

# Understanding critical pedagogy and its impact on the construction of knowledge

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*This article highlights the underlying principles in the construction of knowledge drawing on the theoretical framework postulated by Critical Pedagogy. It also stresses the importance of viewing human beings as co-creators of the world by being able to integrate new knowledge into previous knowledge and, consequently, taking an active role in this process. Conversely, when humans are not able to create new knowledge under such circumstances, they remain disconnected and simply adapt to the world. Having said so, it is vital that education provide both teachers and students with the chance to (re)construct their knowledge and become Subjects of their own thinking. As a result, they will be better able to learn to learn.*

**Keywords:** *critical pedagogy, construction of knowledge, meaningful learning, cultural synthesis, conscientização.*

## Introduction: An overview of critical pedagogy

Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup> has been widely claimed as one of the first proponents of *critical pedagogy*. His experience in his homeland, mainly his involvement in more popular forms of instruction (i.e. teaching illiterate

adult workers in Recife), apart from other pedagogical engagements, has contributed to his love and passion for the teaching-learning process. His achievements<sup>2</sup> were impressive: in 1963, within a period of 45 days, he managed to teach 300 adult learners to read and write.

However, following the military coup of April 1964 in Brazil, a time when people lived within a 'culture of silence' and were devoid of their right to speak, Freire was sent to jail for 75 days; his ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, Pernambuco, in the northeast of Brazil. He had been struggling with poverty and social injustice for quite a long time when he eventually defended his doctoral dissertation in 1959, at the local university. There, he also worked as a professor of History and Philosophy of Education.

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<sup>2</sup> Information retrieved from the *Catedra Paulo Freire* at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, Brazil [<http://www.pucsp.br/paulofreire/>].

were considered as a threat to the ‘old order’. The following five years were spent in exile in Chile where he worked with UNESCO and the local Institute for Agrarian Reform. Immersed in the relationship between agronomists and peasants, he carried on to further develop his pedagogy for educating adults, as well as producing his world famous literary works<sup>3</sup> *Pedagogy of Freedom* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. These writings were a major turning point in his life and career: he was invited to teach at Harvard University’s School of Education, in the United States, for one year while working in several urban and rural educational projects. After that, in 1974, he became a special consultant to the Office of Education at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, focusing on educational projects mainly directed at African countries which had undergone independence. Finally, in 1979, he returned to his homeland and developed projects aiming at a public school of quality for all. In the late 1980s, he was appointed Minister of Education to the State of Sao Paulo for a period of 4 years. He remained in the capital city, also working as a Professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo (PUC-SP), from 1981 until his death in 1997.

It is, therefore, important to say that, owing to Freire’s vast experience not only in South America but also in Central and North America, Europe and Africa, in all his works we may also hear important voices such as those of L. S. Vygotsky, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl

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<sup>3</sup> Originally written in Portuguese, in the late 1960s, with the following titles: *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* and *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, respectively.

Marx<sup>4</sup>, Georg Lukács, Louis Althusser, Erich Fromm, Antonio Gramsci, and Jürgen Habermas, among others. In addition, since the time he spent at Harvard, and even now after his death, his pedagogy has fostered dialogues with several educators in the USA such as Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Peter McLaren, Myles Horton, Donaldo Macedo, Joe L. Kincheloe<sup>5</sup>, and Carlos Alberto Torres<sup>6</sup>, just to name but a few. A recent publication by McLaren and Kincheloe (2007) illustrates Freire’s thinking within several theoretical, pedagogical and political dimensions.

Freire’s pedagogy aims at liberation from social injustice and oppression. One of the major consequences of domination is the ‘culture of silence’, in other words, individuals are deprived of their right to say their word. When people are dehumanized and are not allowed to speak, they are not able to transform their own realities. Liberation, then, lies in both self-awareness and awareness of reality, which by no means is static. Therefore, people need to have the opportunity to engage into a different model of thinking, powered by an emancipatory cognitive interest, as Haber-

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<sup>4</sup> I will draw on the words of Fromm (1976) to further illustrate Marx’s influence in this theoretical framework: “the real Marx, the radical humanist, not the vulgar forgery presented by Soviet communism” (p.15–16). This “real Marx” also stated that only by means of a ‘being mode of existence’ would man achieve real freedom.

<sup>5</sup> Professor Joe L. Kincheloe (1950–2008) was the Canada Research Chair at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University and the founder of *The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy*, launched in March 2008 [<http://freire.mcgill.ca/>].

<sup>6</sup> Professor Carlos A. Torres is the director of the *Paulo Freire Institute* at University of California Los Angeles [<http://www.international.ucla.edu/lac/cat/carlostorresweb.htm>].

mas (1971) argued; in such a model, the construction of knowledge “attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility” and “reason also means the will to reason” (p. 314). Finally, the process of being able to transcend oneself while perceiving and understanding reality, enables people to both act upon their reality, transform it while transforming themselves as well. This process is what Freire calls *conscientização*.

