# English for a Critical Mind

## Language pedagogy for social justice

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## Alessia Cogo, Graham Crookes, Sávio Siqueira

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## Dedications

**Alessia** dedicates this to her parents.

**Graham** dedicates this to his wife Hildre and his son Ikaika.

**Sávio** dedicates this to his wife Simone and his sons João Gabriel and Pedro Henrique.

## Images

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# From the authors

**Alessia:** *I work as an Applied Linguist at Goldsmiths, University of London, and as the Editor of the ELT Journal. Before that, I was a teacher of English and Italian for many years.*

*My teaching experience shaped my pedagogical understanding of language teaching and encouraged me to question assumptions of English, diversity and the tenets of language teaching. I then started researching the area of English diversity, especially English as a Lingua Franca, ELF pragmatics and the interface between ELF and multilingualism.*

*My work with students on the MA in Multilingualism, Linguistics and Education led me to a research project in Brazil, through which I came to know Sávio. Together with Graham, we started our work on Critical Pedagogy.*

*From my experience with ELF and multilingualism, and my engagement with teachers dealing with diversity, I feel certain this book will be welcomed by teachers and teacher educators.*

**Graham:** *I am now a professor in the Department of Second Language Studies at the University of Hawai'i. I had been rather concerned that the research I was doing was not benefiting the ordinary teacher, let alone students in many parts of the world which do not have the resources needed for even a basic good quality of English language teaching.*

*It seemed as though the social contexts and working conditions of teachers – and the problems faced by many second language students in their daily lives – needed attention. Around 1995, favourable conditions allowed me to start investigating Critical Pedagogy.*

*Since then, I have explored it and promoted it in small initiatives and especially through educating language teachers, including in both South Korea (and elsewhere in Asia) and South America. Despite some academic writings I have done, I feel that a basic introduction to this area directly addressing teachers was needed.*

**Sávio:** *I have been an ELT professional for over three decades. I am currently a professor and researcher at Bahia Federal University, Salvador, Brazil, and my research interests include language teacher education, materials development, intercultural education and Critical Pedagogy.*

*One of the first researchers in Brazil to propose a prolific interface between Critical (Language) Pedagogy and English as a Lingua Franca, and inspired by Paulo Freire's philosophy of education, I have always struggled, personally and institutionally, to link language education with the principles of Critical Pedagogy. My contention was always that language teachers are no different from other teachers, and that this critical element is extremely important in conducting our practice in such a way that we make a difference in our students' lives.*

*I have always wanted to see more critically-oriented ELT materials out there. This is by no means a reality yet, but we hope this book, co-constructed with two very special colleagues, can be one more brick in the wall.*

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When challenged by a critical educator, students begin to understand that the more profound dimension of their freedom lies exactly in the recognition of constraints that can be overcome. Then they discover for themselves in the process of becoming more and more critical that it is impossible to deny the constitutive power of their consciousness in the social practice in which they participate. On the other hand, they perceive that through their consciousness, even when they are not makers of their social reality, they transcend the constituting reality and question it. This behavioral difference leads one to become more and more critical; that is, students assume a critical posture to the extent they comprehend how and what constitutes the consciousness of the world.

*Paulo Freire*

From 'Rethinking literacy: A dialogue'
A chapter in *Literacy – Reading the word and the world*
by Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (pp48–49)
Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., Massachusetts 1987

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# A

**English for a critical mind** is English that invites the mind to see things from a critical perspective, and aims to stimulate reflection, critique, and – ultimately – action.

This book provides a straightforward introduction to Critical Language Pedagogy.

In the book we write directly to you the reader – someone who teaches English – and we explain the ideas associated with Critical Language Pedagogy and its close neighbour, English as a Lingua Franca, in as direct a way as we can.

*English for a Critical Mind* is divided into three parts:
In the beginning of this first part – Part A – we define Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP):

- We then consider what we call 'critical understandings', both of language in general and of English in particular.
- We then explain what English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is, and why it is a concept that should be used when teaching English from a critical stance.
- We then go on to a review of syllabus and materials, within the framework of CLP and ELF, and say something about assessment in this context.

In the second part – Part B – you will discover an eminently practical collection of materials:

- It is intended to suggest what fully worked-out materials in this area could look like.
- It makes extensive use of the *English for a Critical Mind* website to provide accessible materials that both students and teachers can take advantage of.
- It presents a series of Draft Handouts which prepare the way for a collection of Sample Units.

