that teacher must be treated as transformative intellectuals who constantly explore their own and their students’ lives. So this view breaks down the troublesome theory/practice dichotomy and adopts the notion of informed praxis (Pennycook, 1990).

Rejection of banking method of education

CP is against banking models of education in that this system is oppressive and dehumanizing (Freire, 1970). It prevents inquiry and creativity by characterizing students as receptacles and containers required to memorize everything they are taught. This turns classrooms into a site of innumerable limit situations. Monchinski (2008) states that one of the biggest limit situations confronting teachers and students on a daily basis in the everyday classroom is what Freire called “the banking system of education.” Freire (1970) suggests that the banking method is a system of education in which the teacher is seen as having all of the knowledge and students are simply empty vessels waiting to be filled with this knowledge. It suggests that the students do not have any prior knowledge and the teacher is the source of all information (Freire, 1970; Macrine, 2009; Pennycook, 2001). In other words, students are not expected to think how their attitudes towards themselves and towards the society are being formed or think about the hidden ideologies present in their textbooks which are unconsciously passed into their minds in order to make them as subjects of wider social institutions. This culture of silence embodies marginalization of voices and ideas of students from certain socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and, thus, their disempowerment and social exclusion (Ranson, 2000; Abedinia, 2000). In this system the version of reality to which students are exposed is a motionless, mechanistic and static one. This motionlessness is embodied in the “narrative character” of this education and the content of the materials covered by this system which is detached from the existential life of students and tends to dichotomize human beings and the world (Freire, 1970). It pits teacher against student and both against the joys that education can and should bring and fosters antagonistic relationships between teachers and students i.e. teacher-student contradiction (Monchinski, 2008; Freire, 1970). Freire (1997, p. 54) makes a list of “attitudes and practices” indicative of the banking concept of education as follows:

- 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.

After enumerating above-mentioned features, Freire (1970) proposes problem-posing education as the solution to negate the domesticating effects of banking education. He states that "in problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* (original italic) they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (1970. p. 83).

Dialogical method

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 Freire (1970), 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. Kanpol (1999) states that a critical postmodern condition objective is to question control mechanisms. A classroom context would be a place to practice dialogical relationships and learning becomes a reciprocal process. But a word of caution is in order here. One should be careful of not interpreting dialogue as a method. In the introductory chapter to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Macendo (1970) eloquently reveals wrong takes on praxis as intended by Freire. Quoting a long paragraph from Freire, Macendo believes that for Freire dialogue is not a technique. Rather, for Freire, dialogue "dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. "(Freire, 1970. p. 17). Macendo adds that in looking so at dialogue, dialogue presents itself as an integral element of the process of both learning and knowing. It is "an I–Thou relationship, mutuality between teachers and students (Freire, 2005, p. 45). This dialogical inquiry prevents students' "Mutism" and attempts to establish a kind of shared knowledge and mutual relationships which are against the process of dehumanization (Benesch, 2010; Freire, 2005; Monchinski, 2008; Pennycook, 2001; Shor, 1980; Smyth, 2011).

Praxis

Praxis is the power and know-how to take action against oppression while stressing the importance of liberatory 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). "Praxis may be understood as the mutually constitutive roles of theory grounded in practice and practice grounded in theory. Praxis is a way of going beyond

dichotomization of theory and practice and considering them as dependent (Pennycook, 1999; Pennycook, 2001; Eryaman, 2006, 2007; Benesch, 2010). It is an understanding of the ways in which human beings are dominated and also forms of actions that are aimed at countering dominating forces (Giroux et al., 1981). The point that seems relevant here is that one should be cautious in interpreting the meaning of theory and practice. Atkinson (2010) eloquently makes a distinction between theory with its initial capitalized, i.e. “Theory”, on the one hand and that of “theory” with a small initial, on the other hand. He observes that the former has a bearing on “a system of principles, ideas, and concepts, used to explain, understand, or predict some phenomenon or phenomena.” The latter, on the other hand, is speculative in nature and so, suggestive of an everyday application. The above-mentioned, however, is one side of the saddlebag and yet to be balanced by a second side, here having to do with practice dimension. Theories are not given birth to in a vacuum and are meant to be applied to and tested in practice. Only is such a theory tenable. Otherwise, the speculative nature of theories overrides the scientific, rigorous elements and this can be tantamount to erroneously squaring laymen guessworks with nuanced, exact readings of a phenomenon. Not being oblivious of that, Atkinson (2010) makes a case for another upper- and lower-case distinction but this time for practice. An initially capitalized practice, i.e. “Practice”, is delimited to mean “practice which is outward-looking, reflective, and open to reformulation.” This way of defining practice can be well welded together with the first definition of the theory referred to above. Following is what Atkinson means by practice with a small “p”, i.e. “practice.” It is defined as a “customary or habitual action.” This take on practice is more compatible with the second definition of theory, namely “theory” with the small initial. The only are practice and theory with their initials capitalized are the focus of practice and CP. Hence, Atkinson delimits praxis to the link between theory and practice that is a mutual and dialectic one meaning that theory always directly informs practice, and practice, for its part, dialectically informs theory in turn.