Freire (1970) was certain that rigid and oppressive social structures influenced institutions, such as the family and schools, which may function as agents within structures of domination. As a result, he claimed that the maintenance of a ‘culture of silence’ was rooted in educational systems, which in turn acted by means of a ‘cultural invasion’ as the content of their actions was drawn “from their own values and ideology; their starting point is their own world” (p. 180). As such, the “culture of the dominant class hinders the affirmation of men as beings of decision” (p. 157). Nevertheless, Freire (1974) contended that a ‘climate of transition’ within social structures could provide people with the opportunity to analyse reality without fear; as a matter of fact, they should “take advantage of that climate to attempt to rid [one’s] education of its wordiness, its lack of faith in the student and his power to discuss, to work, to create” (p. 33). Therefore, it would be only by engaging into a dialogical encounter followed by a ‘cultural synthesis’ that the process of *conscientização* was to be attained, regardless of the relationship between people: a peasant and agronomists in the rural fields or teacher and students in the classroom.

The question we should ask, therefore,

is the following: how can education help people fight against such oppression which disguises itself in a ‘culture of silence’? It is the aim of this article to discuss the construction of knowledge in light of a critical pedagogy framework. I will start by providing an overview of the underlying principles of such pedagogy, as well as their implications for the construction of knowledge, also drawing on contributions from other scholars. Next, I will discuss the role of instruction – as well that of the teacher – within this theoretical framework. Finally, I will provide illustrations of such perspective applied to educational contexts in which teachers engage in a different role: not only do they construct knowledge but also they are given the opportunity to *learn to learn*.

### **The construction of knowledge**

A key thinker in the construction of knowledge from a critical perspective was John Dewey (1859–1952). In his work “How we think” (1910), he emphasized that thinking begins with a situation which is first ambiguous, then presents a dilemma and finally proposes alternatives. Moreover, Dewey made an important distinction between bad and good thinking. The latter was also referred to as ‘reflective thinking’, and in his own words this type of thinking “is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance” (p. 13). Finally, he contended that this type of thinking was the one that should be fostered in the classroom.

Likewise, Vygotsky (1926) argued that the state of creativity emerges from a state

of unease, arising from a state of discontent; in this sense, “education and creativity are always tragic processes” (p. 349). Furthermore, based on other thinkers, he stated that this was essential due to the “chaotic structure of mankind under capitalism”; so there should be “a bitter struggle, now concealed, now explicit, between teacher and student” (p. 348). Nonetheless, as he pointed out, the child “has to travel the road on his own two feet [...] the child will have to enter into a brutal struggle with the world” (p. 347). This is to say that the classroom should be a battlefield, and as much as “hunger and thirst are the inspirers of the struggle for existence”, the child should be pushed “into a confrontation with this discontent in the sharpest way possible and as often as possible, and to force him to conquer it” (p. 350). Being this so, we may say that while learners engage in such struggle, they also create knowledge attempting to find the solutions to problems which affect them directly or indirectly.

By the same token, Freire’s (1970) ‘problem-posing method’, powered by a creative form of thinking, takes into account the perceived problems, and aims at overcoming the obstacles or limit-situations into which students find themselves. As a result, they “will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” because they are not facing problems as a theoretical question, but rather, as something “interrelated to other problems within a total context” (p. 81).

The solution to these problems is to be found by means of an emancipatory power of reflection, as pointed out by Habermas (1971), who also plays a vital role in critical perspectives. According

to this author, the experience of reflecting “articulates itself substantially in the concept of a self-formative process [...] in self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility” (p. 197–198). Kincheloe (2003) added that this emancipatory interest allows for freedom and liberation from the dominant forces and distorted communication, and as a consequence, it “allows an individual to gain an awareness of the connection between knowledge” and it “connects the act of knowing with the immediate utilization of knowledge” (p. 94).

This has direct influence on the construction of knowledge, which is, by far one of the most important goals of education. From a critical perspective, as argued by Freire (1998), education is “the key to social transformation” by means of a “human act of intervening in the world”, in the form of “radical changes in society in such areas as economics, human relations, property, the right to employment, to land, to education, and to health” among others (p. 99, 110).

However, in order to socially transform this world, first we must learn to read it critically. Nevertheless, before ‘reading the word’ in schools, Freire (1992) argued that we already ‘read the world’, our surroundings, and our own context. He illustrated this by describing his own experience, in his childhood, a period in which his first readings were birds singing, trees, leaves, fruit, the colours of the fruit, its smell and taste. All these things made up the ‘texts’, the ‘words’ and the ‘letters’ of that context; the more he perceived them, the bigger was his ability to perceive. Indeed, his ‘reading of the wordworld’ made him a literate boy

even before entering the classroom (p. 15). Nonetheless, as he noted, reading always implies a critical perception, allowing for interpreting and rewriting what was read (p. 21).

