

**CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: FROM A THEORETICAL LENS****Alprata Ahuja***M. Phil Scholar, CIE, University of Delhi***Abstract**

In this paper, the author have shared her understanding of the critical pedagogy. The outline of the paper: it starts from small introduction on critical pedagogy, then the author have tried to bring forward the historical perspective of critical pedagogy to understand why this idea developed, then the discussion is carried forward on critical pedagogy in exposition to Giroux's ideas on why we need critical pedagogy and its relevance to the various aspects of schooling. Also the discussion seems incomplete without the mention of the implication, which is done under the heading: The citizen school project. To conclude, analysis of relevance of this theoretical idea to Indian context is presented. Hence, the title of the paper "Critical Pedagogy: From a Theoretical Lens".

Keywords: *Critical Pedagogy, Critical Theory, Giroux*



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What is Critical Pedagogy?

Critical pedagogy is also a difficult term to define as there are many theorists contributing to the idea. One of the idea of critical pedagogy as given by Giroux is "I develop a framework for engaging critical pedagogy as a theoretical resource and as a productive practice, and in doing so reject dominant forms of pedagogy as an a priori method, technique, or rationality that simply has implemented. Instead, I expand the meaning and theory of pedagogy as a part of an ongoing individual and collective struggle over knowledge, desire, values, social relations, and, most important, modes of political agency" (Grioux, 2011, p.5). The idea of critical pedagogy draws attention to the issues regarding who has control over production of knowledge, values and classroom practices. It also questions the authority, whose experience should be considered valuable under the specific conditions of learning.

The foundations of Critical Pedagogy: Critical Theory

Critical pedagogy takes us on the journey to understand how equations of power work to restrict marginalised sections of society. Critical pedagogy makes us question how oppressions exist in the systems that we consider to be 'good' and 'normal'. To traverse this journey more meaningfully we need to look in the foundations, ideas that have shaped it and also look into the historical perspective of critical pedagogy for deeper understanding.

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory: Roots of Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has its roots into the critical theory. Critical theory originated in Germany, though at that time the originators would never have realised to put up a unified theoretical framework of cultural criticism under the name 'Critical theory'. Critical theory came into being in Frankfurt school (established in 1923), a group of scholars connected to the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. "In its beginnings, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse initiated a conversation with the German tradition of philosophical and social thought, especially that of Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Weber" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 46). Post war situation in Germany was marked by depression, inflation and unemployment. The changing capitalist effect, its consequences led to the mutating forms of domination which critical theorists voiced against. These critical theorists also argued that schools act as the agents of oppression, withholding students from forming aims for themselves and "essentially de skilled students" (Apple, 1982; Kincheloe, 2004 as cited in Breuing, 2011).

Shifting the base to America, these critical theorists were shocked by the America's "positivistic social science establishment beliefs" and the "taken for granted empirical practices" (Kincheloe, 2005). This move further led to the development of the critical theory. The work of Herbert Marcuse has particular contribution to the development of this theory. His work influenced the philosophical voice of "New Left Scholars" who started to emerge in 1960s. Their main concern was domination of academic work by power exerted by the capitalist economies. "They came to view their disciplines as manifestations of the discourses and power relations of the social and historical contexts that produced them. The 'discourse of possibility' implicit within the constructed nature of social experience, suggested to these scholars that a reconstruction of the social sciences could eventually lead to a more egalitarian and democratic social order." (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 48) This led to establishment of critical pedagogy based on the dimensions of critical theory.

Principles of Critical Theory: Relevant to Critical Pedagogy

Critical theory is a difficult term to describe (a) there are many critical theories (b) the critical tradition is always in flux and evolving (c) there is always room for disagreement between critical theorists so there is risk in defining critical theory specifically (Kincheloe, 2005). Thus the ever changing nature of critical theory makes critical pedagogy like an umbrella term encompassing to include many theories and ideas. Critical pedagogy is highly suspicious of theories that fail to uncover and discern diverse forms of hegemony, power and

oppression in the given system. With theoretical innovations and shifting zeitgeists, the theories relevant today may become redundant in different times, new era. To explain the nature of critical pedagogy better, following is a discussion on the principles of critical theory affecting the framework of critical pedagogy.

