Sociological Influence of Critical and Social Pedagogy on Young Learners' English Education

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Abstract

Education, by regarding the social and critical elements can be traced back to the 20th century. Critical pedagogy was started out of the need of reforming education in a way that it would acknowledge the influence of the present social and political elements in each and every educational context. Some critical theorists applied ideas in critical theories to education in the society. In this regard, social pedagogy describes a holistic and relationship-centered way of working in care and educational settings with people across the course of their lives. In actual fact politically and socially engaged critiques of power in everyday life, communities, and institutions are exactly what are needed to develop critical and social pedagogies in language education. This paper aims to study descriptively about the sociological effect of critical and social pedagogy on young learners' English education.

Keywords: Young learner, Social pedagogy, Critical pedagogy, Education.

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1. Introduction

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education and social movement that combines education with critical theory. Critical pedagogy, with roots in the works of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, has influenced the area of education in general, and Applied Linguistics in particular. In the light of Critical Pedagogy (CP), education, including English Language Teaching (ELT), takes on a new dimension, which is the sociopolitical aspect (Giroux, 2010). It holds that education is not neutral, and it impacts to the social and political relations in the society, by either reinforcing or reducing them. Critical pedagogy includes relationships between teaching and learning. Critical pedagogy, therefore, following other critical approaches, seeks to empower people to reach its goal in the society, which is to critique the status quo, and then to transform it (Sadeghi, 2009). In recent years, researchers in the field of ELT have begun to adapt the ideas of critical pedagogy to their own field. They are in a way acknowledging the non-neutrality language teaching as a branch of education, and beginning to recognize the sociopolitical aspects of it. Language teaching is, therefore, claimed to be conveying ideas and influencing to a large extent the power relations in the society and in the world. English is not an exception to this rule, but they have ruled it out, by dexterously introducing it as a neutral international language which belongs to all the people in the world. "But now many ELT experts and social educators overtly display pessimism about the role English is playing in the world and see it as a means used by some powerful countries in the world to transfer their thoughts, ideologies and social attitudes to the other nations of the world who have to learn English" (Kasaian and Subbakrishna, 2011).

2. Critical Pedagogy
2.1. The Concept of Critical Pedagogy in the Society

Critical pedagogy deals with developing awareness and consciousness among young learners in order to enable them improve their education and life in the society. Following critical theory, it is concerned with people's emancipation from any kind of oppression or discrimination, by empowering them to criticize the status quo, but is according to Keesing-Styles "distinct from critical theory in that it is primarily an educational response to oppressive power relations and inequalities existing in educational institutions" (2003). Critical pedagogy in literature, has been given different titles, such as "critical work", transformative pedagogy" (Pennycook, 1999), "participatory approach" (Auerbach, 1993), "emancipatory literacy" (Wink,1997), "critical education" (Apple, 1999), "pedagogies of resistance (Aronowitz and Giroux,

1985), libratory teaching (Shor, 1987), radical pedagogy (Hooks, 1989), post-modern pedagogy (Giroux, 1992), border pedagogy (Giroux and McLaren, 1994), and pedagogies of possibility (Simon, 1987)," (In Canagarajah, 1999, p. 18-9).

Giving a clear-cut definition for critical pedagogy seems difficult, for as Hall (2000) points out "by their very nature, critical approaches are unwilling to prescribe what 'should be done'. It seems reasonable, however, to suggest that critical pedagogy aims at clarifying the power relations in education, and emphasizing the non-neutral and non-educational aspects of education. The main goal of critical pedagogy in the society is, to use Freire's terms, to transform young students from being mere objects of education to autonomous subjects of their own learning. Critical pedagogy, therefore, attempts to enhance young learner's awareness, give them courage, and lead them to improve both their education and society.