So, what are the implications of such personal act of reading the world for the social activity of reading the word? Freire (1992) stated that the main difference between the educator and the learner (especially the one who cannot read or write the symbols yet) is that only the educator can write the symbols and further read them, despite the fact that both of them can touch, see, perceive an object such as a pen. However, he went on to say that “literacy is the creation of the written word from the spoken word” (p. 19). Therefore, this creative act cannot be performed by the educator for the learner; the learner has a right to create it with the mediation of the educator.

Freire (1970) went on, then, to design his ‘own method’, as some would say. Instead of having a ‘school’, they had a ‘culture circle’; ‘teachers’ played the role of ‘coordinators’; ‘traditional lectures’ were replaced by ‘dialogues’, and ‘pupils/learners’ were now considered as ‘group participants’. Finally, the ‘syllabi’ was replaced by compact programmes which were broken down and codified into ‘learning units’. The ‘topics or themes’ were selected after an investigation of participants’ thinking (p. 108); the topics were first presented by visual aids, in a dialogic-type of discourse. In addition, the codifications always constituted a totality and the elements were to “interact in the makeup of the whole” (p. 115), as opposed to making use of isolated items, abstract in nature, being merely coded and decoded for the sake of literacy.

It is important to stress that the discussions underlying those themes had the purpose of ‘re-presenting’ the universe to people, “not as a lecture but as a problem” (p. 109), as already stated. That is why it was crucial to mutually select those themes, representing situations familiar to the participants, within their own culture, allowing them to “easily recognize the situations (and thus their own relation to them)” (p. 114). In other words, they could make use of the knowledge they had previously constructed by having read the world before they started learning to read the word. This also allowed for a cultural synthesis, considering both readings were drawn upon while constructing new knowledge.

### **The teaching-learning process as a true dialogue**

From a critical viewpoint of education, the active interaction between human beings requires ‘true dialogue’; therefore, both learners and educators are to engage in a dialogic construction of knowledge. But this dialogue should occur in a horizontal relation between the people involved in the learning process (Gadotti, 1993), as opposed to being a top-down, vertical narrative from the teacher. In this way, “dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world”, moreover, this naming of the world “is an act of creation and co-creation” (Freire, 1970: p. 88–89).

Freire (1970) pointed out that learners, regardless of their instructional levels (i.e. primary schools or colleges/universities), have the right to say their word, and educators, in turn, have a duty to listen to them. Nevertheless, listening also implies spea-

king *with* them as opposed to speaking *to* them, as the former takes place on a two-way road, and the latter, on a one-way road. In this sense, both learners and educators, as human beings, exist not only in this world, but within this world, and with the world, having the right to say their word. As they say their word, not only do they name the world and, consequently, change it, they also exist humanly, as “human existence cannot be silent”. Therefore, dialogue is “an existential necessity” (p. 88).

Furthermore, true dialogue does not exist without humility, as people name the world and re-create it; therefore, there should not be acts of arrogance. As Freire (1970) once asked himself, “How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? [...] How can I dialogue if I am closed to – and even offended by – the contribution of others?” (p. 90). Moreover, he said, “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 93). As far as the learning process goes, Freire (1974) stated that “time spent on dialogue should not be considered wasted time”. The classroom is to be considered as a ‘meeting-place’ where the all the Subjects (i.e. teachers and students) construct knowledge, as opposed to it being transmitted. Thus, asking questions increases the curiosity about the object – the subject under study (p. 133).

The anti-dialogue method, however, favours the implementation of a ‘banking type of education’ in which students “must adapt to the precepts which have been set from above. And one of these precepts is not to think” (1970: p. 155), or put it another way, they do not employ the good thinking approach defended by Dewey

(1910). Nevertheless, true dialogue is essential for establishing ‘critical’ and ‘reflective thinking’. In such type of thinking, one “perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity” says Freire (1970: p. 92). Conversely, ‘naïve thinking’ is directed at accommodating and adjusting to the normalized ‘today’. Moreover, ‘naïve thinking’, in the form of ‘magic consciousness’ does nothing more than direct one to simply apprehend facts, fold one’s arms, and adapt to reality, as part of the process of inertia. However, the nature of one’s own understanding has a significant impact on one’s actions in the world, as Freire (1974) put it, “critical understanding leads to critical action; magic understanding to magic response” (p. 40).