- Critical enlightenment: is to uncover the hidden agendas of the groups of people benefiting in the given social and political set up. The power play operates on the basis of discriminations due to race, class, gender, and sexuality and we need to question the status quo of the given system to upheaval these discriminations.
- Critical emancipation: is achieved when one has the power to take control of their own lives in solidarity with justice oriented society. Though it is criticized that emancipation cannot be achieved in the absolute sense as person always exists within a socio-political setup. Thus emancipation can be understood as to understand the forces that prevent individuals from taking crucial decisions that shape up their lives.
- The rejection of economic determinism: Economic factors were once considered only factor playing the role in oppression but now reconceptualised critical theory considers many factors that become reasons of oppression such as racial, gender, sexist factors apart from economic factors.
- The critique of instrumental or technical rationality: Critical theorists claim that rationalistic scholar become over obsessed with technique, procedures that they lose sight of the humanistic purpose of research. It is also important to answer of “why” along with “how to”.
- The impact of desire: Critical researchers view individuals and their desires to be result of the interplay between power, identity, rationality and emotion. Thus, the psyche works in reference to socio-political realm.
- The concept of immanence: Critical theorists should always be concerned with ‘what would be’? They should move beyond the contemplative realm of present social reforms and also try to visualise how we can make our world more socially just in the future.
- A reconceptualised critical theory of power – hegemony: No socio-political setup is free from dominance of power. Power works in two ways- to suppress and to motivate, and is contextualised and contested between various groups of individuals. Power does not exist in the form of physical power only but can be complex, hidden and can act in subversive ways through media, school, family and church.

- A reconceptualised critical theory of power – ideology: Ideology works in sublime way to make people accept oppression in normalised way. Ideology is closely related to hegemony and provides nuanced understanding of the power and power equations that make people accept their role in the given society. Ideology works through avenues like movies, film, TV, popular music, sports etc.
- A reconceptualised critical theory of power – linguistic/discursive power: Language and linguistic description does not describe the world as it is in fact it helps us understand the power play existent in the given set up and also plays a role construct it. Language in the form of discourses serves to regulate and control people as who can and cannot speak with authority, also who must listen. The texts used in classrooms serve to dominate and regulate. It is also matter of power equation whose text will be used in classrooms.
- The relationships among culture, power, and domination: Culture is also a domain of the struggle where “production and transmission of knowledge is a contested process” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.57). Cultures, subcultures operate, affect each other and power play also work here for domination on few. Mass media and electronic media proliferation affect the culture and make people not appreciate their own traditions.
- The centrality of interpretation – Critical hermeneutics: “Scholars familiar with critical hermeneutics builds bridges between reader and text, text and its producer, historical context and present, and one particular social circumstance and another” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.58)
- The role of cultural pedagogy in critical theory: Cultural production is a form of education which forms-deform our values, identities and gives knowledge. Thus, it is important for critical theorists to understand and uncover how education takes place in popular culture and how dominant cultural agents produce hegemony.

These principles of critical theory also elicit for us the principles on which critical pedagogy work and concretely spread before us the ideals on which critical pedagogy is based.

Work of Some Theorists in the Field of Critical Pedagogy

In the following section, the author has attempted to briefly highlight the work of selected theorists in the field of critical pedagogy. There are many theorists working in this field only selected few are discussed here.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997): Paulo Freire, is called the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy (McLaren 2000) (as cited in Breuing, 2011). He had closely seen the impoverished

