

Understanding critical pedagogy: Conceptual foundations and its relevance in Teacher Education

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Abstract

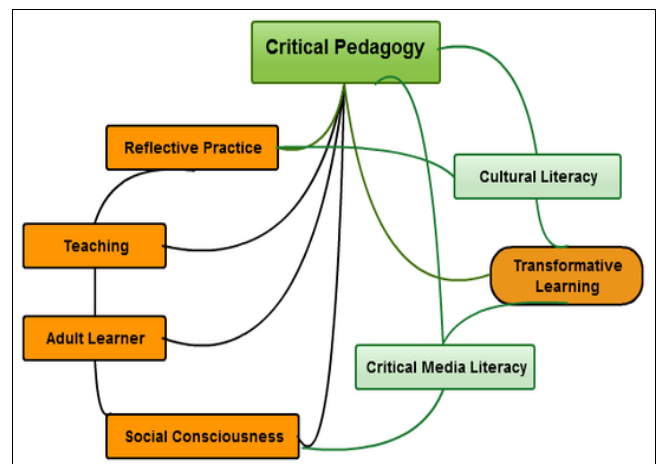
One relatively recent paradigm that considers the transformative, subjective, contextual, wholeness, sustainability, and pluralistic nature of knowledge and society is critical pedagogy. By focusing on social justice, discourse, and critical consciousness in education, critical pedagogy—which has its roots in the writings of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and other transformative educators—challenges conventional teaching paradigms. This study examines the philosophical grounds, conceptual underpinnings, and necessity of critical pedagogy in teacher education. The study emphasizes how teacher preparation programs can be redesigned to promote justice, democratic participation, and emancipatory learning through the use of critical pedagogy. In order to develop socially conscious teachers who can confront structural injustices in the classroom, this paper makes the case for the inclusion of critical pedagogy in teacher education by looking at theoretical frameworks, real-world applications, and difficulties.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy, teacher education, social justice, emancipatory education, transformative learning

Introduction

Critical pedagogy contends that all education is fundamentally political and ideological, challenging the long-held belief that education is a neutral, objective process of knowledge transmission (Freire, 1970) [6]. Critical pedagogy, which has its roots in the writings of transformative scholars like Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, highlights how education can either reinforce or undermine oppressive structures. The "banking model" (Freire, 1970) [6], in which students passively absorb knowledge, is frequently used in traditional teaching approaches to reinforce hierarchical power structures. Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, promotes dialogic, problem-posing instruction that cultivates critical consciousness, or the knowledge of social inequalities and the ability to confront them (Freire, 1973). Given that teachers have a significant influence on whether classroom dynamics are fair or inequitable, this paradigm change is especially important in teacher education (Giroux, 2011).

Persistent educational disparities, where marginalized students—especially those from low-income, racialized, or linguistically varied backgrounds—face institutional impediments, need the use of critical pedagogy in teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1995) [12]. Oppressed communities are further marginalized by standardized curriculum and high-stakes exams, which frequently place more emphasis on compliance than critical thinking (Au, 2011) [2]. Teacher education programs can equip aspiring teachers to identify and address these disparities by including critical pedagogy. In order to advance social justice, scholars contend that educators need to develop beyond their technical expertise to become transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 2020) [7]—professionals who practice reflective praxis (theory + action) (Darder, 2017) [4].



The politics of "woke" teaching, institutional opposition, and neoliberal educational changes are some of the obstacles to integrating critical pedagogy into teacher education (McLaren, 2015) [14]. Research shows that critical educational strategies, like participatory action research (Kincheloe, 2008) [10] and culturally sensitive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) [12], improve student participation and equity in spite of these obstacles. This essay examines the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy, its importance in teacher preparation, and useful tactics for creating emancipatory learning environments. In the end, it makes the case that in order to develop teachers who can promote a more equitable society, teacher education must place a high priority on critical literacy, democratic discourse, and social participation.

Characteristics of Critical Pedagogy

1. According to the critical pedagogy, education is inherently political, and any kind of pedagogy should be aware of this fact.
2. A social and educational vision of justice and equality should be the basis for any kind of education.

3. The liberation from oppression and human suffering should be an important dimension in education.
4. Education should promote both emancipatory change as well as the cultivation of the intellect.
5. It is focused on dialogue instead on one-way knowledge transfer. To bring the awareness process in motion there must be dialogue, because man does not create oneself in silence, but by words, actions and reflection. The use of such a dialogue is the main element in the learning process.

The Need for Critical Pedagogy in Teacher Education

1. Addressing Inequality in Education

Through biased curricula, tracking systems, and disciplinary measures that harm minority pupils, schools frequently reflect and perpetuate societal inequities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) ^[3]. Teachers are empowered by critical pedagogy to identify these structural injustices and take proactive measures to address them. Teachers can, for example, use culturally responsive teaching that affirms students' identities (Nieto, 2010) ^[15] and audit curricula to incorporate minority voices (Ladson-Billings, 1995) ^[12]. All students can feel represented in inclusive classrooms if teachers challenge the "hidden curriculum" that favors dominant cultures. According to research, these strategies increase historically marginalized individuals' participation and academic performance (Valenzuela, 1999) ^[18]. To find hidden prejudices and systemic complicity in injustice, teachers must engage in continuous self-reflection (Kendi, 2019). Anti-oppressive frameworks must thus be given top priority in professional development in order to prepare educators to be change agents.

