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Special Issue

Critical Pedagogies and Teaching and Learning Languages in Dangerous Times

Introduction to the Special Issue

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"Language is a 'war zone'," Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o powerfully notes (Inani, 2018, para. 17). In trying to conceptualize and define Critical Pedagogy in the current historical moment for the teaching and learning of languages, this seems the most appropriate definition. After all, language teaching and learning are neither politically neutral, nor ahistorical, nor free of ideological considerations. On the contrary, language as a site of power, ideological tensions, political and financial interests, hierarchies, and symbolic and material violence, is most definitely a war zone. War is being waged over which languages have more "value" or are "worth learning;" which languages are at the core and the periphery and how they got there; what the goals of language learning should be; what counts as knowledge and what should be taught; in what ways particular theoretical, curricular, methodological, and other choices marginalize and oppress certain languages, their speakers, and their interests, reproducing racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and so forth; and how language learning is connected to political economy, to name just a few of the "battlefields."

This Special Issue of *L2 Journal* comes out at a very unusual historical juncture. The year 2020 is being registered in our lives and in our collective imaginary as the year that has radically changed human life as we know it. A pandemic of historic proportions has ruptured our existence and shaken our sense of "normalcy," redefining human life and relations, teaching, learning, and labor. At the same time, an unprecedented and long overdue wave of demonstrations, protests, and mobilizations, triggered by the murder of another Black man by the police, brought to the fore once more the Black Lives Matter movement, capturing the ongoing oppression, discrimination, violence, and systemic racism against people of color in the United States. Both events and their consequences are forcing us to rethink our pedagogies. How are we, as academics, researchers, and language educators, engaging with this social and political reality? How do we educate and raise educators' and students' critical consciousness, so that they will always find themselves on the right side of history? If we want to claim doing engaged scholarship that truly aims at improving the lives of students, their families, their communities, and our society, we must be ready to talk about the workings of

power and power asymmetries, the unequal distribution of wealth and power, racism, and the role of schooling in all this. As Lourdes Ortega has so powerfully argued, "Our 21st-century world looks fraught with real threats to human difference, and many language learners and multilinguals are under siege. The worrisome present times demand responses at all levels, not only personal and civic but also scholarly" (Ortega, 2019, p. 23).

But there is a lot more going on right now.

The dramatic rise of authoritarian right-wing populism across the globe is another factor that, as language researchers and educators, we need to take into consideration in this discussion. One of the characteristics of right-wing populism is that it typecasts anybody labeled "other" as a threat. As Ruth Wodak (2016) notes,

> All right-wing populist parties instrumentalize some kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic/political minority as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective group as dangerous and a threat 'to us', to 'our' nation; this phenomenon manifests itself as a 'politics of fear.' (p. 2)

The massive movement of immigrants and refugees around the world because of imperialist wars, political unrest, poverty, and so forth, has fueled a new wave of xenophobia and racism and has revived nativist sentiments. Many governments (with the United States at the top of the list) have, by and large, refused to take responsibility for the actual situation that stems from broader geopolitical interests, as well as for protecting the rights and providing the material resources needed for these populations. They have largely relegated them to the margins of society, as scapegoats or simply "wasted" disposable lives (Bauman, 2004).

For instance, currently in the United States, Syrian refugees are unwelcome in 31 states, sanctuary cities have been receiving tremendous backlash for protecting "illegal" immigrants, and "Muslim-looking" people are attacked on a daily basis across the nation, all the while Arabic is being taught as part of the World Languages (WL) curriculum. Similarly, there are daily human tragedies at the United States' southern border with people whose mother tongue is actually Spanish. People are beaten for speaking Spanish, as was the case with two women, a mother and daughter who were walking casually in a Boston neighborhood having a conversation in Spanish, and were punched, kicked, and bitten by two other women who yelled, "This is America! Speak English!" (Levenson, 2020, para. 4). These glaring contradictions are not simply optics or anecdotes. Unfortunately,

> …[m]any multilinguals are constantly at risk of experiencing their multilingualism as a curse rather than a fact of life, all along while other multilinguals are able to experience it as a gift that adds to their privilege. The vulnerabilities are particularly acute for multilinguals who are members of minoritized communities. They are the targets of language-compounded injustice because of their differences in race/ethnicity, class and wealth, gender and sexual orientations, religion, and other socially constructed hierarchies that devalue human diversity. (Ortega, 2019, p. 34)

While knowing another language is considered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) *the* "21st century skill" because it is "not only beneficial, but necessary for success in life" to help "students to effectively function in the modern global marketplace" (ACTFL Language Connects, 2020, Why? section, para. 1), it is a curse for many students, as Ortega astutely described above. In the current historical juncture, researchers and educators are compelled to discuss how languages (cultures, identities, lived experiences, and

discourses) of subjugated and oppressed people can earn their space and get legitimacy in the World Language classroom; Or to explore how identities and representations of otherness are embodied and enacted in language. Given that World Language curricula continue to be Eurocentric (Glynn & Wassel, 2018) with a focus mostly on French, German, Italian, and Spanish (cf. ACTFL Language Connects, 2020), there is a need to discuss the asymmetry in symbolic and economic power at play, while constructing a critical, de-colonial agenda. What might be the implications for the teaching of other World Languages? What would it mean to decenter English as the sole focus of critique and/or celebration and look at other languages as well? How can the language classroom be reinvented as a space for decolonization, transformation, and the development of critical consciousness? Language researchers and educators should not shy away from taking up these issues, as part of a critical language pedagogy. This is the *critical pedagogy* I would like to talk about here. A pedagogy that names, interrupts, challenges, critiques, and has a proposal for a different kind of language classrooms, curricula, schools, and communities that in turn affect societies and human life as a whole.