lives of Brazilian peasants and developed educational practices and principles to work for these oppressed marginalised and lessen their plight. For Freire “education is always political and teachers are unavoidably political operatives” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.70). He viewed teacher as progressive educator, not mere technician and follower of rules. He made students reflect on their lives through “codifications” and made them appreciate that there are multiple ways to live their lives and hardships they suffer. For him true liberated individuals will act in ways to overcome their oppression. Liberation and emancipation cannot be obtained without existence of hope. “In many ways Freire is critical pedagogy’s prophet of hope” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.72). What Freire proposes that critical hope is necessary for wanting to change the condition of present times for better and not take present as fixed, rigid and given. Also it is important to mention Freire’s idea of cultivation of critical consciousness. It is important for individual’s to understand the reality as process not product, fluid as opposed to static. They need to develop consciousness to imagine their future that is not normalised and release future from the dictates of the past. Learning, being and identity, for Freire, is not fixed and there is always possibility of change. Literacy is important tool for emancipation. Literacy makes students empowered to read realities and write their lives in the ways they want to. Thus, contribution of Paulo Freire made to critical pedagogy is crucial and has formed bases for work of many other theorists.

Henry Giroux: Henry Giroux work in late 1970s and 1980s has given shape to the critical pedagogy as it is today. Giroux has worked to bring together the ideas of Freire’s work, critical theory of Frankfurt school, cultural capital of Pierre Bourdieu, Dewey’s ideas of democratic classrooms etc. Giroux’s struggles revolve around oppression in United States, disdain state of democracy and voice against the suppression caused by the four fundamentalisms: market fundamentalism, religious fervour, destruction of critical education and militarisation (Giroux, 2005). For Giroux, schools became an instrument at the dispersal of capitalistic economy. Students were trained, regulated, monitored through the lens of the performance. Schools served the hidden agenda to maintain the status quo in society, students were prepared for the role pre identified for them. Giroux, thus brings forth to highlight the relationship among power, ideology and schooling. Also Giroux stresses on the relationship between cultural studies and oppression. He was concerned with the legitimizing factors of the popular and dominant culture and their concern with radical democracy. He wanted to avenue out determinism and illustrates how schooling can be a force of emancipation, critical and radical democracy.

Michael Apple: Michael Apple has also been concerned with the inequities in American society. Schools, according to Apple, are affected by political and economic forces. In fact, according to Apple, all aspects of education such as funding, goals and objectives, textbooks, curriculum, who has access to education and who has power to make these decisions are all politicized processes. All these factors will play important role in formulation of meaning of democracy. Apple has worked with aspect of curriculum and teaching in 1980s, contesting that education in United States favour only few privileged socioeconomic classes, promotes discrimination on the basis of gender and any other diversities. Teachers and their pedagogies are monitored through the control of the external agencies. Teachers are stripped of their autonomy and power, they cannot address inequities in the classrooms. Teachers are reduced to technicist roles of managing the students and their performance categorised on the basis of meritocracy. Apple argues “in this control they have established a knowledge industry that emphasizes the traditional family, free market economic policy, a narrow view of patriotism, Christianity, and a business needs driven school curriculum” (Kincheloe, 2005, p.82).

Why Critical Pedagogy? – Elaborating on Giroux’s Ideas

The discussion on critical pedagogy is extended with exposition to the ideas of Henry Giroux. Henry Giroux has undeniably major contribution to shape the framework of critical pedagogy as it is today. His ideas developed against the backdrop of United States and it is important to understand the capitalist forces of domination working in United States to understand Giroux’s ideas better. Giroux (2005) has passionately written about the forces that worked in America that has led to threatened condition of democracy. He vividly explains the repercussions under the rule of three presidents – Ronald Reagen, Bill Clinton and George W Bush. There are four fundamentals attacking democracy in America: market fundamentalism, religious fervour, destruction of critical education and militarisation. Following is the discussion of each one point in detail.

The capitalist economy of America has made richer more rich and poorer more poor. The welfare schemes for the needy and the poor found no place in this shifting notion of economy. The security of fixed jobs in markets was replaced by the new catch word of flexibility, part time workers, minimum wage jobs replaced the permanent jobs.

