

## Culturally Relevant Education and Critical Pedagogy: Devolution of Hierarchies of Power

### Educación Culturalmente Relevante y la Pedagogía Crítica: Descentralización de las Jerarquías de Poder

### Educação Culturalmente Relevante e Pedagogia Crítica: Descentralização das Hierarquias de Poder

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This article considers two educational strategies that serve to empower students by responding more authentically to student needs. We begin by defining our terms and then move to a tiny school deep in the jungles of Central America. This school, like many schools in developing nations, struggles to educate students for an uncertain future. At issue are contradictions extant in a postmodern, globalized world, where colonial domination has been replaced by post-colonialism, which is not free from issues of domination and power. This article offers culturally relevant education and critical pedagogy, in tandem or separately, as a way to forge new links with a society that is attempting to become a more developed nation. Culturally relevant education allows for teaching and learning that is responsive to student needs, while critical pedagogy offers a means of devolving as much power to the students as possible. In this way, students may become empowered to foster meaningful change within their lives and within the societies in which they live.

**Keywords:** Critical theory, Culturally relevant education, Public education, Student empowerment, Teacher empowerment.

Este artículo considera dos estrategias educativas para capacitar a los estudiantes y responder a sus auténticas necesidades. Comenzamos por definir nuestros términos para dar paso a una pequeña escuela situada en la selvas de América Central. Esta escuela, como muchas escuelas en naciones en vías de desarrollo, se esfuerza por educar a los estudiantes para un futuro incierto. El problema es la contradicción existente en un mundo globalizado y postmoderno, donde la dominación colonial ha sido reemplazada por el post-colonialismo, que no está libre de problemas de dominación y poder. En este artículo se ofrece una alternativa de educación culturalmente relevante y pedagogía crítica, que, en conjunto o por separado, son medios para crear nuevos vínculos en una sociedad que trata de convertirse en una nación más desarrollada. La Educación Culturalmente Relevante permite que la enseñanza y el aprendizaje responda a las necesidades de los estudiantes, mientras que la pedagogía crítica ofrece un medio de dar el poder a los estudiantes. De esta manera, los estudiantes pueden tener el poder para fomentar un cambio significativo en sus vidas y dentro de las sociedades en las que viven.

**Descriptores:** Teoría crítica, Educación culturalmente relevante, Educación pública, Empoderamiento del estudiante, Empoderamiento del docente.

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Este artigo considera duas estratégias educacionais para capacitar alunos e responder às suas reais necessidades. Começamos por definir os nossos termos de abrir caminho para uma pequena escola localizada nas selvas da América Central. Esta escola, como muitas escolas em países em desenvolvimento, se esforça para educar os alunos para um futuro incerto. O problema é a contradicção existente em um mundo globalizado e pós-moderno, onde o domínio colonial foi substituído pelo pós-colonialismo, que não está livre de problemas de dominação e poder. Este artigo oferece uma alternativa na educação culturalmente relevante e pedagogia crítica, que, em conjunto ou separadamente, são um meio para criar novos elos de uma sociedade que está se tornando uma nação mais desenvolvida. A educação culturalmente relevante permite que o ensino e a aprendizagem atende às necessidades dos estudantes, enquanto a pedagogia crítica fornece um meio de dar poder aos estudantes. Assim, os alunos podem ter o poder de promover mudanças significativas em suas vidas e nas sociedades em que vivem.

**Palavras-chave:** Teoria crítica, Educação culturalmente relevante, Educação pública, Capacitação dos alunos, Capacitação de professores.

*...to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (Bell Hooks, 1994).*

## 1. Literature Review

Student demographics are in constant flux. Evolving and designated leaders, both, can benefit from establishing a culturally relevant approach to education within a critical pedagogy. With these two stratagems in place, diverse families and students will undoubtedly benefit from administrators' and educators' ability to create safe, happy, caring and successful classrooms.

Being a school administrator is always a difficult and complex endeavor. In addition to the many responsibility and growing complexity of their responsibilities, administrators, in conjunction with their teaching staff and occasionally with the students themselves, aspire to develop the best possible teaching and learning contexts within their schools and for their school communities. These instructional leaders tend to view their roles as helping teachers and students construct and apply new knowledge and skills. However, this is often accomplished through the process of trial and error (Popper, 1972) simply because teaching cannot be reduced to a set of prescribed technical activities where students of the same grade or age group complete similar tasks. Teachers must continuously make decisions as to how similar age-group students can learn and apply concepts being taught through prescribed curricula in different situations so as to construct knowledge. Furthermore, the importance of connecting the home culture with the school culture through facilitating a culturally relevant classroom has been underemphasized pedagogically (Brown, 2007). In accordance with this, a critical pedagogy can assist in creating a socially just school within an equally socially just school system. This article introduces culturally relevant leadership in combination with a critical pedagogy to ensure a dynamic and thoughtful organizational climate.