This Special Issue comes at a time when welcoming politics into the language classroom is not simply encouraged—it is mandatory, as part of our understanding of what it means to be a critical educator. By "politics," I do not mean political propaganda and partisanship. Rather, I use the term "politics" to capture different layers: a) the ways educational systems are embedded in the political landscape where their goals, vision, mission, and curricula are shaped along specific ideologies; b) the awareness that students, teachers, administrators, and parents are political beings embedded in complex social relations; c) the recognition that, as political beings in our homes, our schools, our workplaces, and our communities, we daily make important decisions and act upon them; d) a constant and ongoing critique of reality and of the self, as necessary for individuals to critically move into subject positions.

One of the core ideas of Critical Pedagogy (CP) is the acknowledgment that educational institutions are deeply political in the ways I have outlined above. In order to create a conceptual and theoretical background/map against which I will discuss Critical Pedagogy in language teaching and learning, I will now provide a brief historical overview of the origins of Critical Pedagogy and its early iterations. Capturing the entire spectrum of Critical Pedagogy perspectives and directions is a herculean endeavor and beyond the scope of this text.

HISTORICAL ROOTS AND MAIN CONCEPTS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Historicity is a core Critical Pedagogy concept and it will be applied here to trace the beginnings and evolution of this theoretical tradition, in an attempt to identify the specific elements that might be most useful in setting an agenda for the language classroom. As Graham Crookes (2009) has pointed out, spending some time on historical traditions "emphasizes the *relevance* and *practicality* of the area by heading off responses that such work is impossible." These same "historical analyses can also focus attention on what enabling factors allowed for early radical pedagogy" (p. 2).

Critical Pedagogy as a distinct theoretical tradition of intellectual production and educational practice emerged in North America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Its precursors were progressive education theorists like John Dewey and the social reconstructionists Theodore Brameld, George Counts, and Harold Rugg in the 1930s (Kliebard, 1995, 2002; Grollios, 2011). Most importantly, critical pedagogy was inspired by and grounded in Paulo Freire's seminal work, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), and his notions of the historicity of knowledge, pedagogy as revolutionary praxis versus a banking

model of education, the development of critical consciousness (*conscientização*), problem-posing education, and students as historical subjects of the educational process.

CP's intellectual history is far-reaching and diverse. It owes its "critical" name to Critical Theory produced in the Frankfurt School of Social Theory of the late 1950s, 60s, and 70s in Germany (Fromm, 1973, 1976; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947; Marcuse, 1964). Other intellectual traditions integrated in early Critical Pedagogy literature include Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, and Antonio Gramsci's political writings (1971) as well as the work of Valentin Volosinov, Louis Althusser, Basil Bernstein, Michel Foucault, and others.

At the core of the theory lies the premise that educational issues are political. As mentioned earlier, Critical Pedagogy questions the purported political neutrality of educational institutions that supposedly makes them unbiased sites where students simply acquire knowledge and skills. Further, it challenges prevailing notions that schools are level playing fields and that education functions as the great equalizer, pointing to widespread inequalities and injustices that are produced and reproduced through schooling (Apple, 2004, 2012; Au, 2009; Knopp, 2012; Shor & Freire, 1987).

Critical Pedagogy also built on the Sociology of Education of the late 1970s and 1980s, as it critically capitalized on theories of social and cultural reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In a social reproduction theoretical framework, schools use their material and ideological resources to reproduce the social relations and attitudes needed to sustain the social divisions of labor necessary for the existing relations of production. Bowles and Gintis (1976) posited that schools serve two functions: First, they reproduce the labor power and second, they reproduce those forms of consciousness, dispositions, and values necessary for the maintenance of the existing social order. According to Bowles and Gintis's "correspondence principle," hierarchically structured patterns of values, norms, and skills that characterize the workforce are mirrored in the social dynamics of everyday classroom life. Early Critical Pedagogy theorists challenged this correspondence principle arguing that it leads to a one-sided economistic and deterministic approach on education. They proposed instead that school knowledge is a product of conflicts and negotiations between different social groups inside and outside education. These conflicts do not determine mechanistically but rather condition or limit social actors (students, teachers, and other stakeholders).

In contrast to social reproduction, in cultural reproduction theories, schools are seen as relatively autonomous institutions only indirectly influenced by more powerful economic and political institutions. Cultural reproduction theories are largely based on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who analyzed the reproduction of dominant cultural norms, values, cultural capital, and discourses through the schooling process. A sociology of curriculum linked culture, class, and domination with schooling and knowledge. Bourdieu considered traits of individuals' everyday way of life to make up what he termed "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital results from a person's long-lasting engagement in and socialization with family, culture, education, as well as neighborhoods, peers, and so forth. The school affirms, rewards, and legitimizes the cultural capital that by and large resonates with dominant values and is further exhibited and transmitted by the teachers to the students. Along these lines, when the school devalues the cultural capital of disadvantaged and oppressed students by promoting and rewarding a White, middle-class cultural norm, it reproduces unequal relations in the form of educational inequalities. Cultural reproduction theories had an important impact on Critical Pedagogy in that they highlighted the role of culture, language, and discourses in the schooling process.