In the third and final part – Part C – we aim to help you, the teacher, to undertake further development, both personal and professional, in this challenging but hugely rewarding field:

- We invite you to review – and reflect on – any initial attempts you may have made in this area.
- We suggest further consideration of actions that might emerge from your teaching in this area.
- We encourage you to develop a teacher network which will support these further explorations of Critical Language Pedagogy and English as a Lingua Franca.

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*English for a Critical Mind* will break new ground for a lot of teachers, and may draw you away from your comfort zones. We sincerely hope that the opportunities it opens up – and the results it hopes to make possible – will make the journey through the landscape of Critical Language Pedagogy as exciting as it is challenging.

Part A of *English for a Critical Mind* is divided into six sections:

**Critical Language Pedagogy**
   What is Critical Pedagogy?
   Origins of Critical Pedagogy
   Key concepts of Critical Pedagogy
   What is Critical Language Pedagogy?
   Why Critical Language Pedagogy?
   Key values of Critical Language Pedagogy
   Key features of classroom practices

**Critical understandings of language and English**
   What is language?
   A critical understanding of language
   Standard languages as constructs of power
   Additional language learning
   Language learners and the classroom
   Critical learning, critical literacy and English
   The dominance of English
   The spread of English and ELT
   The phenomenon of English

**Language and English as a Lingua Franca**
   What is English as a Lingua Franca?
   What can teachers do with ELF?

**Syllabus, materials and assessment for CLP**
   The organisation of a syllabus
   The materials in Critical Language Pedagogy
   Assessment in Critical Language Pedagogy

**Setting up activities for CLP**
   Managing student expectations
   Negotiating the syllabus
   Providing attitudes and techniques for critical dialogue
   Clarifying rules for classroom participation

**Integrating CLP and ELF**
   Focusing on Critical Language Pedagogy
   Focusing on English as a Lingua Franca

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*English for a Critical Mind*

You can access

all the complementary digital material for the book at

www.allango.co.uk

# Critical Language Pedagogy

We begin by providing a basic introduction to Critical Pedagogy (CP) and Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP). We define them, consider important conceptual aspects of them, and go on to list and briefly discuss some of their key elements.

There are, of course, practical features that teachers who want to explore Critical Language Pedagogy should be thinking of trying out, even as they are reading about its more abstract aspects – for example:
- student input into class content and themes;
- participatory curriculum development;
- classroom management.

We will be discussing those practical applications at a later stage.

## What is Critical Pedagogy?

Critical Pedagogy (CP) is a view of curriculum, materials and instructional practices that is intended to foster social justice.

Teachers adopting this view hope to do this through practices *inside* the classroom, and connections that may be made to *outside* the classroom.

The emphasis on social justice suggests that there is not sufficient justice in society as it exists at present, and that education – here, *language* education – could contribute to improving matters. In this case:
- Justice does not mean people following the laws, or justice being served – as in a law-abiding society.
- It refers to justice in terms of *fairness*, which comes from an emphasis on *equality*.

If people are very unequal, this means a few have a lot and many have little:
- If you live in a democratic country, or if you have democratic values, you may think that this is not a good thing. Indeed, some would say that high levels of inequality are inherently bad for democracy itself. Justice – as fairness – can also sometimes be seen to be applied unequally, across different kinds of people.
- If you think that women, ethnic minorities, the old, the poor, the disabled, are not – in general, or in some cases – being treated as well as men, majority group members and the rich, then you may say that this society is socially unjust. If you do so on the basis of evidence or analysis (as opposed to mere assertion), you are then engaging in a critical analysis of society.

This means *constructive* criticism: not just criticism for its own sake, but critical analysis to address specific social conditions, or to solve particular problems.

With some kind of accurate analysis, we all might be able to take the right sort of action to improve matters.

In respect to the foregoing:
- If you are a student or a teacher and you want your view of the world (of the kind just mentioned) to *count* in your role as student or teacher – in your school or professional educational work – then you are in search of a critical theory of education.
- If you are an *additional language* student or teacher, you might also be interested in Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP), the subject of this book.

# Origins of Critical Pedagogy

People have been teaching with the intention of improving society as long as there has been education.