## **2. Method**

Because this article presents a philosophical stance rather than a purely empirical approach to this study, an organizing framework, rather than a qualitative research methodology has been applied to the current phenomena under investigation. For this topic, we have chosen to use Cooper & White's (2012) "Five Contexts" of qualitative research. These contexts include the autobiographical and biographical component, the historical component, the political component, the postmodern component and the philosophical component.

Hopefully, the (auto)biographical context will assist the reader in situating him-/herself relative to the research being conducted. The historical context allows the recognition that one has a place in history, and that one can change that place from being merely an observer and a reactionary to being in a position of power within which one can insert oneself into the historical moment in order to influence the course of that history. For the researcher, the historical context offers an important perspective on the past, which, in turn, can inform future decisions. The political context is omnipresent in the lives of every citizen in today's society. Recognition of the political aspects of engaging in, performing or resulting from research allows the researcher to bring an additional perspective to bear upon the research issue. The postmodern context is an important consideration to any form of research, since we live in postmodern times. In an age of blurred genres and mixed methods, the postmodern era helps one to realize that things are not as they were. In that sense, an understanding of these postmodern or "liquid" times can assist the researcher in seeing qualitative research in all of its complexities and contradictions. And, last but not least, the philosophical context binds the previous contexts together in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with engaging in and contemplating deep issues embodied in the research. This context allows for the necessary introspection and thoughtfulness that may aid in delving into deeper philosophical questions of meaning.

As such, these five contexts represent an orientation to inquiry that allows one to describe, identify and speak about the naturally messy and complex nature of this and any research inquiry. However, these contexts do not occur sequentially in any research endeavor. They tend to arrive simultaneously and to overlap one another, weaving in and around the research as major themes and ideas become transparent or, at least, are made less murky. And so it is with this inquiry. The components of the "Five Contexts" weave themselves subtly and unobtrusively into the fabric of this article.

### ***2.1. Definitions***

Culturally relevant or culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy (Gay, 2010) grounded in teaching in cross-cultural or multicultural settings (Diller & Moule, 2005), allowing each student to relate course content to his or her own particular cultural context (Scherff & Spector, 2011). While the term culturally relevant teaching often deals specifically with instruction of African American students in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1994), it has proven to be an effective pedagogy for students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Culturally relevant pedagogy encompasses "behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial cultural diversity in learning" (Gay, 2010: 31). It is a pedagogy that ensures learning for all students because it is relevant to the students' lives. It is a pedagogy that ensures the delivery of instruction, no matter what the curriculum outcomes; are taught in a manner

that accesses student's ways of knowing and doing. It values what students already know and uses student's prior knowledge and ways of learning to deliver instruction in a successful manner.

Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, represents both a philosophy of education and a social movement combining education with critical theory. As Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinburg (1997) attest, "critical pedagogy is the term used to describe what emerges when critical theory encounters education" (p. 24). First identified by Paulo Freire (1993), it has developed into a praxis-oriented "educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action" (Giroux, 2010: 67). Critical pedagogy represents a philosophy of education more than a set of "tried and true" methods that serve to advance student learning. Critical pedagogy combines education with critical theory, of which there are numerous brands, including Marxist, feminist and post-structuralist critical theory (Capper, 1993; Vibert, Portelli, Shields, & LaRocque, 2002). In education, critical theorists often come armed with an agenda for change. Due to this agenda, critical pedagogues as educators are ultimately concerned with the elimination of oppression and suffering (Brosio, 2000) as they critically reflect on current and historical social inequities in order to work toward the empowerment and transformation of others, while grounding decisions in morals and values (Capper, 1993; Greenfield, 1993). In short, critical theorists in education tend to work towards positive social change within the development of a truly democratic and socially just society.

In essence, there are five relevant and critical leadership techniques for developing such a school culture that is supportive of social justice: building trust, engaging personal culture(s), confronting issues of social dominance and social injustice, transforming instructional practices, and engaging the entire school community (Howard, 2007). What follows is an exploration of that process, using a tiny elementary school in the rain forest of Central America. This school serves as a metaphor for all schools desirous of making positive change in the process of educating students in order to positively impact their lives and the lives of their families now and in the future.

## ***2.2. St. Jude's elementary school***

I (Robert) am writing this section of the article from the table of a dining hut deep in the jungle of a small country in Central America. It is mid-April, and I am here with a group of pre-service teachers from Canada who are experiencing their final practicum. This is an international opportunity for them. However, this experience has not been without its benefits and drawbacks. To begin with, this country would be considered a developing country. With less than half a million people, it continues to struggle to maintain a vibrant economy and this is reflected in the educational system.