By identifying the limitations of reproduction theories, and capitalizing on theoretical constructs from Marxist and neo-Marxist theory and progressive education, early Critical Pedagogy theorists set the ground for important discussions around what counts as knowledge and its social construction (Apple, 1993, 2004; Aronowitz, 2008; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Giroux, 2011); the role of culture as a lived experience and a main pedagogical force (Giroux, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2013); teacher autonomy and student agency (McLaren, 1993, 1998; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b); student resistance (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Apple, 2004); school ideologies (Apple, 1993, 2004, 2012; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b); the hidden curriculum (Apple, 2004); and control exercised through forms of meaning (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1983a, 1983b). Other directions in this theoretical tradition brought richness and complexity to the discussion, namely racial politics and feminist thought (hooks, 1994), liberatory meaning making through education (Greene, 1988); and racism, political economy, and social justice (Darder, 1991).

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Interest in the critical dimension in language studies has been vivid and has spanned the last 35 years (Kubota & Miller, 2017; Kubota & Austin, 2007; Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Crookes, 2009, 2012) with important intellectual output that is beyond the scope of this Introduction. It should, however, be noted that a significant embodiment of critical theory in language studies has been the development of Critical Discourse Studies (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This Special Issue of *L2 Journal* did not seek to include critical scholarship in language studies *in general*, but rather work that *specifically* engages with, and is inspired by, some iteration of Critical Pedagogy, and self-identifies as such. The bibliographical review that follows explores if and how Critical Pedagogy has been used in existing bibliography in foreign language/world language teaching/learning literature. This exercise is valuable because it reveals the degree to which scholars in the field have engaged directly with the main themes and tenets of Critical Pedagogy, as delineated earlier in my discussion. In looking for direct connections, I wanted to explore to what degree that rich intellectual output has or has not in turn influenced critical language pedagogy.

While there is abundant work done mostly in English as a Second Language (ESL), and most particularly in ESL literacy, possibly because the target student population are mi-nority students and historically oppressed groups, the same is not true for "foreign" language/World language teaching and learning (Crookes, 2009). One possible explanation might have to do, for instance, with the framing of foreign languages or World Languages in the United States context. For example, teaching and learning of languages other than English has been based on pragmatism (Kubota & Austin, 2007) and schools have been encouraging students to enroll in language classes based on a discourse of promoting international business, diplomacy, and national security, that is, "types of work typically engaged by elites" (Baggett, 2015, p. 22). Yet, the enrollment of African American students has historically "remained low because of the inherent notion that foreign languages taught in contemporary American schools were spoken by White Europeans" (Baggett, 2015, p. 22). In other words, "Foreign Languages" or World Languages are still often framed through a touristic gaze that fails to delve deep into the lives and experiences of different groups of speakers, their cultures, and histories. This same framing identifies "foreignness" with anything non-English. A persistent Anglocentrist ideology has been putting English at the core of all critiques, often ignoring that racism, sexism, stereotyping, and so forth can be expressed in all languages. Looking at the existing literature, there is a clear imbalance privileging work on teaching English as a hegemonic

language or glorifying it as a global language, at the expense of problematizing the ideologies and histories of other colonial languages such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese or the possibilities that exist in conducting critical work in languages other than English.

Research in the teaching of English influenced explicitly by Critical Pedagogy includes but is not limited to the following: studies on the application of Freirean principles of problem-posing in ESL classes and critical literacy (Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987); critical language awareness (Janks, 1999; Alim, 2005; Byram, 2012) critical literacy (Janks, 2010, 2011; Luke, 2000, 2004, 2012; Masuda, 2012); critical bilingualism (Walsh, 1991); critical practice in ESL in connection to the community (Morgan, 1998; Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005); the construction of student identities (Norton, 1997, 2010); critical language testing (Shohamy, 1997); dialogic critical thinking and academic language teaching (Benesch, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2009); ESL pedagogy working with generative themes (Graman, 1988); critical pedagogy in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom (Haque, 2007; Chun, 2015); advocacy (Osborn, 2000; Reagan & Osborn, 1998, 2002); and critical pedagogy influenced Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Pennycook, 2001, 2004; Canagarajah, 1996, 2006; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Kubota & Austin, 2007; Crookes, 2009, 2012). Additionally, an entire edited volume titled *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* brought together the work of a variety of scholars interested in critical perspectives on language education in globally diverse sites of practice (Norton & Toohey, 2004) and a recent special issue of the journal *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* was dedicated to *Re-examining and Re-envisioning Criticality in Language Studies: Theories and Praxis* with articles that partly engage with Critical Pedagogy (Kubota & Miller, 2017). The same journal has been hosting since 2004 an important number of articles that discuss Critical Pedagogy theoretical and classroom-based engagements (see, for example, Alford & Kettle, 2017; Sharma & Phyak, 2017; Khatib & Miri, 2016; Muirhead, 2009; Kubota & Austin, 2007; Shin & Crookes, 2005).