Christian fundamentals were reinforced. George W Bush was seen as the “messenger of God” (Giroux. 2005, p. 19). The campaign launched by Bush prevents homosexuals of many rights,

they were not allowed to secure job as teachers, and gay marriages were prevented. Religious freedom, freedom of speech was no longer available to the people.

“Critical education was destroyed as a foundation for an engaged citizenry and a vibrant democracy” (Giroux, 2005, p.21). Schools now run on business models, curriculum has been standardized and students are monitored, regulated through lens of performance. Schools are reduced to training grounds, rote learning is promoted and the poor is expected to learn and fit in the roles marked for them. So, schools are expected to produce and regulate people to fit in to the categories earmarked for them, maintaining the status quo of the society. Teachers are seen as technicians, not considered skilled to take their own decisions. Teachers are also controlled by external forces checking their work.

Ongoing militarization of the public life is also on increase. Military roles among people are promoted to be salvific who have the largest machinery and are masculine and capable of moral policing others. The idea that is promoted is “cowboy mythology”. “Schools also adopt the idea of “tough love” on the similar lines. They have zero tolerance policies and students are treated with “hard love”. “Militarism has become a new public pedagogy, and one of its consequences is a growing authoritarianism that encourages profit hungry monopolies, the ideology of faith based certainty, and the undermining of any vestige of critical education, dissent, and dialogue” (Giroux, 2005, p. 25).

The affect of media is undeniable existent in demotion of the critical thinking and democracy. Media operates at the hands few powerful corporate houses, promote their ideologies. Even Giroux goes on to introduce a term “celluloid patriotism”. Media especially movies and television programming, have worked to promote the image of patriotic male who is masculine, chauvinistic and can go to any length to save the country. The position of females is reduced to second fiddle, who independently are not capable of achieving much. Movies like Rambo, Rocky IV are constructed to show that world is divided in two parts of those who love freedom and those who don't. These movies promote false consciousness. Movies like Top gun, Iron eagle's promote that young people promote the act of super patriotism, instead of challenging the logic of patriotism. TV programmes like Miami vice, Cheers have further added to degenerating the position of women. The idea of males is around forms of patriarchy and chauvinism. This clearly elicits the threats to critical thinking, critical education, radical democracy and emancipatory citizenship in US.

Giroux's Critical Pedagogy and Various Aspects of Schooling

Next, I will like to discuss Giroux ideas of critical pedagogy and its relevance to various aspects of schooling.

- Critical pedagogy as means of reconstruction of school as democratic public spaces: Schooling and society at large are reflection of each other. Changes in schooling will eventually bring forth the changes in society that we aim for. Education is the platform that fosters in students identities that conform to ordering, power and propagate specific forms of knowledge. Thus, through critical pedagogy a cadre of educated people who have developed the knowledge, skills and habits of Critical Citizenship, through which democratic institutions can be reformed. Giroux elaborates further that Critical Citizenship requires skills in students to understand and question the existing binding norms, recognising their own voices, showing courage to take risks, work for civic benefit. Schooling should make students develop the habit, customs and social relations that are essential for public democratic norms.
- Critical pedagogy and the construction of curriculum: This principle deals with the epistemological point. Existing disciplinary boundaries needs to be deformed as the exiting state of organisation of curriculum knowledge promotes discrimination and conceal their historical origins. New forms of curriculum knowledge needs to be organised which promotes new ways of thinking, creating insight into how discourses of power and inequality come into play of curriculum organisation.
- Critical pedagogy and the role of teacher: Teacher should move away from the existent boundaries and its defined role of professionalism. Teachers are expected to operate objectively and adopt discourse of decentredness. They should move away from such practice and operate at local level, simultaneously also unravelling the historical and ideological parameters of classroom discourse and its implications for self, society, culture and others. “Though he does not reject macro-theoretical narratives, he suggests that teachers need to operate at the local level, and locate themselves in discourses of professionalism that understand how power ‘is operationalised, domination expresses itself, and resistance works in multiple and productive ways (Giroux, 1992 as cited in Scott, 2008)”.
- Critical pedagogy and role of students: Pedagogy followed in the classrooms and adopted by the teacher should make students aware of their own voices, ideas and opinions. Teachers should make students see the determinant role of their opinions in the formation of socially just society. Teachers should help raise student’s level of consciousness to

make them understand their role in wider society and politics at play, which may or may not be of conflicting nature. Also mere recognition of their voices is not enough as it may be reduced to just a cathartic experience, but it should lead to collectively work to transform the structures of domination responsible for social relations. (Scott, 2008)