Unfortunately, many magic responses are originated in the classroom, for instance, while reading texts, which are made up of “about a hundred-number chapters of books” pertaining to “extensive reference lists that are much more ‘swallowed’ than really read or understood” (Freire, 1992: p. 17) This insistence on the quantity of readings to be carried out by students, who in turn superficially apprehend and memorize pages after pages instead of comprehending and understanding, “reveal a magic view of the written word” (p. 17–18), thus a magic comprehension of texts. This leads us to question the issue regarding quantity/quality of course materials, and Freire himself stated that “one of the most important philosophical documents that we have at our disposal, *Theses on Feuerbach*, by Marx, has only two pages and a half...” (p. 18). Having said so, we may now move on to discussing the role instruction plays.

## The role of instruction

Instruction plays a prominent role in constructing knowledge: it is through instruction that meanings are negotiated; new knowledge is integrated into previous knowledge and, finally, restored in our memory. Therefore, the way the material is presented – via a rote learning fashion or meaningfully – will have a significant impact on the retrieval and utilization of the knowledge which had been previously constructed.

Ausubel and Robinson (1969) noted that if the primary goal of school is that of meaningfully incorporating materials into students' cognitive structure, it should devote less time to have students absorb rote material. And the reason is simple, as the authors mentioned:

the capacity for memorizing lists receiving multiple representations is notoriously limited both over time and with respect to the length of the list, unless this list is greatly overlearned and frequently reproduced. Both of these limitations can no doubt be attributed to the rather *frail human capacity for sheer memorization*, a capacity in which man is vastly exceeded by the computer. (p. 57, emphasis added)

In describing his own experience as a Portuguese language teacher at an elementary school in his hometown, Freire (1992) stressed that his students did not have to memorize descriptions of objects but instead apprehend their in-depth meanings. Thus, his role as a teacher could not be belittled to that of one summarizing the grammatical structures of the target language (e.g. the verbal agreements and the syntax in Portuguese) and placing transforming them into “tablets of knowledge” as if they could be simply “swallowed by students”. He went on to say that:

The mechanical memorization of descriptions of an object does not result in knowledge of such object. That is why the reading of a text, taken as the pure description of an object, carried out with the intention of memorizing it, neither is real reading nor results in knowledge of the object described in the text. (p. 17).

Moreover, Freire (2005) added that the intellectual nature of reading cannot be reduced to memorizing “portions of paragraphs by mechanically reading – two, three, four times – portions of the text and closing my eyes and trying to repeat them as if the simple machinelike memorization could give me the knowledge I need” (p. 34). And reading the world certainly plays a vital part in such construction of knowledge; nevertheless, it does not suffice. The sensory experience obtained has to undergo changes as well. These changes are accomplished “through school language” which allows for the “reading of the abstract world concepts” that in turn allows for generalization and further “comprehension of objects” and, finally, provides the reader with a tangible and concrete experience (p. 35). Indeed, knowing the meaning of a text enables readers to become co-authors of that text by understanding what an object means instead of memorizing the profile of the concept that such object represents. As a co-author, the reader will be fascinated by the act of reading rather than thinking of it as a burden or “a bitter obligation” (p. 45).

Furthermore, Freire (2005) argued that the reading tasks carried out in the classroom should then allow for a “composition” between reader and writer. In this sense, the significance of the text is constructed by the creative role the reader

takes, through a dialogic experience, accomplished by group discussions of different points of view, which in turn, “enrich the production of text comprehension” (p. 55). However, as the author noted, the actual practice in most classrooms seems to reduce the creative act of reading to that of “verbal copies of the text” in which “children learn early on that their imagination does not work: Using their imagination is almost forbidden, a kind of sin. In addition, their ‘cognitive abilities’ are challenged in a distorted manner” (p. 57, emphasis added).

In this sense, Freire’s (1970) views on education as a political act and that of constructing knowledge did not allow him to have his role reduced to a process of filling up student’s heads with words, as if students’ heads were “an empty vessel to be filled in”. By doing so, he added that education “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72). This process has its main method that of ‘banking education’ which not only emphasizes permanence, anesthetizes and inhibits creative power – as students play the role of “docile listeners” – but also “attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness” in a way as such that “man is abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world” (p. 81).

Having said this, one may ask what characterizes such a type of education. Almost over 100 years ago, Dewey (1910) had already identified the main element of such practice:

teachers have a habit of monopolizing continued discourse. Many, if not most instructors, would be surprised if informed at the end of the day of the amount of time they

have talked as compared with any pupil. Children’s conversation is often confined to answering questions in brief phrases, or in single disconnected sentences. (p. 185)

And this has serious implications as far as understanding concepts and ideas is concerned. Dewey went on to say that:

The vocabulary of things studied in the schoolroom is very largely isolated; it does not link itself organically to the range of the ideas and words that are in vogue outside the classroom...if the idea is not grasped, nothing is gained by using a more familiar word. (p. 181/185).