Critical Pedagogy has been taken up in the foreign language/World Language teaching literature in different permutations, forms, and approaches and it underwent trans-formations, re-inventions, and at times, misrepresentations. Although not enough, several scholars have drawn from CP as it relates to the World Language classroom. Here "World Language" should be understood as the evolution of the "foreign language" label, in an attempt to capture multilayered systems of human communication while at the same time problematizing the concept of "foreignness." This shift came as a response to the historical labeling of languages other than English as "foreign." "Foreignness," then, has been constructed as a peripheral zone with English at its core as the norm. As Kubota and Austin (2007) note citing Osborn, "the term 'world' could still imply that it is an outside location, potentially overlooking the domestic linguistic and cultural diversity as an important focus for world language education" (p. 74).

In the Foreign Language (FL) literature, we find general theoretical work that advocates for a Critical Pedagogy in FL and WL and, less often, literature on critically teaching languages other than English, or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For instance, Correa discusses Critical Pedagogy approaches to the teaching of Spanish as a heritage language (2011, 2016) and Leeman (2005) addresses Spanish for native speakers instruction from the lens of Critical Pedagogy, emphasizing the "inherently political nature of education and the role of language in the production of knowledge, culture, and identities" (p. 35); Guilherme (2002) looks at foreign language education as cultural politics and explores Portuguese EFL teacher attitudes towards culture; Kramsch et al. (2007) propose a Critical Pedagogy for German that fosters "awareness of and reflection on the indexicality, subjectivity, and historicity of discourse [as] the basic elements of the critical pedagogical frame" with the goal of producing and

interpreting "meanings through various symbolic systems" that would serve them both in class as well as when they go abroad (p. 174); Crookes makes the case for a critical language pedagogy (2009); Osborn (2000) and Reagan and Osborn (1998, 2002) have worked on critical pedagogy and advocacy for the World Languages classroom; Baggett (2015) has addressed the inclusion of historically marginalized students in World Languages, as well as World Language teacher beliefs (Baggett, 2018); and Glynn and Wassel (2018) have tackled issues of social justice in the World Language classroom. Finally, McGowan and Kern (2014) have studied pre-service foreign language teacher attitudes of privilege and oppression, and Muirhead (2009) has proposed a "pedagogy of possibility" in the World Language classroom.

In exploring the gravitation towards more "critical" perspectives in Foreign Language pedagogy, it is important to note the shift in paradigm in the early 1990s to intercultural communication and the reinvention of the notion of culture in the Foreign Language classroom (Byram, 1997a, 1997b; Kramsch, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). This reorientation put a greater emphasis on the development of critical cultural awareness as a component of Foreign Language education. For instance, Kramsch (1993a), posited that the main components of a "critical foreign language pedagogy" are an awareness of the socio-cultural context of the student, of the school and the classroom cultures, and of the resourcefulness of language that may play the leading role in changing the perceptions and visions of those individuals in the classroom. This critical language pedagogy values dissent, dialogue, and dual-voiced discourse, a personal "third culture" that learners can create and use to express their meanings apart from the meanings established by either their own or the target language community.

Part of the 1990s paradigm shift is Alastair Pennycook's influential article *Critical Pedagogy and Second Language Education.* In it, focusing on "second language teaching," he acknowledged the work of early Critical Pedagogy theorists who articulated "a position strongly opposed to positivistic, ahistorical and depoliticized analyses of politics and power in education" (pp. 307-308). He discussed knowledge as socially constructed, and

> "… a notion of critique that also carries with it a sense of possibility for transformation, and an exploration of the nature of and relationship between culture, knowledge and power. Viewing schools as cultural arenas where diverse ideological and social forms are in constant struggle, critical pedagogy examines schools both in their contemporary sociopolitical context and in their historical context." (pp. 307-308).

Pennycook went on to pose a number of questions he deemed important for future research agendas in this direction. He later developed a post-colonial, non-Eurocentric, Critical Pedagogy model for teaching/learning English as an International Language (Pennycook, 1994). In his seminal 1994 book *English as an International Language*, he looked at the global spread of English as it connects to colonial exploitation and the contemporary inequalities fostered by globalization and neoliberal ideologies. He argued that we must look at these cultural, political, and ideological forces in order to understand both English hegemony and English Language Teaching (ELT).

A very consistent and in-depth engagement with Critical Pedagogy comes in the work of Manuela Guilherme (2002). In *Critical Citizens for an Intercultural World: Foreign Language Education as Cultural Politics,* Guilherme firmly and appropriately grounds her discussion on core literature in critical theory and critical pedagogy. She traces the historical roots and philosophical foundations of CP in an attempt to create a context where she argues for "critical citizenry, critical professionalism, critical cultural awareness and critical intercultural

competence" (p. 224). She further advocates for a critical perspective towards both native and foreign cultures that "rejects cultural ethnocentrism and dogmatism but does not deny the preservation of basic universal and particular principles and values" (p. 225) as well as "the combination of a critical discourse with the commitment to transformative action, for a concern with social justice based on equity and equivalence as well as for the explicit recognition and endorsement of the political nature of our profession" (p. 225). A critical approach to foreign languages and cultures involves, according to Guilherme, personal and professional growth since it entails grasping the sociocultural complexities "through divergent, sometimes colliding, points of view, by engaging with a vision that is both utopian and pragmatic and, therefore, transformative. Our endeavor entails a committed and emancipatory stance, albeit ironical and cynical at times" (p. 224).