When the pre-service teachers arrived, they were immediately introduced to the local school, St. Jude's Elementary School, and the surrounding village. Ironically enough, St. Jude is considered to be the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes. The school itself is a parged, cinder-block structure that is comprised of three buildings – one of which is a designated hurricane shelter. The classrooms sport a profusion of posters on the walls referring to the alphabet, the water cycle, flora and fauna and times, places and dates, depending on the grade level. The floors are covered with ragged linoleum that is swept clean on a regular basis by students, most often girls. Even among the very

young, gender stereotyping is much in evidence as the young boys tussle with one another while the girls tend to pursue more sedentary, typically housekeeping, activities.

The grade levels are similar to those of a regular North American school, but children begin school at three years of age, occasionally as early as two years of age. This is the Pre-Kindergarten Class. There is one classroom per grade up to Grade Eight. Classes range in size from a low of sixteen students to a high of more than twice that number. Classrooms are slightly smaller than average-sized North American classrooms and large rooms are sub-divided to conserve space.

Teaching is interesting. Students attend school intermittently with some students being present most days while others are less inclined to attend. School is not viewed as particularly important by the parents, in general, although some parents remain steadfastly involved with their children's education. Each Friday, teachers must submit lesson plans for the following week to the principal. The principal, as instructional leader, very likely has little time to go through the lesson plans and the teachers do not necessarily, or even often, adhere to what they had planned for the children. Although the desks in each classroom are arranged carefully in rows, the students are free to move about the classroom. They converge upon the teacher on a regular basis in order to receive a red check mark in their books to show that they are on task, on target and on time.

Classes, as a result, are uniformly raucous and classroom management strategies are largely absent. Teachers shout over the student noise and it often takes two or three attempts to regain most of the students' attention. Much of the educating is done by rote. Information is memorized, practiced and regurgitated on cue, often with hilarious results. For example, if the teacher is to ask a question, the students do not necessarily listen to the question asked, but parrot back the answer from the previous lesson or even from the previous day. Often, questions are closed-ended and require only a "yes" or "no" from students. Again, the correct answer is often guessed at, with the loudest voice carrying the rest of the group. When the question is repeated, students change the answer until the teacher is satisfied.

Testing abounds. Students are tested mercilessly and the results are recorded. Many students do not do well because of the rote nature of their learning. There appear to be multiple disconnects between the teaching process and the act of learning. Frequently, during class activities, the students storm the teacher for the coveted red check mark, amid a cacophony of voices shouting, "Miss, Miss." After having said all of this, the diatribe above is not meant to vilify any one or any part of the school system. It is meant to describe a situation where culturally relevant education and critical pedagogy could offer some assistance to a system that barely offers any form of real education to a group of students who desperately crave to learn.

Even at the elementary level, students' attendance is spotty, as there is little incentive for them to come to school. After finishing the equivalent of Grade Eight, only one student out of a student body of more than two hundred students will be able to continue on to the secondary school in a neighbouring village. Lack of finances and transportation appear to be the main cause of this travesty. Parents often feel that their daughters are better off learning how to be housekeepers, wives and mothers, rather than pursuing an education that they may never be able to put to use. By the same

token, the boys may not need an education because they will eventually work on the farm or at their parents' industry, whatever that may be.

Teacher education programs are woefully inadequate here and teachers typically remain uncertified. The prevailing culture of the school is to teach in a rote manner and to test frequently. By their own admission, the greatest challenge is to keep the principal happy by submitting lesson plans that are rarely followed. Teachers often create their lesson plans during class time. Occasionally, teachers do not turn up to class. More often than not, no reason or even advance warning is given. Other teachers cover by simply adding the absent teacher's class to their own group, often resulting in crowded and frequently interrupted lessons. Although striking students has been deemed unprofessional, hitting a student for misbehavior is common, both in the school and at home. For this reason alone, it is often difficult to use more psychological measures to encourage student engagement.

Even the principal admits that he is under-qualified for his position as instructional leader and is desperately in need of professional development, professional development that will not happen. Resources are few and far between. Technology is largely absent, represented symbolically by an outdated computer printer that has been out of ink for as long as anyone can remember. This is a school in desperate circumstances and appears to be representative of the school systems in this country in general.

### ***2.3. Competing realities***

When asked if obtaining an education was important, parents and educators alike all agreed that it was. However, the reality of this community is vastly different than the espoused aspirations. Children are rarely able to access high school and, even if they could, they have the choice of returning to their community and resuming their work on the land, or moving to a city in pursuit of a better life. If the move to urban centers were to happen on a large scale, many small communities would disappear, as has been the case in so many places ever since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution (Staton, 2012). As such, this represents a change in the traditional way of life and may even represent an assault on the present culture of the country. For this community, the people are caught between hard realities.