Ways of doing formal and informal education based on a critical analysis of society and what is needed, particularly in a democracy, to increase the amount of freedom, equality and sense of community (to take three key values often associated with democracy itself) have become more visible – in societies influenced by democratic values – since the French and American revolutions.

These include:
- The Romantic tradition in Europe.
- The educational ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1] (that favoured the natural growth of children in schools).
- The ideas of progressive education that bore full fruit in the ideas of John Dewey [2].
- The more radical views of society and the role of freedom in schools that produced a range of alternative schools.
- Catholic ideas about a preferential option for the poor …

All eventually manifested themselves in the – at first, little known – first language literacy programmes associated with a Brazilian philosopher of education, Paulo Freire (1973 [3]; 1994 [4]; 2000 [5]):
- Freire was particularly active and successful in his informal literacy programmes in Brazil in the early 1960s (after at least a decade of work).
- Forced into exile by a military take-over of the government, he continued his work and began to write more: first in Chile, briefly in the US, and then in Switzerland – where his work with the World Council of Churches enabled him to travel extensively and publish more widely.

As early as 1973, his ideas were being used in US adult immigrant literacy programmes, and they began to appear in a few language textbooks in the mid-1980s.

# Key concepts of Critical Pedagogy

In the long run, the Critical Pedagogy perspective is intended to encourage and support individuals working together to improve their lives under the general heading, again, of 'social justice'.

That is to say – it has an *action orientation*, and invites the following two questions:
- What is needed for effective social action to address inequity and ensure fairness?
- What does Critical Pedagogy believe is needed?

A key concept is 'critical consciousness' (originally, *conscientização* in Portuguese):
- This means: both the ability to see what is wrong with society, and a disposition to act to do something about it (again, with the democratic values mentioned earlier uppermost).
- Relatedly, this means: having a sense that we humans do – to some extent, at least – make our own destiny.

Together – better than individually – we have a chance to change history.

But let us not exaggerate:
- This could be in small steps.
- This could certainly concern immediate problems and local issues.

Or, inspired by Freire's ideas, we could make a difference by supporting the changes that our students want – addressing issues and problems that *they* identify, in dialogue with *us*.

So how would this critical consciousness be developed?
- Does a student have it already, or – if they do not – where does it come from?
- Does a teacher working from this perspective necessarily have it?

Freire was optimistic about human capacities, and insistent upon avoiding imposition.

Thus, he placed much emphasis on *dialogue*.

Critical Pedagogy in general – and language professionals who operate from a Critical Language Pedagogy perspective – believes that, through talking things out in a probing but egalitarian way, *analysis*, and then *action*, will be fostered.

We discuss (or dialogue), we talk and think, we reflect on problems – and perhaps draw conclusions about why they exist, and how they might be addressed. That is to say, amongst other things: we theorise from practical matters, carefully inspected, and we make plans – and, if we are facing problems, we try to solve them:
- If our solutions work, we draw conclusions (again), supporting our theory.
- If they don't, we try to figure out why, revising our initial theory, and – if conditions allow – we return to the drawing board with further plans for more action.

This means: theory and practice are related, and the results of practice feed into how we understand our work – that is, our theory.

This interactive cyclical understanding is called *praxis.*

# What is Critical Language Pedagogy?

Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP) – that is, teaching languages for social justice – is the application of Critical Pedagogy ideas and principles to the teaching of additional languages:
- It is a perspective on teaching second, additional, heritage or other languages which reflects values associated with social justice and democracy – eg liberty, equality and solidarity.
- It is associated with a theory of education in which the work of Freire is seen as central.
- It is characterised by some concepts that are prominent within it, such as dialogue and critical consciousness.
- It is strongly opposed to teachers telling students what to do or think (which it calls 'banking education') and puts the students in active roles, giving them much more responsibility for input into content, materials and assessment than is usual, signalling this by terms such as 'participatory' or 'emancipatory'.

In CLP, the word 'critical' is used in a variety of ways – including the general questioning of assumptions, but also the questioning of the status quo in societies, which is typically viewed as inequitable, such as that societies are unequally divided in terms of class, race and gender (to list only a few possible sites or sources of oppression).

A final term of importance used to characterise CLP is that it is – or, specifically, the role of the teacher is – 'problem-posing'.