Finally, noteworthy is also the work of Graham Crookes and his multiple attempts to push the agenda for a critical language pedagogy (Shin & Crookes, 2005; Crookes, 2009, 2012). While he mostly focuses on EFL, he provides a more general framework through which to think CP in languages taught in the United States such as French or Spanish. In their 2005 article Shin and Crookes connect Critical Pedagogy with the work of Paulo Freire and his ideas of setting the curriculum on learners' life situations, dialogic processes, and an opposition to the banking model of education. In a later article, they emphasize that "through critical dialogue, learners gain transformative experiences and eventually take action in their social lives" cautioning that "critical pedagogy is not 'single-strategy pedagogies of empowerment, emancipation or liberation' but should be able to evolve in response to local contexts and needs" (Shin & Crookes, 2009, p. 115). In his plenary talk at the 2009 American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) conference, Crookes proposed eight areas for future research based on relevance and practicality. These are i) historical inheritances and lines of development associated with critical pedagogies; (ii) advocacy (and the need for critical language teachers to engage in it); (iii) the diverse institutional contexts that could be explored for critical language pedagogy; (iv) the range of languages within which critical approaches have been explored; (v) EFL critical pedagogy; (vi) the broad range of categories of oppression addressed by critical language pedagogy; (vii) materials for critical language pedagogy, and (viii) the role of the 'imaginary' in encouraging critical language pedagogy (p. 333). Finally, in a 2012 article Crookes makes the case that Critical Pedagogy is "the most widespread term for social justice-oriented tendencies in applied linguistics and in language teaching" and stresses that "the elements of the language curriculum should relate to the issues of the students' life and the things in their life that are problematic, which they might be able to change and improve through the tool of literacy or an additional language, and the changed consciousness that would come from that" (p. 3).

WHAT IS CRITICAL, AFTER ALL?

The biggest challenge in putting together a Special Issue on Critical Pedagogy, in reviewing submitted articles, and conceptualizing the introduction has been to define "critical." And to define it in a way that is consistent with the existing intellectual history and, at the same time, open to new iterations. The Call for Papers had a specific orientation on what "critical" means, based on particular historical inheritances, as delineated earlier. We received a large number of articles that took the "critical" from Critical Pedagogy to many places, giving it different content and meaning. Kubota and Austin (2007) have already noted the wide range of meanings and definitions of the word "critical." Talmy (2015) captures this definitional

diversity when he notes that "[t]he task of defining 'critical' is difficult, as there is a plurality of critical theories, based on the diverse work of a range of scholars, including Marx, the Frankfurt School, Volosinov, Gramsci, Freire, Althusser, Bernstein, Foucault and Bourdieu, among others […] critical theories are not monolithic, neither are they static, as they change and shift due to ongoing, 'synergistic' relationships among themselves" (p. 154) and with other theoretical traditions. He concludes that "[t]o arrive at a settled-upon definition would be to deny a productive dissensus among critical scholars, who would prefer 'to avoid the production of blueprints of sociopolitical and epistemological beliefs' (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281, cited in Talmy, 2015). While we talk about critical pedagogies in the plural to capture this intellectual "dissensus," diversity, versatility, and situatedness, at the same time it is important to find those common denominators, without which CP loses its core radical content. We must, therefore, acknowledge the tradition's theoretical roots as part of historicizing our pedagogies. Our critical pedagogies did not fall out of the sky. An acknowledgment and understanding of their intellectual roots enables educators and researchers to better anchor and theorize their work and practices and to give specific content to their pedagogical projects.

Embracing the definitional diversity, I, myself, will refrain from providing a normative definition. I will instead make the case that any definition must acknowledge and take into consideration Critical Pedagogy's intellectual roots and a long lineage of theoretical work that set the stage for future work. As previously mentioned, Critical Pedagogy owes a great deal to Critical Theory. Critical Theory "has as its object human beings as producers of their own historical form of life" (Horkeimer, 1993, p. 21). Critical Theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it (Gounari, forthcoming). Critical Theory must meet three criteria: "it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time." That is, it must present and explain the problems and ills of current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and "provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation" (Bohman, 2019, para. 3).

What does all that have to do with language teaching and learning? It has a great deal. Ignoring the historical and intellectual roots of a theory often creates misconceptions and distortions or, worse, empties the theory of its radical content. In the existing language teaching/learning bibliography Critical Pedagogy has been interchangeably used with critical thinking, criticality, critical literacy, social justice, critical consciousness, and critical awareness, but also with developing social and cultural empathy (as critical thinking), linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies, and critical inquiry. I propose a definition where "critical" must necessarily a) be political, in the ways I discussed earlier b) be historically anchored c) be socially situated and d) have concrete content and a clear pedagogical and political project for transformation. In what follows, I will focus on what I believe Critical Pedagogy *is not*.

Critical Pedagogy is not Critical Thinking (but you should think critically)

The most widespread misconception that exists regarding Critical Pedagogy is that it is synonymous with what is known in the United States as "critical thinking." Critical thinking refers to an educational goal, a skill that can be acquired, developed, and sharpened and is reached individually, in a set span of time if a specific pathway is followed. It is understood as goal-directed thinking, connected with logical analysis and evaluation of reasoning and arguments. As Mitsikopoulou (this issue) notes, it refers to "students' ability to analyze reading

and writing from the perspective of formal logic, to make judgments 'evaluating relevancy and adequacy of what is read' (Harris & Hodge, 1981) and to use strategies and skills to solve problems, formulate inferences and make decisions (Fung, 2005; Halpern, 2002)." Critical thinking is very often used in school curricula, universities, colleges and organizations' mission statements, etc. to add a layer of "progressivism." Byram and Kramsch (2008) correctly argue that "critical thinking skill" is an ideologically charged term that indexes membership in an American society that prizes individualism, entrepreneurship and hard work" (p. 32).