Further to this, even effective and efficient educational systems tend to become absorbed into the exigencies of the globalized economies (White, 2009). At stake is the culture of the country, itself. Consequently and simplistically, such educational systems, as represented within this tiny community, may represent a bellwether for the future. Unfortunately, however, the choices are dire and represent a dilemma – there is choice, but neither choice represents an attractive alternative. School systems can either help to move the economy “forward” as students move into secondary and tertiary occupations rather than remaining in primary industries, or the citizens, students among them, can continue along the current road towards economic servitude at the hands of more globalized countries which seek ever newer sources of cheap labour and raw materials.

Perhaps, however, we might envision a middle ground where countries such as this, and there are many of them, can achieve both a modicum of development while still preserving their own culture. In essence, the position is one of self-determination and, whether it is capitulation in the face of encroaching global economies or preservation of the culture or a combination of the two, it is important that the decision be made by

those who have most to lose, rather than decisions being thrust upon the population by outside forces who have the most to gain.

By way of encouragement, we offer two possibilities – culturally relevant education and critical pedagogy. Each on its own may be a partial solution to the problems of the future; but together, they may represent a force that may help to wittingly forge a future from current chaos, indecision and lack of resources and infrastructure. Thus, school leaders and educators working within ailing economies may be able to capitalize on educational systems in order to for their societies to access a more positive, authentic and socially just process of self-determination.

#### ***2.4. Culturally relevant education***

Regarding the schooling experience described in this article, teachers are charged with relaying what appear to be basic facts using a rote method. Instruction is delivered in English, although, the common languages used in homes are “Kriol” and/or Spanish. The rote method as an instructional delivery choice can be compared to Freire’s banking model. The teacher talks and the students sit quietly listening. “The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students are” (Freire, 1993:72). In the banking model the teacher is singularly essential to student learning. The students are merely empty vessels into which the teacher “deposits” his or her knowledge.

The banking model does not take into account the various ways of knowing that the child brings to school nor the knowledge that a student has already gained before entering into the formal learning of the institution known as school. This model also separates the teacher from the child in the most basic human way – emotionally. Noted African American scholar, bell hooks, states that “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (Hooks, 1994: 13). Learning cannot happen unless the student internalizes what the other is conveying. Teaching does not happen until the student has learned. A successful pedagogy must contain the necessary conditions for learning and teaching, and therefore requires a delivery method that is relevant to and values the student.

To guarantee that the teaching strategies employed in classrooms are relevant to the learning styles of all students, they must include components that are relevant to their lives. Geneva Gay defined culturally relevant pedagogy as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002:106).

Culturally relevant pedagogy, also known as culturally responsive pedagogy, nullifies the deficit-thinking model or “cultural blindness” (Gay, 2010: 22). Since the literature on this model uses the terms responsive and relevant interchangeably, for the purpose of this article, I have adopted the term culturally relevant because teachers are responsive to the culture and associated learning styles of students by ensuring curriculum and instructional delivery are relevant to their lives. Using this model, teachers can no longer ignore the cultural differences of their students or see these differences as impediments to learning. The differences now become the catalyst for delivery of instruction as well as the content of the curriculum.

When adopting a culturally relevant pedagogy model, teachers must know their students. The statement, “Know your students,” has become a cliché in the context of North American Schools. Most teachers teaching in the United States and Canada can recite this when they are discussing assessment data and differentiated instruction. Unfortunately, their efforts are often futile because their differentiation techniques are all variations of the same non-culturally relevant strategies. All instructional strategies, at all academic levels within a classroom, need to consider the cultural learning styles of the children within that classroom. Teaching strategies and styles “must tap the full range of student potential” (Kuykendall, 2004:71). Teaching by rote, as was observed in the Central American classroom, neglects the actual educational needs of the students and therefore stifles the intellectual potential of the child. A teacher, standing before a class in front of students seated in rows expecting students to respond in unison – the loudest voice getting the most attention – neither promotes nor guarantees learning. However, a teacher who plans lessons based on students’ academic and cultural needs with collaborative activities that are relevant to their everyday lives can promote and guarantee culturally relevant learning.

When using a culturally relevant approach, the teacher understands the student outside of the school environment. Culturally relevant teaching incorporates the students’ interests into curriculum activities, and thus the teacher is able to capture the students’ interests and motivate them more effectively. Lessons are built with creativity; this is used to motivate and engage the student at the beginning, middle and end of each lesson. The lessons value and uphold the students’ culture(s). This is easily done through integrating the culture within the delivery method, or pedagogy, and in the content of the curriculum.