It is not the role of the teacher to problem-*solve*. The teacher should be:
- working with students and engaged with identifying problems faced by the students or by society – whether small or large – and over time;
- working towards developing actions that address these problems;
- working up skills and dispositions that enable the students to be active citizens (Crookes, 2013 [6]; 2021 [7]).

# Why Critical Language Pedagogy?

Why might a teacher wish to explore a CLP orientation?

There are a number of reasons why a teacher might come to explore this perspective, and one way of characterising this would be to say that they are acting out of – or seeking the rewards that come from – unifying one's daily work with one's *values*.

Initial questions are:
- How do you, the teacher reading this, view your occupation as a teacher?
- Is it something you do just to bring in a wage, or is there more to it than that?

This is not to deny the value of labour: a good day's work for a good day's pay – though often teachers in general, and language teachers along with them, do not get decent pay for their hard work:
- If this is your experience, you might ask why that is – is it some meanness on the part of your particular boss, or a manifestation of something larger that is wrong with society?
- If you are not so concerned with pay, or if money is not what makes language teaching worthwhile for you, then it may be that it is the pleasure you get out of helping students in general – or helping them to learn a language in particular.

But does the language the students learn really help them?
- If we look carefully at those of our students who are not already 'helped' in society (by being well-off, able-bodied, and from enfranchised, mainstream parts of society), the answer may not necessarily be 'yes'.
- In which case, as we get satisfaction from helping our students, the question naturally follows: In what ways can language teaching practices be organised to best assist those in society who most need help?

If you do not see your role as a teacher as similar to that of a worker, then probably you would describe yourself as a *professional*.

As mentioned before, this is not to say that we do not value workers – but, here, we are drawing a parallel between professionals and values.

# Key values of Critical Language Pedagogy

What does it mean to be a professional?
- It means that you have both specialised knowledge, and values that guide your use of that knowledge.
- It means that you undertake your role with a sense of your moral responsibility to your students and – let us not forget – society as a whole.

Professionals are trained and specially educated to fulfill significant roles in society. Their responsibilities are broad:
- But are you being *treated* as a professional?
- If not, in what ways can you continue in your employment so as to improve your situation, or to improve society so that it will make better use of those with professional capacities and intentions?

These questions suggest taking up a position with regard to additional language teaching that is inquiring – that looks at the teacher's role and responsibility to students and to society in terms of critique and improvement.

It does so out of a position that could be described also in terms of a person's *values*.

As a professional, you do have values, and a responsibility to society. So, it is always important to ask:

■ Are you able to act fully out of those values?
■ And, finally, what might those values be?

As we have said, the values most clearly associated with CLP are those of democracy, which is to say (at least) the famous three: liberty, equality and fraternity – or, better, in this non-gendered age: *solidarity*:

■ CLP is certainly aligned with democracy, and would like to enable teachers and students – and their societies and the cultures they live in – to have more, not less, democracy.
■ Arguably, many of the problems the less well-off members of society face would be at least more likely to be solved if there were more democracy – that is to say, if more ordinary people had a say in how things are done, in daily life and in the long run, in matters small and large.

So then, if you stand for democratic values, and they are part of, or inform, your professional values as well, you would have much greater personal and professional satisfaction – even if you were underpaid and overworked – if at least *some* of the time your teaching and curriculum would match, respond to, and march with, your democratic values.

And perhaps your *students* would feel some of the same satisfaction, too.

Questions arise, of course:

■ Specifically, how could this be done?
■ What would education, a school, a language classroom or literacy programme look like – if it were to foster such analyses and actions?
■ Would it be just the same as usual?
■ How different would it have to be?
■ Where would a teacher – a language teacher – start?
■ What problems might they face?

We shall endeavour to answer these questions in the following pages.

## Key features of classroom practices

If we are to have democracy in society, and if school – or education – prepares young people for being members of society (or provides additional development for adults within already existing societies), then it might seem to be logical that democracy should be practised in the educational system: in the school, and in the classroom itself.

Yet a moment's thought will remind us how undemocratic most classrooms (not to mention other social institutions) are. In some schools, yes, there is some degree of student choice:

■ But often this stops, even in higher education, at the point when a particular class or course has been selected.
■ After that, the content is chosen by the teacher or mandated by the curriculum, the administration, or the institution.
■ And very often, the assignments, the learning activities, the way the students will be assessed, the duration of class periods, the acceptable forms of behaviour and interaction, and so on, are not up for discussion.