While the goal of critical thinking is problem solving and appropriate decision making, the goal of Critical Pedagogy is human agency and sociopolitical transformation. Human agency here should be understood as the ways individuals negotiate between constraints and possibilities and act upon them consciously with the aim of intervening in the world; a constant and ongoing critique of reality and of the self, as necessary for individuals to critically move into subject positions. However, as Wayne Au has so powerfully argued "when we take action—when we negotiate structures through our own subjective positions—we are never operating as the fictive autonomous individual, nor are we operating in politically neutral terrain: we are instead always taking action amid ongoing historical processes and relations, and, ultimately, on behalf of some set of interests" (2018, pp. 68-69).

Thinking critically about the world and about ourselves is built over time, through multiple experiences inside and outside the classroom and it involves our ability to translate private troubles into public issues; it is not readily observable nor can it be measured; it becomes part of our human existence, when as members of different social groups we are called to understand our sociocultural location at different moments and make important decisions. For educators, there is no prescriptive way to do this. It, rather, means to reorient our pedagogies and see ourselves and our classrooms in their connections with the social world. It also means understanding that our pedagogical decisions are always political decisions about cultural perceptions, inclusions, and exclusions. What we do today in the classroom could become a transformative moment for our students later in their lives. In the context of language classrooms, we have the power to expose students to alternative narratives, help them challenge dominant versions, and familiarize them with an understanding of language that encompasses communication. This understanding unveils the multilayered content and lived experiences where the language classroom becomes "a site of struggle" where "together with our students, we explore its sociopolitical implications in the production of knowledge, culture, and identities" (Leeman, 2005).

Critical Pedagogy is not a Methodology (but you can and should create one!)

Often Critical Pedagogy is promoted as a "methodology" to be "implemented" in different contexts. However, Critical Pedagogy is both reflection and action, theory and practice that mutually inform each other. It calls upon educators to adopt it as a framework and a vision for their pedagogy—to create their curricula, materials, and lesson plans not as quantifiable, definable, and measurable activities, but rather as an opportunity to see and understand the world differently. It, therefore, must be "situated." As Kumaravadivelu has argued in the context of a postmethod pedagogy, in order to be "relevant, [pedagogy] must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (2001, p. 538). Therefore, Critical Pedagogy should not only be "situated" sociohistorically, but also locally, to meet the needs, dreams, and aspirations of the specific classroom

population, school district, historical moment, and so forth. It should be rooted in theory as a guide to research, organizing ideas and practices. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that where there is learning, there is also "unlearning." While Critical Pedagogy is geared towards empowering the oppressed, to help them move into agency positions and ultimately, rupture their oppressive conditions, in teaching contexts where students come from privileged groups, educators' work is equally challenging and important. The goal here is to help those students see themselves in the world, acknowledge their privilege, question their assumptions and stereotypes, be able to see the world through the eyes of the oppressed, and ultimately gain a different kind of agency—one that does not exist at the expense of the other. It means unlearning privilege, socialization, and racism. In this respect, Critical Pedagogy is the theory that helps us make the linkages between the abstract and the concrete, that gives us a blueprint for the kinds of questions that not only will improve our teaching and learning, but will also help us get a different vision about the world. As bell hooks (1991) has so powerfully noted, "I am grateful to the many women and men who dare to create theory from the location of pain and struggle, who courageously expose wounds to give us their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys. Their work is liberatory" (p. 11).

Critical Pedagogy is not Criticality (but a sense of criticality is required)

Kubota and Miller in their introduction to the Special Issue of *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* (2017), drawing on Pennycook's work, define "criticality" around the following concepts: "problematizing naturalized and normalized assumptions and practices; questioning power and inequality; focusing on broader social, ideological, and colonial milieus; problematizing gender, race, class, and sexuality; transcending fixed knowledge and seeking visions for change; and practicing self-reflexivity and praxis" (p. 4). These are all critical endeavors that I believe the concept of "criticality" does not do justice to. They embody a larger pedagogical and political project. The use of the term "criticality" might blur the subjects of the action—who develops criticality and for what purposes. In that sense, it also erases the historicity of the term, as the goal should be the development of a collective consciousness, not simply the development of individual criticality that takes us back to the "critical thinking skills" trap.

Critical Pedagogy is not Social Justice (but social justice should always be part of a critical pedagogy project)

Finally, a very common conflation is that of Critical Pedagogy with social justice. The two terms have been used interchangeably in many articles. Connie North (2008) has pointed out that "social justice" is the new catchphrase in the educational terrain. There are increasing numbers of networks of educators working for social justice in education. There are program concentrations, undergraduate and graduate, on "social justice." There are conferences, workshops, blogs, even "areas of expertise" in academics' bios. Even well-intentioned progressive educators who think outside the box focus on the need to teach for "social justice" as an idea that should be embraced because it is just, fair, compassionate or simply politically correct. They infuse their curricula with activities and materials that would sensitize their students to the misfortunes of other people but they stay at that level. They do not problematize who created the misfortunes, and how social justice is in a dialectical relationship with social injustice. This type of curriculum stays at the acknowledgment level where we temporarily feel sorry for what happens to "other people." Social justice in some of its

manifestations has become an educational niche, a teachable competence, a set of skills and values to be transmitted in the classroom, rather than an exploration of an uncharted and problematic terrain that would push students to understand themselves in the world and name the perpetrators of social injustice.