For learning to occur, all students must understand (a) what the end result is, (b) why they have to learn a certain topic, (c) how it is relevant to their lives or their future careers, and (d) the process involved (Hale, 2001). In concordance, Davies (2007) states “to ensure success for all students, especially for those who struggle, students need to know what they already know, what needs to be learned and what success looks like” (n.p.). Learning is viewed as a concrete process and an active one. Learning occurs as a result of the “ability of the learner to make meaning of new knowledge by making connections with existing knowledge” (Williams, 2003: 182). Therefore, learning is more than the teacher talking and the students receiving; it is hands-on, cooperative, and creative. As well, when discussing instructional strategies, it is important to remember not to separate assessment from the explicit instruction. They are intertwined.

Authentic assessment-for-learning techniques provide timely feedback to students about their performance and, when utilized, motivate students and help them to improve. Rote teaching and rote responding, as an assessment technique, have the same end result—no guarantee of learning. However, if educators and educational leaders incorporate authentic assessment practices into the art of teaching, they will always know where their students are in terms of the teaching that has taken place and what instructional changes are needed to ensure further learning. Just as importantly, the student will know and understand where they are in their learning process. Teaching in this way allows students to know where they are on their personal journey of learning through frequent feedback (Chappuis, et al., 2005).

Figure 1 was created to synthesize culturally relevant pedagogy. In this graphic, it is possible to see how the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy can be incorporated into any classroom.



Figure 1. Principles of culturally relevant pedagogy

Note: Elaborated by authors.

To put this in the context of the Central American classroom described, primary students were learning to read and write using the English language, even though English is a minority language in this context. Instead of learning the actual letter names, the teachers taught their students the letter sounds as a proxy for the names of the letters. Instead of learning the letter “R,” the students were taught “rrrr.” For the letter “B,” the students were taught “buu.” At no time were they given the actual letter names or provided with a connection to prior knowledge the students may possess.

During her research in Papua New Guinea, Lisa Delpit (2006) observed that, although the country was multilingual, the instructional language in schools, because it was the language of the trade economy, was English. There was another school system however, in which children were taught first in their indigenous tongue. From her research she concluded that, “Children learn to read only once, and if they learn to read in a language they already understand orally, they become literate much more quickly and effectively than do those who learn in a foreign language” (p.88).

If the instruction the Central American children received were to become culturally relevant, they would first learn their own language in print and use that knowledge to learn to read in English. In this way, the learning activity would be relevant to the lives of the students because it would be responsive to their ways of knowing and doing. Delpit (2006) reported that the immersion system of learning was seen as a success by both the system and the home. There was no question that students could become more successful in this system. Likewise, the teachers, having high expectations for their students’ academic success, demonstrated their understanding of established curriculum outcomes.

### ***2.5. Accountability for student success***

Becoming skilled in culturally relevant pedagogy, as successful at it seems, does not occur simply by completing a degree program in Education or by obtaining a teaching license. Besides the obvious professional development required by teachers in order to teach in a culturally responsive manner, school systems must operate within a vision that would allow culturally relevant pedagogy to flourish. A system in which policies and curriculum, created using research-based pedagogical instructional strategies and practices based on students' cultural and academic needs, is required to set the foundations for success.

When these systems are in place, there is still the need for accountability. The work of ensuring research-based instructional strategies, as well as a culturally relevant approach to delivering curriculum would fall to the role of the school principal. No longer can the principal merely exist as the person accountable for managing time and attendance of teachers and accounting for inventory. The principal must be the lead instructor of the school and, therefore, the instructional leader. The instructional leader would also provide needed instruction for the teachers, ensuring that they have the skills needed to teach in a manner conducive to the learning styles of students.

### ***2.6. Critical pedagogy***

In tandem with culturally relevant teaching, or on its own, critical pedagogy is a powerful tool that can be employed to interrogate systems of oppression. Pierre Bourdieu, whose work was primarily concerned with the dynamics of power in society, is revisited by Albright & Luke (2008) to examine how cultural differences relate to school performance. Educational rewards are won by those who feel most at home within the system. Those who are certain of their abilities may pursue ideas and vocations that interest them and their teachers, while non-mainstream students struggle to acquire the academic and other cultural attributes that appear to come naturally to mainstream children. Unfortunately, the further the distance from the mainstream culture, the more difficulty students from outside that culture will encounter in acquiring requisite academic and cultural attributes through the educational system.

This struggle is often perceived as a sign of inferiority by mainstream participants. Instructional leaders frequently struggle to take this into consideration as they attempt to ensure that their schools are teaching in culturally relevant ways. However, one way that the instructional leader and his or her teachers can ensure that they are being responsive is to incorporate critical pedagogy into their culturally relevant repertoire.