Interpretation of the hidden curriculum

The hidden curriculum refers to a collection of all the messages and intentions of academic institutions that are not detailed in the official curriculum (Freire, 1970). These messages and intentions can cover a broad range of issues that pertain to academic, political, economic, and any other number of issues but will always have an effect on students of academic institutions. This curriculum keeps teachers in the service of the dominant political and economic system despite their good intentions (Giroux et al., 1981). Attempting to understand how the working of schools is, McLaren (1989) talks about discovering a “hidden curriculum” which constraints the success of minorities, women, and the poor. Slattery (2006) maintains that the goal of hidden curriculum is to socialize people into accepting the roles assigned to them by the capitalist class. He characterizes the hidden curriculum with a teaching nature which is aimed at submission, deference and respect for the established organization of work. A radical view sees curriculum work from the perspective of race, class, and gender analysis. Following is a number of considerations that Slattery (2006) believes such a curriculum should take care of:

ask the students to describe their image of the ‘typical’ male and the ‘typical’ female. The students should then share their views with the rest of the class, the aim of the exercise being to make the students aware of sex-role stereotyping as an assumption, underpinning the socialization of males and females.

_ students should be asked to complete the following activities:

What do you feel it means to be male or female? Check off everything on the list in the box below that you feel applies to you.

_ encourage the students to think carefully about their own actions and the extent to which they may be perpetuating gender-role stereotyping

_ consider where, how and why women's and girls' experiences, achievements and contributions have been excluded from the knowledge that is valued in society;

_ provide both females and males with access to a wider range of knowledge, skills and ways of being. It should contain those areas of knowledge and living that are of particular significance to women and girls, to

_ acknowledge the multiple perspectives that women have because of ethnicity, culture and class;

_ students will be as knowledgeable about female as male contributions to society;

_ there will be no difference by gender in the classroom interaction of students and teachers or in expectations for student success

-there will be no sex bias in the content of courses taught or instructional materials used;

_ there will be no sex stereotyping in the hidden curriculum of the school;

_ unravel the ways through which social and institutional structures act to maintain the dominant position of men in society;

_ explore system and personal models that fulfill expectations of social justice, and that are based on broad rather than narrow views of what it means to be female or male.

Treating method as a colonial construct and borrowing the main tenets of post method

Pennycook (1989) argues that method is a prescriptive concept that expresses a positivist, progressivist, and patriarchal understanding of teaching. However, with the appearance of colonialism, method seems to have assumed easily identifiable colonial properties. Kumaravadivelu (2003) asserts that the concept of method is a construct of marginality which gives it colonial coloration. It values everything related to the colonial Self and marginalizes everything related to subaltern other. Method ignores the local knowledge and interests and tries to prescribe one approach of teaching and learning English to all learners with their different goals. To get rid of problems of method, Kumaravadivelu (2006) introduces the concept of post method. He believes that it is an effort to liberate teachers from being restricted in their choices of teaching methods. He visualizes post method pedagogy as a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility.

Contextualized language teaching programs, praxis (teachers must theorize what they practice and practice what they theorize), and attention to students life experiences are the main features of these dimensions.

The Implementation of CP tenets in Content and Sequencing of Materials

With the concepts taken from Freire (1970) and the literature presented above, we attempted to squeeze the tenets of CP into our syllabus. In what follows an example of our implementation is catered for.