The rhetoric on social justice does not produce more social justice or even deep awareness. Otherwise, with so many "social justice" curricula and programs implemented, we would not still be witnessing, for instance, the racialization of police murders in White America. A critical take on social justice would mean to move beyond a notion of social justice as compassion or charity/philanthropy, where those privileged with resources and access "help" underprivileged and oppressed groups to acquire the skills necessary to survive in capitalism. At the same time, educators should strive to give "social justice" a concrete, radical meaning.

My point here in providing this short list is to make the case for theoretical clarity around Critical Pedagogy—a clarity that avoids conflation with other terms, a clarity that acknowledges the theoretical roots of CP and does justice to its radical content. From this point on, I believe Critical Pedagogy must be explored, owned, and reinvented for language teaching and learning.

THE ARTICLES IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This Special Issue of *L2 Journal* hosts six original articles that are inspired by and draw from Critical Pedagogy theory, but they do not simply "apply" it in their respective settings. Rather, they attempt to reinvent it and situate it to meet the needs of their sociopolitical context, their research design, the specific student/teacher/research participant population and research setting. Presenting studies and perspectives from the American Midwest to the Southwest, and from Colombia to Greece and southwest China, these articles are an example of how Critical Pedagogy cannot just be exported and implemented or "applied" but needs to always be reinvented. The articles presented here should not be seen as models to be uncritically replicated. They are, rather, departing points for other scholars and educators to explore new paths and embrace a notion of Critical Pedagogy in their own research and classrooms. They are an opportunity to revive the discussion around an education for emancipation and liberation in the language classroom and a starting point for further theoretical discussions. The reader will see that the papers included here cross pollinate Critical Pedagogy with Critical Content–Based Instruction, Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics, post-structuralism, Freire's notion of critical consciousness, and Boal's Theater of the Oppressed in a multitude of settings and geographical locations. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the abstracts we received, and most of the articles that were ultimately accepted, focused again on teaching English, and English is the medium of instruction in most studies.

In "Critical Pedagogy and L2 Education in the Global South," Paula Echeverri Sucerquia articulates a Critical Pedagogy project for the hemispheric South. She explores the potential of Critical Pedagogy in English Language Teaching in Colombia and in Latin America. Through her positionality as an academic/educator in the Colombian sociopolitical context, Echeverri Sucerquia argues that Critical Pedagogy is not only a powerful tool for empowering students, but also a site of struggle, where knowledges and meanings are contested or nourished by other perspectives. Drawing from existing literature, she questions the prominence of Western male scholarship in Critical Pedagogy and brings into the discussion the work of Latin American scholars who recognize the North-South conflict, as well as issues of colonialism and Eurocentrism that are present in pedagogy. She urges critical educators in

the hemispheric South to understand, deconstruct, and challenge power relations and the colonizing power embedded in language. She, further, calls for more work from female Latin American scholars, work that that uses clear, accessible language and that addresses issues of race, ethnicity, ability, and so forth. Rooted in a solid Critical Pedagogy framework and contextualized sociopolitically, Echeverri Sucerquia's article makes a powerful case for Latin American Critical Pedagogies.

In "Relevance, Representation, and Responsibility: Exploring WLT's Critical Consciousness and Pedagogies," Hannah Carson Baggett makes the case for World Language Teachers (WLT) developing critical consciousness that would enable them to "implement and enact critical pedagogies." For Baggett this means being "critically conscious about the ways that educational (and other) systems and the individual actors within them, including themselves and their students, both perpetuate and disrupt societal inequity and inequality." In her study, conducted with educators teaching a variety of target languages including Spanish, French, German, Chinese/Mandarin, Italian, Japanese, Arabic, and Latin in a Southeastern state in the United States, she explores WLT beliefs about the relevance and representation of identity markers to teaching and learning (reflection, as it comprises part of critical consciousness), beliefs about educators' sense of responsibility for addressing identity dimensions in their teaching practices and, more broadly, in educational contexts, and how these beliefs relate to teachers' espoused teaching practices (action). A guiding assumption for her study is that teachers' beliefs inform and shape their teaching practices and, therefore, are an important point of departure for rethinking the World Language classroom. She challenges educators to honestly reflect on their teacher identity and challenge their own beliefs and assumptions before they can foster critical consciousness among their students.

Blanca Caldas Chumbes in "The Boal-Freire Nexus: Rehearsing Praxis, Imagining Liberation in Bilingual Teacher Education" draws on Paulo Freire's work and Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed to present findings from two qualitative studies with Mexican-American/Latinx bilingual pre-service teachers in the United States. She presents a course where the goal is to prepare these students linguistically after years of subtractive Anglo-centric schooling, help them to develop political and ideological clarity, and encourage them to engage in leadership and advocacy inside and outside the classroom. Caldas Chumbes makes a deliberate choice to run a bilingual classroom (Spanish-English) legitimizing and validating her students' language. Her masterful use of the Theater of the Oppressed as pedagogy supports students in questioning discriminatory and racist narratives and encourages them to rehearse stories from a future where these histories are part of their collective memory and subjectivity. Through this process, future educators develop a professional identity "as advocates committed to a mission for social justice for the racially- and linguistically- minoritized Mexican-American/Latinx population. The implications regarding language in the preparation of future teachers are intertwined with the need for decolonial approaches to language from the speakers engaged in marginalized language practices" (Caldas Chumbes, this issue).