Critical pedagogy as an educational ideal is a moral enterprise in that failure to take as central the fostering of students' abilities and dispositions to think critically fails to treat students with respect as persons, and therefore fails to treat them in a morally acceptable way. If we agree that exclusion, marginalization and oppression are morally wrong, critical pedagogy is crucial at all levels of education (Hare, 2009), as educational institutions must become more sensitive to minority group needs, including protection from hegemonic domination of dominant cultures that exert power over a specific culture, even though that culture may exist in a separate country.

While school cultures may take complex and heterogeneous forms, the principle that remains constant is that they are situated within a network of power relations from which they cannot escape (Giroux, 1983). It is crucial to recognize that schools

represent contested terrains (Brosio, 2000) in the form of inter-subjectivities, but that this terrain is heavily weighted in favour of the dominant culture. It is this contradictory nature of school life that provides a site for teachers to explore how the knowledge and meanings of subordinate groups are experienced and interpreted. Teachers can develop an understanding of how the dominant culture becomes embedded in the “hidden” curriculum in order to negotiate the meanings that relegate schools to a particular relationship with the dominant society (Brosio, 2000; Fairclough, 1995; Giroux, 1983), within or outside of national boundaries.

The “hidden” curriculum is an inherent contradiction of education, where lessons learned are not the intended lessons (Martin, 1983) and may include, but are not limited to the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs that are conveyed in the classroom and the social environment (Giroux & Penna, 1983) and, therefore, may encompass ideological instances of the schooling process that structure and reproduce hegemonic assumptions and practices. Knowledge is being constructed (Fernandez-Balboa, 1993) as often as truth is being discovered, and voices must ask, “Whose knowledge?” “Who benefits?” (Boyles, 1998; Fabos and Young, 1999; Young, 1994) or “Whose interests are being served and at what price?” (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Fernández-Balboa, 1993). As a result of this interrogation of systems of power, emphasis may be shifted from cultural reproduction to a concern with cultural intervention and social action, thus providing a foundation for using schools as important sites to wage counter-hegemonic practices (Corson, 1995; Cummins, 1995; Fairclough, 1995; Giroux, 1983). This can be accomplished by challenging present beliefs through asking whose interests are being served and linking the internal constructions to external social, political and economic conditions that create social injustice (Fernández-Balboa, 1993) now and in the future.

John Willinsky (in White & Cooper, 2015) takes us into a typical Humanities program in order to show us what this would look like in practice. He suggests that teachers should select texts that complement or are incongruent with the text at hand in order to more clearly understand what perspectives are being presented or what is being left out in the companion texts, or to provide a new perspective altogether. As such, it must be noted that critical pedagogy is more of an attitude towards texts than a method that can be practiced in the same way each time a new text is chosen. By proceeding in this way, students gain opportunities to understand what it is that is being promoted. In this way, they can begin to become critical thinkers in view of not only the canon of authorized texts, but of the responses to that canon as well. Perhaps critical pedagogy may be a useful instrument to develop not only a more democratic form of governance but also one that will allow a certain understanding of ourselves, one another and of the world around us.

Another task for the critical educator is to provide conditions for individuals to acquire a language allowing them to reflect upon and shape their experiences and to transform such experiences in the interests of a larger social responsibility (McLaren & da Silva, 1993). Senior administrative leaders, school principals and teacher leaders can also analyze school knowledge as part of a wider universe of knowledge (Wortham, 1995) in order to understand the reproductive functions existing between external dominant cultures, as forms of power and control, and to focus on questions aimed at dominant culture and the school culture (Brosio, 2000; McLaren, 1994).

Teachers and their instructional leaders must also attempt to unravel the issue of meaning from the issue of mastery embedded in the structure of classroom knowledge.

It is important for educators to reject educational theories that reduce schooling to training, or learning theory to technocratic rationality that ignore social change, power relations, and conflicts within and outside of schools, the society in particular and the rest of the world in general. Critical pedagogy offers one potential solution.

In the absence of general membership in community-based institutions such as churches, recreation centers and social groups, schools have become the default mechanism for the mounting of social change. As such, the life of the school is not only amazingly complex, there are many competing demands for the very precious time allotted during the school day for the education of future generations. However, critical pedagogy can become imbedded in our individual schemas and, like democracy itself, is engaged with, enacted and performed daily. It is, in essence, an attitude, a position, a stance that is transposable from one discipline, age group or grade level to another.