Freire (1970) also shared the same views. He noted that one of the characteristics of the ‘banking-type’ education was the discursive genre of ‘narrative’ in which the teacher’s main goal is to talk about reality, through teachable contents, in such a way as reality was motionless and static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Those narratives may well be replete with topics “completely alien to the existential experience of the students” (p. 71). He went on to say that when this is the case, students have no choice but “to memorize mechanically the narrated content” (p. 72).

Interestingly, studies about memory and cognition showed that the human memory is not a single ‘vessel’ to be filled in (Novak and Cañas, 2006). As a matter of fact, according to the authors, when information is simply mechanically memorized by rote, there is little or no integration of new knowledge into previous knowledge. This poses two main negative consequences: firstly, the knowledge learned by rote is very likely to be quickly forgotten; secondly, the learner’s cognitive structure (e.g. their prior knowledge) is not enhanced or modified. As a result,

the knowledge learned will have little or no potential use for applications in further cognitive activities. What is more, as the authors put it, “rote learning contributes very little at best to our knowledge structures, and therefore cannot underlie creative thinking or novel problem solving” (p. 11). Therefore, a question is posed: how can we critically transform the world if no creative thinking is employed? This leads us to examine the roles teachers play.

### **The role of the teacher**

The crucial role teachers play in the construction of knowledge has long been a topic for discussion. Nevertheless, as Vygotsky (1926) put it, socio-historical events have reduced the work of the teacher to that of “a mere fount of knowledge, a reference volume or a dictionary, a manual or illustration, in a word, an auxiliary aid and tool of education” (p. 339). Interestingly, this scholar went on to say that such role – a teacher being a ‘teaching machine’ – was increasingly disappearing, and, as a consequence, the student would no longer need to “gulp down all that stuff the teacher is filling him up with”, as he now “educates himself” (p. 339). However, would that role be really disappearing? In order to answer this question, we need to understand, from a socio-historical standpoint, the reasons why teachers were to fill students’ head with certain knowledge.

Vygotsky himself provided us with some possible thoughts regarding the constitution of the psychological work of teachers in previous times, by reminding us of the goals of the Tsarist school: “the meaningless and pedagogically destructive orientation towards examinations [...] students would study to pass exams, and

would pass examinations in order to obtain diplomas” (p.126). Moreover, as the author put it, the greatest sin of that school was exactly this: “none of the people involved in it had any answers when they were asked why study geography and history, mathematics and literature”. Despite the fact that it provided people with knowledge, little could be achieved considering “this was only an abundance of knowledge that always lay buried, an abundance that none could make the proper use of” (p. 127).

Therefore, what use would a student make of such knowledge, later on, outside the classroom, while exercising his or her social roles and citizenship? The answer may have already been provided by Vygotsky (1926):

the only application he [the student] has been able to make of the knowledge he acquired in the school was to give a more or less correct answer on an examination. [Nevertheless] The knowledge of geography has yet to help anyone get a sense of direction in the world outside or to enlarge the set of impressions we gain when travelling, and the knowledge of astronomy has not helped anyone experience the magnitude of the heavens any more strongly or more vividly. (p. 127)

And yet, he added, “for present-day education, it is not so important to teach a certain quantity of knowledge as it is to inculcate the ability to acquire such knowledge and to make use of it” (p. 339).

By the same token, Fromm (1976) put forward two modes of existence – ‘having’ and ‘being’ – and illustrated them within daily experiences, such as *learning*. Students who are in the ‘having mode’ simply listen to what teachers have to say, write down notes and later memorize them to pass an examination. However, “the con-

tent does not become part of their own individual system of thought, enriching and widening it. Instead, they transform the words they hear into fixed clusters of thought, or whole theories, which they store up” (p. 28–29). By contrast, in the ‘being mode’, students do not attend lectures as *tabulae rasae*; instead, they “have in mind certain questions and problems of their own”, they are not “passive receptacles of words and ideas”, because what they hear and listen to allows them to “respond in an active, productive way” as it “stimulates their own thinking process”. Most importantly, the knowledge acquired is not simply taken home and memorized, as “each student has been affected and has changed; each is different after the lecture than he or she was before it” (p. 29). Unfortunately, the author noted that our education normally trains people to have more knowledge, as if it were a possession, rather than knowing more deeply, within a being mode of existence (p. 41). Such process of learning, mediated by the role teachers play, has serious implications on the way students relate to the world, in other words, they do not exist in and with the world, as Freire argued, but simply become alienated to it.

Interestingly, during the course of their conversation, Horton and Freire (1990) argued that transforming the world requires an active stance in which neutrality does not belong. If the role of education is that of transforming the world by making it a better place to live, it is impossible for education to be neutral. If teachers play a crucial role in such process, they should confront some practical problems. So, they questioned, what is the role of the teacher of biology, philosophy, mathematics and

other subjects? It cannot be *just* to teach biology, philosophy, mathematics and so on, in their strict sense. This is to say that the knowledge constructed should be used to create and (re)create the world, outside the realms of a given classroom.