2.2. The Origin of Critical Pedagogy

The starting point for the view of education critical pedagogy holds, that is, education has social, political, regional, and ethnic elements to it, can be traced back to the 20th century. In the 19th century As Auerbach points out, bilingual education was prevalent under the local political powers, but the revival of nativism and antiforeignism in the late 19th century weakened this trend. During the World War I, he maintains, many Europeans immigrated to the USA, where war and the problems it had caused, raised a feeling of dislike toward other countries. These changes all helped build an English-only tendency in TESOL (Auerbach, 1993). Among other changes that contributed to critical pedagogy were social movements such as human rights. According to Apple (1999), in the 1950s, Black and White students had to go to different schools, and when school segregation was decided to be ended, they found solutions to circumvent this problem. Other than historical and social changes, politics can also be a reason why critical pedagogy was created at all. After all, education was considered as a political act by Freire, the so-called father of critical pedagogy. Such issues as imperialism, racism, and feminism, with roots in sociopolitics have been discussed as the source of some problems in education. As Santana-Williamson (2000) puts it: "Critical pedagogy was started out of the need of reforming education in a way that it would acknowledge the influence of the social and political elements existent in each and every educational context".

3. Research in Critical Pedagogy

Although considered as being born in Brazil, by Freire, some forty years ago, and critical pedagogy has never been restricted to a single individual, time, or place. In fact according to Santana-Williamson, the idea of education being a multifaceted activity can be seen in the work of ancient philosophers, Plato, and Aristotle. Later other scholars in philosophy, such as, Renee Descartes in the 16th century, and Kant and Hegel in the 18th century also contributed to the area.

Social theorists like Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, German mathematician Edmund Husserl, German existentialist Martin Heidebergger, and Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud worked on the issue as well. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the Psychologist, by his theory of zone of proximal development stressed the role of context in learning. More recently, the social theorist Gramscihas mentioned explicitly, that, it is the role of an educator to identify and admit to the "existing oppressive structure" in schools (Wink, 1997).

Critical pedagogues may be from different ethnic backgrounds in the society, and they may be talking about different aspects of the issue, but as Santana-Williamson (2000) has pointed out "they share one common goal" and that is "to fight against imperialism and social and political injustices through education."Figure 1 shows the Intersection between critical thinking and critical pedagogy
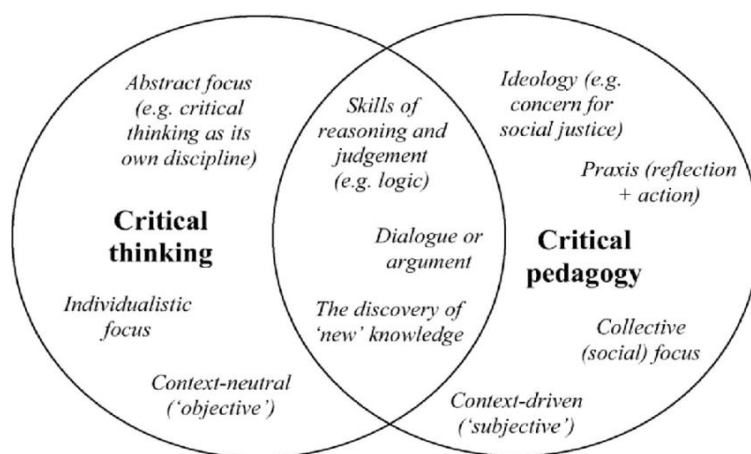

Figure 1. Intersection between critical thinking and critical pedagogy
(Johnson and Morris 2010)

4. Critical Pedagogy in the Society of Iran

Despite all the attention and effort critical pedagogy in TESOL and Sociology has received during the past several years, this post-method approach has no place in Iran educational system. Apart from the fact that critical pedagogy is not used practically in language classrooms, only few research has been done to investigate the issue (Akbari, 2008; Sadeghi, 2009; Kasaian and Subbakrishna, 2011; Aliakbari and Faraji, 2011; Rashidi and Safari, 2011). It seems drastically ironic that in a country with strong anti-imperialistic tendencies and social, political, economic, and even educational policies, there is no room for an approach that fights against linguistic imperialism.

This study asserts to clarify the necessity for more work on critical and social pedagogy in English learning in Iran, by assessing the level of awareness among Iranian English teachers.

5. Social Pedagogy

Social pedagogy is based on humanistic values stressing human dignity, mutual respect, trust, unconditional appreciation, and equality, to mention but a few. It is underpinned by a fundamental concept of children, young people and adults as equal human beings with rich and extraordinary potential and considers them competent, resourceful and active agents.