2. Moving Beyond the Banking Model

According to Freire (1970) ^[6], the "banking model" of education, in which instructors impart knowledge to obedient students, encourages tyranny by stifling critical thinking. This one-way transmission is rejected by critical pedagogy, which advocates dialogic, problem-posing learning instead. By discussing real-world problems with students, teachers transform into facilitators who co-construct knowledge (Freire, 1970) ^[6]. As students examine power dynamics instead of learning facts by heart, this change promotes student agency (Giroux, 2011). To cultivate students' critical consciousness, a history lesson can, for instance, look at contemporary racial injustices as continuations of colonial legacies. By fostering the abilities necessary to confront injustice, this type of participatory learning turns classrooms become democratic forums (hooks, 1994) ^[9]. To put this into practice, nevertheless, one must oppose standardized testing cultures that place a premium on memorization (Au, 2011) ^[2].

3. Preparing Teachers as Change Agents

Technical proficiency is sometimes given precedence over critical engagement in teacher preparation, leaving educators unprepared to handle systemic injustices (Giroux, 2020) ^[7]. Teachers are reframed by critical pedagogy as transformative thinkers who relate classroom instruction to social justice (Kincheloe, 2008) ^[10]. Programs must prepare teachers to advocate for equitable reforms and criticize practices that perpetuate inequality, such as high-stakes testing (Au, 2011) ^[2]. According to Zeichner (2009) ^[19], this involves action research initiatives in which educators

investigate and resolve regional inequities. Teachers may, for example, launch campaigns against dress restrictions that discriminate against Black students. This kind of activism is consistent with Freirean praxis, which is action combined with introspection (Freire, 1970) ^[6]. Neoliberal educational reforms, on the other hand, frequently stifle these initiatives by requiring instructors to strike a balance between resistance and acquiescence (McLaren, 2015) ^[14]. Networks of activists and mentors are essential to continuing this difficult task.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

1. Curriculum Reform

Critical pedagogy principles must be included into teacher education programs through drastic curricular revision. Moving beyond token diversity modules to systemic understanding of power structures entails including social justice issues into all curricula (Zeichner, 2009) ^[19]. Courses should use frameworks such as Critical racism Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995) ^[12] to analyze the intersections of gender, racism, and class in educational disparities. Through narrative writing and conversation, autoethnographic approaches (Darder, 2017) ^[4] can assist pre-service teachers in reflecting on their positionality and unconscious prejudices. Critical mentoring that challenges deficient assumptions should be incorporated into field experiences, and placements in underrepresented groups should be prioritized (Valenzuela, 1999) ^[18]. Standardized assessments must give way to portfolios that show critical engagement with real-world problems.

2. Pedagogical Strategies

Teaching strategies that are transformative are necessary for effective implementation. By analyzing controversial topics through debate and Socratic seminars, dialogic teaching fosters critical discussions about privilege and oppression (Freire, 1970) ^[6]. In order to manage discomfort and preserve inclusive discourse, educators need to cultivate their facilitation abilities (Nieto, 2010) ^[15]. By collaborating with neighborhood organizations on social justice initiatives, community-based learning connects theory and practice (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) ^[5]. For instance, teacher candidates and young activists could work together to record local history that aren't included in textbooks. While arts-based techniques enable the creative expression of resistance (Greene, 1995) ^[8], critical literacy tactics have the ability to dismantle official curriculum and media messages (Luke, 2012) ^[13]. According to Shor (1992) ^[17], these approaches include eschewing conventional lecture forms in favor of experiential, student-centered learning that reflects the democratic classrooms that instructors will eventually lead.

3. Challenges in Implementation

A major obstacle to the acceptance of critical pedagogy is institutional. Standardization and quantifiable results are given priority in neoliberal education reforms, which leaves little opportunity for critical thinking (Au, 2011) ^[2]. There is pressure on many teacher education programs to prioritize test-taking strategies over social justice (Giroux, 2020) ^[7]. Criticism of critical theory as "too political" may cause traditional faculty to oppose educational changes (McLaren, 2015) ^[14]. Rigid courses that omit critical viewpoints are frequently required by accreditation criteria (Zeichner,

2009) ^[19]. Furthermore, privileged pre-service teachers could be reluctant to face their involvement in oppression (Kumashiro, 2000) ^[11]. Innovative techniques are further limited by resource constraints in programs that get little funding. Building coalitions with neighborhood organizations, advocating for legislative changes, and establishing safe spaces for critical pedagogy within institutional bounds are all necessary to overcome these obstacles (Darder, 2011).

Conclusion

By questioning conventional approaches that uphold inequity and passive learning, critical pedagogy offers a revolutionary perspective for teacher education. Teacher education programs can equip teachers to confront systemic disparities in schools by including social justice into curricula, implementing dialogic teaching techniques, and encouraging critical consciousness. However, the broad adoption of these strategies is threatened by important obstacles, such as standardized testing cultures, institutional resistance, and neoliberal reforms. Systemic change is necessary to overcome these obstacles, and this includes community partnerships, faculty development, and policy lobbying.

Emancipatory pedagogies that enable educators and learners to act as change agents must be given top priority in teacher education in the future. Education is never neutral, as Freire (1970) ^[6] claimed; it either upholds tyranny or frees minds. The democratic goal of teacher training programs can be fulfilled by adopting critical pedagogy, which produces teachers who not only impart knowledge but also confront injustice and promote social justice. Courage, teamwork, and a steadfast dedication to education as a practice of freedom are necessary for the future.

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