One of the researchers was teaching at a language institute at the time when the study was being carried out. The researchers decided to allocate 40 minutes in every session to practice “freedom” in the classes. Therefore, the researchers tried to find a generative theme to start from. We found a very interesting point of departure. The teacher researcher said that today half of the students were wearing surgical masks. It was very relevant to our study since at the time the west half of our country was severely suffering from hazy and dusty weather. The researchers planned to put the students deliberately to the following question in order to find a common reason (i.e. a generative theme): Why are you wearing surgical masks? Then, the students sparked up a conversation about the terrible weather they were experiencing. The researchers made up their mind to bring some material on the theme to the class (i.e. problem posing and linking micro and macro levels). Therefore, some material on the sources and dangers of haze and dust was downloaded from the Internet and, in the first session, was doled out to students in the form of printouts (i.e. selection). Then, some leading questions were posed to trigger a cooperative conversation among students (i.e. dialogical method). To observe both the linear and modular approaches to curriculum design, on the one hand, and Freire’s idea of concentric circles, on the other, the researchers planned to cover four different topics, among which one more topic will be discussed in the next part. These four topics were included because in a modular model for curriculum design, as Nation and Macalister (2010) propose, a course is divided into independent non-linear units meaning that the material covered during a course are not contingent upon each other. To account for the concentric circles and linear models for curriculum design, each of the four topics were discussed in three sessions. This was where the researchers should go through the process of gradation. To do that, we based our gradation on immediacy of the issues to be covered. So, we began with the most inner concentric circle of our first topic, namely hazy and dusty weather because it was the most immediate and tangible evidence of what we were conversing about. After that, the next session, we went beyond the immediate context to a broader context, in this case Iraq’s war time situation since, in student’s opinions, Iraq was involved in the war and failed to mulch its parched areas. The material the researchers gave to the students for this session was a listening track on the Iraqi people facing the same problem; haze and dust in Iraq. The last circle of the first generative theme haze and dust (i.e. the last to come in the gradation process) was the reasons of Iraq-America war and its effects on nearby countries like Iran. In this session, students were required to write a short paragraph on the probable effects of the war on their country. It was interesting to find out that a couple of students imagined and attributed the increase in the number of respiratory diseases in their context to the aftermaths of the war. Even more interesting was to link arboreal diseases of the local jungles to the chemical materials transferred by wind from the war zone. Every session the material covered was discussed, too.

A second example for the implementation of CP principles was the discussion made on the experience teachers and students have of a very frequent incident in Lorestan Province in Iran. In the hometown of one of the researchers self-immolation is very much higher than everywhere else. This is sadly an exclusive female practice. By all accounts, the city has the highest rank in the country. However, because of some bureaucratic and confidential limitations, formal statistics are denied access. It was one of the topics, one of the researchers decided to discuss in his class (i.e. Generative Theme). To do that, the researcher introduced an own-written text about self-immolation to his class (i.e. content selection and content gradation since the idea of self-immolation was most tangible and immediate (i.e. Immediacy) in the context). The text had subjective follow-up questions meaning that the questions demanded the students to go to their own existential conditions to find the answers (macro-micro level linkage). One of the questions read like this: is self-immolation an issue in your community? What do you think are the reasons for that? Subsequently, the students of the class and the teacher had a 15-minute discussion on the topic (dialogical method). An outgrowth of this was another Generative Theme, namely terrible economic situation the community was dealing with due to lack of economic infrastructures which, they held, was itself a function of unjust distribution of wealth and governmental budgets among different cities and provinces (i.e. the second Generative Theme located in the next Concentric Circle). Hence, because it was a broader issue and was beyond the immediate context, it was gradated next to be discussed in the coming session. To make the students more aware of their pitiful and miserable existence, Comparative texts were drawn upon. The economic statistics of an adjoining city was brought to the class and students were invited to compare it to their city. This helped the class to get more insights into their terrible existence. To even go one step forward in the Concentric Circles proposed by Freire, this time self-immolation and economy were related to each other in a broader way by going beyond the immediate context (i.e. Immediacy) by linking the issue to the Tunisian Revolution. A hint was given to students by asking them whether they had any idea of who Mohamed Bouazizi is. Unfortunately only a small number of the students knew him. Thus, he was introduced. Mohamed Bouazizi (29 March 1984 – 4 January 2011) (Wikipedia, 2012) was a Tunisian street vendor who self-immolated as an objection to the government confiscation of his tools. This set in motion demonstrations and riots throughout Tunisia in protest of social and political issues in the country and catalyzed the Tunisian Revolution. The common Generative Theme of all the topics was relevant, so, this time the syllabus was not modular because the topics were not independent.

Conclusion

Driven by lack of Materials in line with Critical Pedagogy, the present study set off to exemplify and propose ideas on how the current SLA mainstream can be more *criticalized*. What makes this study different from the background is to look at Critical Pedagogy from a practical lens since all the bulk of the studies conducted so far has been focused on the theoretical side of Critical Pedagogy. Both teachers and students were happy with the activities involved in the classroom as the issues raised were very much related to their lives and were immediate. It is hoped that the present study can pave the way for more practical studies to be carried out using experimental methods to see the difference that this approach can make in more controlled ways.

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