The issue for educators is how one comes to grips with a particular point of view without silencing those who hold that viewpoint, or to silence those who hold opposing viewpoints. Carolyn McKinney (in White & Cooper, 2015) promotes the view that all perspectives, even those from the point of privilege, are valid views and that, in order to gain greater equity and social justice, greater democracy notwithstanding, it is only by tussling with incongruent perspectives that we can influence attitudes and hope to fashion some degree of equity and fairness for all. The power in this approach is that we can begin to view each other as real people rather than a sum of attributes and traits that cause them to be viewed as objects, rather than as people. Thus, these people can come together and learn together and, given a modicum of trust, can actually work towards authentic, valuing relationships.

It is essential that a balance be struck between the teacher's agenda and that of the learners. Should learners' aspirations be suspended or distorted in pursuit of the teacher's learning objectives or the school curricula, and if the teacher's agenda consistently overrides that of the students, the critical pedagogic approach founders. When learners spend time meeting the school or teacher's objectives to the exclusion of their own, this distracts them from focusing on, criticizing and developing strategies that may influence how they interact with the world (Swann & Burgess, 2005) around and beyond them. Using the critical pedagogic approach, however, students are initiated into the practice of critical discussions, while building knowledge.

Transmission models of pedagogy must be replaced by classroom social relationships in which students are able to challenge, engage, and question the form and substance of the learning process. Students must be taught to think critically and logically, to move beyond literal interpretations and fragmented modes of reasoning. Development of a critical mode of reasoning may permit students to appropriate their own histories, to delve into their own biographies and systems of meaning, to provide conditions that give students the opportunity to speak with their own voices to authenticate their own experiences. By doing this, linkages between schools and the wider society can be identified and transformed for the greater good of the entire society and beyond.

### **3. Teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Teaching is a difficult and complex endeavor and, assuming that educators in schools wish to transform their teaching practices, they first need to view their roles as helping

their students construct and apply new knowledge and skills, generally through the process of trial and error (Popper, 1979). Teaching cannot be reduced to a set of prescribed technical activities where students of the same grade or age group are required to complete similar tasks. It is more than teachers having a deep knowledge of subject matter, curriculum, resources and of their students, individually or collectively, that would add to their pool of knowledge. It requires teachers to make decisions as to how similar age-group students can apply the concepts in the prescribed curricula in different situations so as to construct knowledge. In fact, teachers who have a good knowledge of their subject matter may find it more difficult to teach their subject matter well because they fail to understand why some of their students cannot learn the materials or are not interested in the materials prescribed for them.

Teachers of the twenty-first century have the task of instructing an extremely diverse student population that resists “cookie-cutter” solutions (Kinsler & Gamble, 2001). These demographic changes also increasingly make traditional whole class instruction less practical as a dominant mode of teaching because the situation demands the flexible and skilled use of a variety of instructional and organizational approaches (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996). It appears that, if we want our students to succeed and become autonomous, our school system would have to open the door to new thinking. We need to create environments where learners are given the opportunity to test their assumptions and/or hypotheses to find the weaknesses contained within their theories. Perhaps it is as Shimizu (2001) suggests, we really need to change our relationship with our students by making them co-researchers in the inquiry into learning. This is a reconsideration of some very basic notions, such as contemplating what the nature of knowledge is. If we agree that it is more than merely a compilation of facts, we must then identify it as a process of accepting new data into our pre-existing schema. This requires time and reflection and it also begs questions about the very nature of learning itself. Learning is coming to be viewed more as a social activity than an activity that is done independently and in isolation from others. Schools should never become places where there is only one method of teaching (Feyerabend, 2010).

However, improving the nature of teaching and schooling does not mean merely focusing on what the teachers do. We need to look at the larger context in which teaching and learning happens as well, such as in the school, district or province. We also need to look at the curriculum framework, the assessment approaches, and the school culture, among others. Additionally, because of the complexity of the teaching and learning process, knowledge of techniques and methods is insufficient to provide solutions to issues in teaching. Not only does teaching require deep content knowledge, as well as a wide repertoire of teaching strategies, but also an intimate knowledge of students so as to engage them in inquiry, discovery, and practical problem-solving with concentration on higher order thinking (Cole & Knowles, 2000).

In keeping with the cultivation of higher-order thinking and the asking of critical and culturally relevant questions, students require a safe place where they are permitted and helped to seek out and identify mismatches between their current expectations and experience and to articulate some of the mismatches that they have discovered – marginalization, exclusion and oppression not excepted. In providing an arena of culturally relevant inquiry, examination and research, the teacher fosters the value of imagination and creativity, a critical stand towards ideas and the confidence to take risks in one’s own learning and to learn from their own mistakes.

One of the many benefits of adopting a culturally relevant and critical pedagogic approach is that, while the students are learning from prescribed curricula, they are also contributors and evaluators of their own learning. Moreover, through this approach, teachers are also presented with opportunities to develop classroom dialogue and peer and self-assessment of students' work (Spiller 2012).