### **Restating the construction of knowledge from a critical perspective**

As previously discussed, the construction of knowledge should be powered by an emancipatory interest, fostering the development of autonomy and responsibility. What is more, such knowledge, as Dewey (1910) put it, should be transformed into wisdom which operates “in the direction of powers to the better living of life”, as opposed to that which is merely transformed into information to be acquired and stored up without any “special training of intellectual capacity” (p. 52). Likewise, in restating the goals critical pedagogy has as far as human development is concerned, Giroux (2007) noted that such educational approach:

is also concerned with providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary for them to expand their capacities both to question deep-seated assumptions and myths that legitimate the most archaic and disempowering social practices that structure every aspect of society and to take responsibility for intervening in the world they inhabit. (p. 2)

We could by now agree that the educational processes, mainly carried out by the actions of teachers, should not only aim at co-constructing knowledge attained by studying a given subject, but also sharing responsibility in finding ways through which those subjects can be applied beyond the walls of the classroom and, thus, help

people “create” or “re-invent” their own world. Having said this, I will now attempt to summarise the principles guiding the construction of knowledge that have been so far discussed herein, viewed on a two-type dimension. Type I illustrates the ‘having mode of existence’, in which humans are submerged in a ‘culture of silence’, resulting in their oppression and alienation. In this type, their cognitive structures are endangered. Type II, by contrast, focuses on the ‘being mode of existence’. Through true dialogue, humans are engaged in problem-posing and problem-solving activities, taking an active role towards the (re) construction of their own world, by means of making use of the knowledge they construct. Finally, they reach a different mode

of thinking and, eventually, they achieve wisdom. The main concepts are described in the following table:

### Implications for teacher continuous education

Given an unfinished reality, Freire (1970, 1998) noted that human beings are also unfinished, and as such, they are always in the process of ‘becoming’. In our relation with the world, we constantly create and re-create our knowledge, as we do not possess absolute knowledge. Freire (1970) argued that “the unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity” (p. 84). Later he added

Table 1. *Two types of construction of knowledge Information-driven vs. Wisdom-driven*

	<b>TYPE 1: INFORMATION-DRIVEN</b>	<b>TYPE 2: WISDOM-DRIVEN</b>
<b>AIMS</b>	<i>To maintain the status quo</i> – emphasis on permanence – (reality is static)	<i>To alter the status quo</i> – emphasis on change – (reality is dynamic)
<b>ACTIONS</b>	<i>Cultural invasion</i> – employs the ‘reading the word approach’, via a banking method, focusing on having more knowledge	<i>Cultural synthesis</i> – employs the ‘reading the world+reading the word’ approach, via a problem-posing method, focusing on knowing more deeply
<b>DISCOURSE</b>	<i>Narrative</i> – discursive explanations: a frequent avalanche of abstract words, creating more obstacles	<i>Dialogue</i> – questioning: fosters epistemological curiosity + self-reflection, overcoming obstacles
<b>MODE OF THINKING</b>	<i>Naïve, magic</i> – powered by rote learning	<i>Creative, critical</i> – powered by meaningful learning
<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<i>Subjects acting upon objects</i> – subjects: the ones who know more, the ones who have more – objects: the recipients of knowledge	<i>Both parties take turns into being subjects and objects</i> – active role-playing in (re)(co) construction of knowledge – participants as researchers
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<i>Human oppression</i> Alienation of the self: adapted to the world ( <i>Alienação</i> ).	<i>Human liberation</i> Awareness of the self: in the world and with the world ( <i>Conscientização</i> ).

that such “incompleteness implies for us a permanent movement of search” (1998: p. 57). This search, in turn, will allow us to become conscious of our “insertion into a context of decision, choice and intervention” (p. 73).

Thus, in our learning experience, within the day-to-day educational practice, there is always something to be learnt and to be done. And this is true of learners and teachers as well, considering those who teach are also learning and those who are learning also teach. Furthermore, this experience helps us achieve a critical understanding of what it really means to teach and learn. By becoming active and conscious during our reading, speaking and writing activities, we also take a “critical ownership of the formation of our selves” (Freire, 2005: p. 44).

As Freire (1974) noted, “no one can know everything, just as no one can be ignorant of everything”. He went on to say that, in fact, by “knowing that they know little, people are prepared to know more” (p. 107), this is mainly so because old knowledge generates new knowledge. As unfinished beings and being “programmed but to learn”<sup>7</sup>, both Subjects of the teaching-learning process have a right. In his own words, “we will exercise our capacity to learn and to teach so much the better for being subjects and not simply objects of the process we are engaged in” (1998: p. 58). Indeed, an open-minded approach to education, in Freire’s views, requires us to acknowledge that no one is a substitute for us in our knowing process. In this sense, education should “challenge students to

perceive in their experience of learning the experience of being a subject capable of knowing”, in other words, “to recognize themselves as the architects of their own cognition process” (p. 111–112).