Cassandra Glynn and Allison Spenader reinvent Critical Pedagogy in Critical Content–Based Instruction (CCBI) in their "Critical Content–Based Instruction for the Transformation of World Language Classrooms." Their study examines the experience of four middle and high school Spanish language educators who use critical content–based instruction to teach for social justice with the goal to promote criticality and agency among their learners. Glynn and Spenader creatively build a case for CCBI articulating a project for social justice that "moves beyond a more mainstream definition of social justice education espoused by scholars [...] that focus on fairness, dignity, and respect for all people" (Glynn & Spenader, this issue). They correctly point out that a more critical approach that recognizes the deeply embedded

nature of oppression and inequity is important in World Language education as we seek to empower students to act and disrupt the status quo. All four teachers presented in the study teach different levels of Spanish with varying degrees of using the target language with one case where the teacher deliberately uses English.

Bessie Mitsikopoulou combines Paulo Freire's (2000) Critical Pedagogy, with Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and his social semiotic approach, to design a college-level course curriculum. The curriculum presented relies on explicit scaffolding that in turn enables undergraduate students at a public university in Greece to start understanding language as a repertoire of resources for representing their experience of the world, establishing and maintaining relationships in interaction, and forming different kinds of texts. In her "Genre Instruction and Critical Literacy in Teacher Education: Features of a Critical Foreign Language Pedagogy in a University Curriculum," students asked to write according to the English genre conventions explore the relationship between texts and their contexts, and they examine how the choices they make from the language system act upon, and, are simultaneously constrained by the social context. They also learn how to construe different kinds of meanings, something that constitutes a challenge for some students. Mitsikopoulou makes a compelling argument for critical literacy as an integral part of the curriculum for language teachers.

Finally, Shizhou Yang in "Critical Pedagogy for Foreign-Language Writing" proposes a poststructuralist-oriented Critical Pedagogy for Foreign Language creative writing. In his classroom-based study conducted with groups of freshmen majoring in English at a state university in southwest China, he provides a Critical Pedagogy-inspired framework that features four intertwining and interacting elements: relationship, identity, power, and agency. His findings show that his approach increased students' confidence in writing as they moved into agency positions and gained new dispositions towards writing. While Yang builds a powerful theoretical context drawing on pedagogy elements (dialogical teaching, student agency, the role of power, and so forth) his focus in the actual study is more on the agency of the student-as-writer, making the argument for creative writing as a meaningful literacy project. The kind of agency he discusses is not subversive or liberatory (yet) but rather connected with increased confidence for his students, freedom of expression and exploration of creativity, and loss of fear. His study does not address power issues or controversial topics but it needs to be understood in its sociopolitical context—it is conducted in a Chinese institution of higher education where more traditional writing approaches are used. He does, however, make a compelling case for a dialogical approach where writing is seen as a social practice and where local and personal knowledge can serve as the basis for creativity. His approach has a lot of potential as his student-writers with their newfound agency could now delve into more contested, controversial, and ultimately, political issues. The inclusion of this paper is also meant to point to institutional barriers and limitations when trying to conduct this kind of work.

CONCLUSION

Adrienne Rich, in her poem *The Burning of Paper Instead of Children*, writes that "a language is a map of our failures." In the context of the current discussion I take this to mean that what we say is unimportant and insignificant if in practice the injustice, oppression, and violence continues. Despite the massive production of scholarship, knowledge, and ideas, there is still great "ineffectiveness" and inaction: Ideas do not influence people deeply when they are only

taught as ideas and thoughts, or skills and competences. As Erich Fromm (1981) noted, "just to become acquainted with other ideas is not enough, even though these ideas in themselves are right and potent. But ideas do have an effect on [people] if the idea is lived by the one who teaches it; if it is personified by the teacher, if the idea appears in the flesh" (p. 14). As critical language educators, we have a responsibility and a duty to "embody" knowledge, ideas, and thoughts that acknowledge the lived experiences and histories of oppressed and marginalized groups, and expose the workings of power and ideology in teaching and learning. Our goal should always be to translate private troubles into public issues with the goal of transforming our classrooms, schools, communities, and society as a whole.

Putting together this Special Issue revealed many contradictions, challenges, and paradoxes: Anglocentrism as a lens prevailed again and different ways of enacting and embodying a Critical Pedagogy agenda arose. Ultimately, as mentioned earlier, Critical Pedagogy is not (and should not be) prescriptive. It is informed by the sociopolitical, historical, pedagogical and linguistic context at hand and is co-created in any given educational context. It is my belief that there is value for educators to be open to introduce "dangerous" topics in their classrooms and to seize pedagogical moments, even if it means that they will have to revert to the students' native language. There is an unknown and yet unrealized creative power in those pedagogical moments.

At a time when the financial crisis is deepening, authoritarianism is thriving, and racism permeates society, being deeply ingrained in our institutions and plaguing our communities, what we do in education matters. What we do in the language classroom matters. How we do it matters. The discussion on the relevance of Critical Pedagogy for language teaching and learning is not only timely—it goes straight to the core of the mission of education. Because we "touch one another in language" (hooks 1994, p.174), in the current historical juncture it is more imperative than ever to make the pedagogical political and the political pedagogical.

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