If lecture or grammar explanations dominate, or even if there is communicative interaction:

■ Does the student have much input into all or any of this?

■ What, if anything, does it have to do with society at large?

■ And what may be wrong with it, or in need of improving action?

Starting from the earliest days of Freirean Critical Pedagogy – with its short-term, intensive programmes of localised, on-site, adult, literacy instruction – classroom and curricular practices that follow from the prioritisation of democratic practices and dialogue were developed.

Some of the key features that emerge out of this are:

1. Critical needs analysis.
2. Use of images, extracts of speech or text, and realia as 'codes' – that is, projective devices to stimulate commentary, discussion, inquiry and potential action.
3. Participatory materials development – or, at least, student input into class content and themes, supported by dialogue, among students and between teacher and student(s).
4. Negotiated classroom management.
5. Participatory assessment.
6. A problem-posing role – and a facilitating role – for the teacher.
7. An inquiry perspective, in which the teacher may learn along with the students.
8. A focus on practical issues that the students identify, working together with the teacher.
9. Real-world content and realia.
10. The development of critical thinking – about real-world problems.

Most of these points will be visible in the units of the central part of this book, Part B. The sample units of student activities there are intended to assist you in trying things out for yourself, with some confidence.

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We turn now to the matter of language itself, viewed from a critical perspective – with, of course, the primary focus on English.

We can ask ourselves:
How do we view English itself from a critical point of view – so as to teach it from a CLP perspective?

That is the question we start to answer in the following sections.

# Critical understandings of language and English

In this section, we discuss what critical understandings of language means when it comes to additional language learning and, more specifically, English Language Teaching (ELT).

We recognise that standard languages (ie those languages that are used as norms of correctness) are constructs of power (as we shall see), and that language learning itself does not happen independently of power and ideologies.

## What is language?

Looking at the concept of language, we can surely arrive at different definitions, depending on the perspective we affiliate to.

In a broader sense, language can be taken as a cultural construct, the principal means of human beings' socialisation and meaning-making:

- Michael Halliday (2001) **8** states, for instance, that language does not passively reflect reality. On the contrary, as a resource for meaning, language actively creates reality.
- Sue Wright (2004: 5) **9** goes beyond that, arguing that 'whatever the origins of the human language ability turn out to be, […] language may be partly a biological phenomenon, [but] it is also a social construct and a cultural artefact'.

In other words, language both creates reality and it is created by it.

Of course, language teachers know that language is something created by, or emerging from, culture. But we do not usually think too much about this when we are teaching.

Notably, with the emphasis on power in Critical Language Pedagogy, we *should* think about it:

- This is because our task as teachers goes beyond the process of passing on information in a teacher-centred way (ie while students sit in front of us and listen to us lecture).
- Paulo Freire would refer to this process of uncritical transmission of information as 'banking education' – a concept that a CLP perspective rejects.

In many contexts around the world, language emerges from culture by way of power, and manifests itself as the 'standard' language. Teachers are aware of the power of the standard language, but in CLP they are encouraged to empower their learners to *challenge* this view (of the standard) and add other varieties to their linguistic repertoire – highlighting the implications this may bring to their lives.

Language is inextricably intertwined with power, and there is every hope that language teachers have such an awareness:

- The *world* is full of examples of historical events in which power is exercised over dominated groups and societies through language, especially through colonialism.
- The *language classroom* – even though it is often taken as a world apart – is actually a reflection of the real world, and teachers cannot ignore such a condition.

The writer bell hooks (real name Gloria Jean Watkins) put her pen name – adopted to honour her great-grandmother, who she admired – in lowercase letters, to draw attention to the power of standard language practices.

As bell hooks (1994) **10** asserts, language can be used to shame, humiliate and colonise, but – depending on how we pass it on to our students – it may be used to *fight* all this: becoming, on the contrary, a weapon to free, empower, and decolonise.

So, within the realm of CLP, language is to support an alternative world view, and serve – above all – as a potential site of resistance. In other words, under CLP, power is a very important element, but always to be used in favour of social justice and the well-being of the societies of which we are members.