As unfinished human beings, teachers also have a right to continuous education, which in turn provides them with the opportunity to think about “practice in terms of developing more effective means of practice [...] and begin to recognize the theory inherent in it” (Freire, 2005: p. 12), as theory should be (re)constructed from practice. This is to say that theory is (re)constructed by analysing our own pedagogical practices.

In considering pedagogical issues in his home country, Freire (1974) discussed the ways in which the Brazilian tradition had been offering inappropriate conditions for the production of knowledge in schools: dictating ideas instead of exchanging them; giving lectures as opposed to having debates or discussions; working *on* the student but not *with* the student, by means of imposing and giving them formulas to accommodate and store, which by far offered students “the means for authentic thought” (p. 33–34).

Furthermore, Magalhães and Celani (2000), provided us with a picture of the educational system in Brazil, in the 1990s, as far as teacher education was concerned. Teachers, in the role of students, who had attended pre-service training courses in most Brazilian universities, obtained their qualification in teaching languages according to the culture shared within those universities based on traditional views on teaching English as a foreign language. As they put it,

their [teachers’] adoption of methodologies will be influenced by factors

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<sup>7</sup> Freire is referring to the work of François Jacob: *Nous sommes programmes mais pour apprendre* (Le Courrier, UNESCO, February 1991).

generated by that culture: *a culture of pre-description of techniques with no reflection*. Teachers' [life] histories and the ways they were taught will certainly influence their thinking and representations regarding teaching English in a public school. They will be influencing their reflective teaching process as well. (p. 2, emphasis added)

Therefore, a change in the educational system was needed. An illustration comes from Freire himself, during his political actions as a Minister of Education in São Paulo, Brazil, from 1989 to 1991, as previously stated. Freire's intention was to help teachers adopt a new pedagogical attitude, despite the authoritarian tradition embedded in Brazil's 500-year existence. Therefore, he established a programme for continuous teacher education. As Gadotti (1993: p. 7) highlighted, such programme had the following principles:

1. The educator is the subject of his/her practice, because of that (s)he should create and recreate an educational action plan by reflecting upon this daily practice;
2. The education of educators should be permanent, as the pedagogical practice is formulated and reformulated (as an ongoing-process);
3. The pedagogical practice requires comprehension of the very genesis of knowledge, in other words, how the process of constructing knowledge takes place;
4. Such a permanent programme is a precondition for the process of reorientation of the curriculum in the schools.

Another example of teacher continuous education, which also has its basis on the importance of reflecting upon one's practice as a means to reconstruct it, has been carried out as a joint research project between the government of the State of São Paulo (the public school system), a large

non-profit language teaching organization (Associação Cultural Inglesa) and a university (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo – PUC-SP): *Continuing Education Programme of the English Language Teacher: A Context for the Reconstruction of Practice*. The participants of such research project/programme include public school teachers, course teachers, people<sup>8</sup> involved in doing research connected with the project, among others.

Since its creation in 1995, over 5.400 teachers<sup>9</sup> who work at state schools have undergone training, not only by further developing their English language skills by attending an English language course offered by the Associação Cultural Inglesa, but by also having the opportunity to take part in the following course offered by PUC-SP: *Reflection on and in Action: the English Teacher Learning and Teaching*, comprising 150 hours, divided into eight modules and taught in two semesters.

As highlighted by Magalhães and Celani (2000), who have been taking part in this research project/programme since its inception, four modules are concerned with the development of reflective learning, including the importance of *reflection on the reconstruction of theory from practice*, as well as the role of self-evaluation. The remaining modules focus on reflecting on the needs of the public school student, in terms of skills to be prioritized, from the

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<sup>8</sup> This author was one of the participants: from 2002 to 2004, I conducted my master's thesis (Zygmantas, 2004), both as a language teacher at Associação Cultural Inglesa and as a master student at Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), under the supervision of Professor Emerita M. A. A. Celani.