## 4. Back to the jungle

When the pre-service teachers arrived and after adjusting to their new surroundings as quickly as could be expected, a rapid change began to take place. Practicing teachers were happy to learn about new techniques, and many said that they truly appreciated the creativity of the pre-service teachers and were learning a great deal from this experience. In the absence of technological assistance, pre-service teachers often stayed up late creating resources, honing interesting and engaging lesson plans and discussing how best to fit in with the prevailing school culture while trying to bring knowledge generation (Weber, 2014) into the existing schema of the school. Everyone was pleased, and attendance at school began to increase. Some claimed that this was because of the new and interesting additions to the school, while others claimed that attendance usually peaks by mid-week and falls off towards weekends.

As the month progressed, pre-service teachers found that, although they were having a significant impact on the culture and climate of the school, the situation was also impacting them. Some pre-service teachers began to find that their psychological interventions were less effective than those interventions that the students were used to. They began to adopt the more vocal approach to bringing students back to order. Pre-service teachers often felt that their lessons were compromised due to lack of resources, student inattention and lack of support from their co-operating teachers. By now, we were nearing the end of our one-month stay and I began to see that the positive intercessions that had been created were of a fleeting nature. I liken this to clearing a small plot of land in the middle of the jungle. If left untended, this land is quickly reclaimed by our Mother, the jungle. So it seems with the school system here in this tiny country. As I noted before, the focus of this article is not who to blame but to attempt to understand the issues and to move forward in as positive a manner as possible.

It is fairly evident that, given the relatively weak teacher education programmes, the lack of principal leadership courses and the general lack of any discernable professional development, this is a school system in difficulty. If we return to the espoused purposes of schooling as a means to develop employment opportunities, knowledge for its own sake, development of social skills and citizenship (Goodlad, 1984), this school system is providing little of that. It is irrelevant for work, as most students will remain at home in the house or on the land. Rote learning represents an accumulation of unrelated factoids rather than real knowledge that can be applied and developed into wisdom. Social skills and citizenship are indoctrinated rather than encouraged. So what is to be done? Clearly, this is a problem that must be addressed by senior administrators higher up the chain of command. Learning becomes understanding and understanding becomes knowledge and knowledge is power because it provides some form of certainty in an increasingly uncertain world.

## 5. Conclusion

The nature of teaching is changing and, to use Linda Darling-Hammond's (1995) words, "teaching is not talking and learning is not listening any more" (p. 9). In a world that is becoming more global and transient and therefore our classrooms, more multicultural, one has a duty to be culturally aware and prepared to deal with cultural differences thrown at us each day in our schools. There is a very real danger that many educators, parents and the students themselves will embrace thinly veiled corporate ideas, contexts and initiatives, which, after a while, will no longer be apparent (Winner, 1997). With culturally relevant teaching and critical pedagogy, educators can affirm that even small steps toward critical consciousness are worth taking (Shor, 1993; Young, 1995). Such a perspective is concerned with a critique of regimes of exploitation in their various guises, out of which differences are produced (McLaren, 1994).

To this end, Paul Gorski (2010) lists twenty things that an educator can do in order to be a more culturally responsible and culturally relevant teacher. Among the items on this list, Gorski notes that one of the most important things is that students need to feel welcome and valued in the classroom and this can assist in improving one's teaching along the way. Such instructional perquisites involve preventing discrimination in the classroom and enacting culturally relevant classroom practices (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Such practice may include, but are not limited to, suitable organization of the physical environment, establishment of expectations for behavior, consistent communication, creating inclusive classrooms, working with families, and dealing appropriately with behaviors.

In addition, Picucci et al. (2002) recognize the role of the principal in creating a positive and culturally competent school culture is extremely important. The importance of building caring and safe spaces in one's school is paramount. Allowing students to feel like they are represented and valued and that their culture is important should be at the root of all educators, especially those cast in the role of instructional leaders.

The entire world order is in flux, as we continue to be affected by globalization, but not by a global culture. Poore (2005) cites the need for unity on a world scale. As culturally relevant and critical pedagogues Poore states that our role is "to ensure our students are educated in an environment which bridges the lack of a universal language and causes them to transcend the limits and differences of individual cultures" (p. 355). Perhaps one way to proceed is by becoming acquainted with culturally relevant teaching and with an accompanying critical pedagogy. By devolving a modicum of power to those who have not yet had an opportunity to explore, inquire and to make changes that benefit the least advantaged rather than those who are most advantaged, perhaps we may be able to avert impending future disasters such as environmental destruction, ignorance and impoverishment, and marginalization at the hands of those in positions of greater power. Perhaps we may even be able to trade notions of equality for those of equity. By adopting a position of culturally relevant and critical pedagogy, perhaps we stand a chance. After all, what could possibly go wrong?

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