In their earlier work on social pedagogy, Petrie et al,. (2011) identify 9 principles underpinning social pedagogy:

- "A focus on the young learner as a whole person, and support for the learner's overall development;
- The practitioner seeing herself/himself as a person, in relationship with the child or young person;
- Yoyth and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate hierarchical domains;
- As professionals, pedagogues are encouraged constantly to reflect on their practice and to apply both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to the sometimes challenging demands with which they are confronted;
- Pedagogues are also practical, so their training prepares them to share in many aspects of children's daily lives and activities;
- Young learner's associative life is seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group;
- Pedagogy builds on an understanding of youth's rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislated requirements;

5.1. The Origin of Social Pedagogy

In many European countries social pedagogy has evolved as a profession which has roots in youth work, social welfare, early years, formal education and care settings, and social pedagogues can be situated in a range of settings (Bird & Eichsteller, 2011). While much of the discussion concerning social pedagogy in the UK has centred on children and young people, it is an approach covering the whole lifespan, emphasizing the importance of education within families and communities (Hämäläinen, 2003). Despite the fact that it underpins much work with children and young people in many European countries, social pedagogy remains a term which continues to be poorly understood in English-speaking countries (Smith & Whyte, 2008). It is a term where the exact meaning will often differ depending on country and cultural setting, however, there are common principles which apply regardless of context. Social pedagogy practice is 'underpinned by core values and humanistic principles, which emphasize people's strengths, the importance of including people into the wider community, and aims to prevent social problems' (Holthoff & Eichsteller, 2009, p. 59). It is about being with others and forming relationships, not so much about what you do but 'how' you do it – a way of being (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012). It is informed by sociological, psychological and educational theories, combining them into distinct, multi-dimensional practice (Holthoff & Eichsteller, 2009). This multi-dimensional element has created both opportunities and challenges when attempts have been made to transfer it to a context where services and professionals are organized in a manner which more traditionally separates than brings together. Figure 2 shows the social pedagogy design.
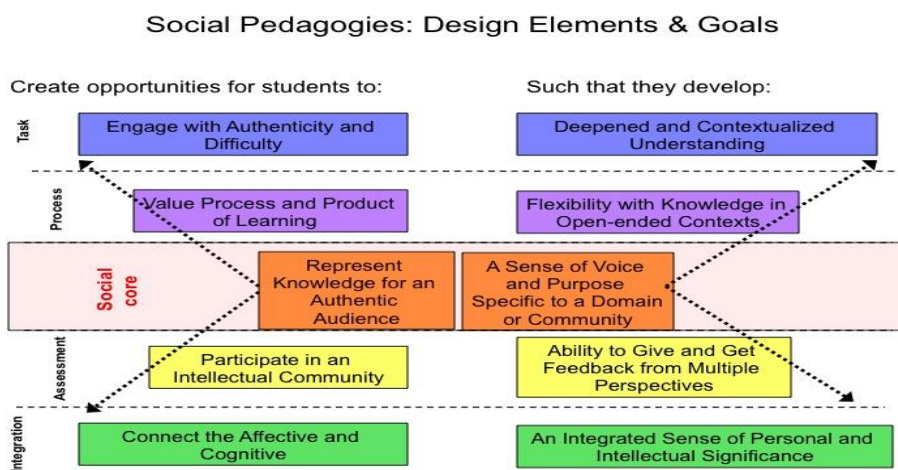

Figure 2. Social pedagogy design

6. Conclusion

This study encompasses those aspects of critical and social pedagogy that are relevant to the field of ELT and Sociology. In case that critical and social pedagogy integrate in our everyday teaching it can possibly change the way the world is seen, organized, induced, and the ways lives are lived by minorities or in regions of the world where the social lacks organization. Critical pedagogy expects people to be independent learners, thinkers, and doers. The main tenets of critical pedagogy are that no education is politically neutral, and all education should be empowering and provide young learners with a model of critical behavior they can take with them to the outside world. The information collected on critical and social pedagogy indicate that critical and social pedagogy are intricate and complicated tapestries made up of various colors and shapes. It is the outcome of diverse comments that come from different areas of the world and from young learners of numerous races and color. However, critical and social pedagogues share one common goal "to fight against imperialism and social and political injustices through education.

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