<sup>9</sup> Information retrieved on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008, from the official website of the language teaching organization taking part in this project: <http://www.culturaingle-sasp.com.br/content/redepublica.mmp>

perspective of discourse, which also entails understanding language (in this context, the English language) not only as an object of knowledge to be learned in the classroom, but rather to be used beyond the classroom as *social practice*. The modules also address questions around the role English phonology and grammar play within the teaching-learning process. As far as the organization and analysis of reflective interactions are concerned, a framework put forward by Smyth (1992), based on Freire (1970), in the form of self-questioning, is employed during the collaborative and reflective sessions, as follows:

<b>Describing</b>	<i>What do I do?</i>
<b>Informing</b>	<i>What does it mean?</i>
<b>Confronting</b>	<i>How do I come to be like that?</i>
<b>Reconstructing</b>	<i>How could I act differently?</i>

After having completed the course, the teachers become ‘multipliers’ and take part in monthly organized workshops, offered to the community of State school English language teachers. During these workshops, the multipliers have the opportunity to speak about their own practices, their own students, the way they have been reconstructing their practice, illustrating it, for instance, by showing the activities devised by themselves and carried out by learners in the classroom. Put it another way, they provide examples of the process of change they have been going through, by means of engaging in critical reflection during the process of *conscientização*.

## Conclusions

Oppressive social forces have been managing to shape people’s views of them-

selves and the roles they play in society. Social institutions, such as the family and schools, may be used as vehicles which help propagate dominant views and, therefore, contribute to the maintenance of the status quo by cultivating a ‘culture of silence’, either at a conscious or an unconscious level of awareness.

This is when critical pedagogy comes into play. It aims at providing human beings with the role of creators of culture and knowledge, with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. In so doing, they are able to make connections between knowing and using the knowledge to create and re-create their own reality, their own world, by engaging in a process of self-reflection. Under such conditions, humans are employing the ‘being mode of existence’. Their own views of the world – their previous knowledge and experiences – are to be incorporated via true dialogues. Thus, new knowledge is integrated into previous knowledge as a result of attaching meaning to the objects they are acting upon; in other words, they learn meaningfully. This is also when cultural synthesis plays its part.

Conversely, when people are deprived of their right to speak, and are simply provided with prescriptions to be followed, without having the opportunity to make connections between their previous knowledge (i.e. their cognitive structures) and the new knowledge, which is simply deposited into their heads, by a narrative-type of discourse, replete with abstract words (and ideas), they simply accommodate and adapt. When this is the case, humans adopt the ‘having mode of existence’. They have no choice but to reproduce what they have perceived and received, by employ-

ing some sort of naïve thinking, followed by magic comprehension which in no time fades away. As a result, they are bound to remain within specific limit-situations, which do not allow them to go any further.

All things considered, education still has a major goal: provide teachers and students, who are unfinished beings and in the process of becoming, with the opportunity to (re)create their own world,

their own selves, and, as a consequence, act as partners and researchers, in the critical construction of knowledge. If such endeavour is successful, we can say that both parties have experienced *conscientização*, in Freire's terms; in other words, as new challenges arise, both teachers and students are in the world and with the world, creating it and (re)creating it, overcoming the obstacles while (re)creating themselves.

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## KRITINĖS PEDAGOGIKOS SUPRATIMAS IR ĮTAKA ŽINIŲ KAUPIMUI

**Janete Zygmantas**

S a n t r a u k a

Šio straipsnio tikslas – supažindinti su pagrindiniais žinių formavimo principais, labiausiai pabrėžiant kritinės pedagogikos, kurios šaknys, savo ruožtu, remiasi brazilų filosofo Paulo Freire's keliamomis idėjomis, postuluojamus teorinius konstruktus.

Despotiškos socialinės jėgos bandė suformuoti žmonių požiūrį į save pačius ir savo vaidmenį visuomenėje. Vis dėlto auklėjamieji veiksmai, besiremiantys žmonių išlaisvinimu iš tokių engėjiškų situacijų, suteikia jiems galimybę ne tik suvokti savo, kaip kultūros ir žinių kūrėjų, vaidmenį, bet ir savarankiškai bei atsakingai naudotis šiomis žiniomis.

Kita vertus, jei žmonės netenka teisės kalbėti ir neturi galimybės susieti ankstesnių ir naujų žinių, kurios tiesiog įkalamos jiems į galvas per naratyvinį

diskursą, jie prie to paprasčiausiai prisiderina ir prisitaiko. Jie neturi kito pasirinkimo, kaip tik atkurti tai, ką yra gavę ir suvokę, pasitelkdami kažkokį naujų mąstymą, lydimą magiško supratimo, kuris labai greitai išnyksta.

Atsižvelgiant į tai, tokie teoriniai apmąstymai rodo, kad švietimas turi nuolatinį tikslą – suteikti mokytojams ir mokiniams (pastarieji yra nebaigusios formuotis būtybės ir vyksta jų tapsmo procesas), galimybę (at)kurti savo pačių pasaulį, save pačius ir todėl veikti kaip partneriams ir tyrinėtojams kritiniame žinių formavimo procese. Jei šios pastangos bus sėkmingos, galima teigti, kad abi šalys patyrė *conscientização*.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** kritinė pedagogika, žinių formavimas, prasmingas mokymas, kultūrų sintezė.

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