- Critical pedagogy and teacher education: Reforming of teacher education forms a step prior to implementing critical pedagogy in the classrooms. Teacher education programmes need to redefine their relationship with the schools. The teachers in the making need to experience social critique, social change and promote emancipatory vision. Schools should be re-envisioned as democratic work place on the lines of Dewey's philosophy. There are four aspects of teacher education programme that Giroux discusses in detail: Power, language, history, and culture.

The student teachers need to understand the relationship of knowledge and power. They need to appreciate how power produces, distorts and hides the truth from being revealed. Language helps constructing the meaning of the world and gives us the medium to negotiate it. A critical approach to history will make students teachers understand how the cultural traditions interplay. It also helps them read the historical construction of curriculum and the process of making it. Culture studies also help the decode the interacting ideologies and it helps student teachers to see culture as formed conflicting components.

Teachers need to create spaces that make students see and form the link between their classroom life and their social contexts. Teacher education institutions and public schools should play an active role in fulfilling the promise of democracy for America's people. (Giorux, 2005)

The Citizen School Project – An Example of Critical Pedagogy Adopted in a School

The whole discussion will be incomplete if implication of all these theoretical ideas is not discussed here. The citizen school project, implemented in schools of Porto Alegre, largest city in southern Brazil, was educational initiative of its municipal government run by The Worker's Party. Based on the ideas of Paulo Freire, the changes were made in form of new school configuration, the problematization of official knowledge and democratization of knowledge.

The reconfiguration done in school was in the traditional structure of grades with duration of one year and a new system of cycles was adopted. This led to re motivating kids who have failed several times to learn without any pre assumptions about their calibre.

The official knowledge was transformed to give importance to cultural and communities knowledge and perspectives. “The whole educational process is aimed at inventing previous priorities and serving the historically oppressed and excluded groups” (Gandin, p.345). This served the problem of exclusion, and the thematic complex provides central guidance to the whole school to proceed. This idea also process of teaching closely related to social problems of the society.

Democratization of knowledge was done through creating support group for students called “the learning laboratory”. The whole process was followed in such healthy democratic manner, that students were not stigmatized to attend these help groups. There was no labelling among students as of intelligent, dumb etc.

Thus, this citizen school project presents a unique example of fight against labelling and categorising poor kids to get only basic education required for specific jobs deemed fit for them. It exemplifies a successful case of “construction of critical education is a real progressive alternative in education” (Gandin, p.352).

Analysis of Relevance Critical Pedagogy in Indian Context

The author has tried to reflect on the relevance of critical pedagogy in Indian context, then the point the author stresses is that these ideas cannot be implemented in our context per se, though NCF 2005 makes a mention of adopting critical pedagogy (NCF, p.22-24). The reason being is that the conflicts in our system are not same. Having said that, it doesn't mean that we don't have any kind of oppressions and conflicts. So, there is a need in our system to make the teachers as agents of change. Schools should provide space for learning through conflict and make students the critical thinkers. We need to make our students enlightened enough, so they can question anything which is treated as given.

Also the author would like to bring to notice that a mere discussion of the theoretical ideas is not sufficient to bring the change, as done in NCF 2005, in fact it is the starting point. We need to talk about specific challenges like the changes required in teacher education programmes. We need to make our student teachers equipped enough to be the bearers of these changes. Definitely there is a long way to reach to this point and it will be interesting to see what course of development these ideas take.

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