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Critical Pedagogy in a Māori-Medium Setting

Abstract

Authentic self-determination for indigenous peoples within secondary schools means making legitimate and meaningful 'space' for an indigenous worldview which is reflected throughout the curriculum. A Māori-medium setting in a mainstream school provides the perfect background for this as it inherently challenges the status quo that perpetuates the language and culture of the subjugating dominant culture. It is argued here that through a collaborative approach that emphasizes critical pedagogy, indigenous learners can be given the opportunity to succeed on their own terms and through their own indigenous culture and language. The teachings of the critical pedagogues can be brought into a bilingual classroom to liberate the minds of our Māori students.

Introduction

One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding (Freire, 1970, p. 84).

I continue to be a classroom teacher, riding the ebbs and flows of four terms and confronted by sways of young adults moving in and out of my classroom on an hour by hour basis.

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The end of each term is still characterised by the sort of fatigue only a teacher will understand and the sense of failure when one (or a few) of my students fall through the cracks is still raw. I am a Māori teacher who teaches Māori teenagers within an educational construct that reflects the values and language of the dominant culture while attempting to hold indigenous 'space' (often unsuccessfully). The objective neutrality that positivists would ask of me is impossible. I am not apologetic about this: personal investment by educators is necessary to bring about different outcomes that challenge the status quo that perpetuates inequality for Māori. Understanding the position that we, as Māori educators, have within the construct is imperative in order to conscientise and liberate Māori learners.

Considering critical pedagogy within our classrooms requires sharp focus on our own positioning in the learning environment. Are we simply cogs in the system (which in one way or another is unavoidable as we are always working within it) or do we critique and power-share with our students to provide space so that they might liberate themselves from the hegemonic substructures that they did not choose?

Occupying 'indigenous space' in a Māori-medium bilingual setting within a mainstream high school provides a potent juxtaposition for emancipatory teaching and learning. Assertions of self-determination within this context highlight inherent and invisible subjugating power-relationships that can be used as a platform to conscientise the learners in our classrooms. An English classroom within a bilingual setting negotiates between the teaching of the dominant language with its unavoidable Eurocentric worldview while continuing to aspire towards revitalising an indigneous language and culture that has been marginalised. The negotiation of these, at times, binary aspirations offers an interesting backdrop for discussion about what critical pedagogy might be like in a Māori medium classroom such as this and how this context might promote agency in its learners in the English curriculum area.

In the first section of this paper I will begin by discussing critical pedagogy and its theoretical roots alongside how it has been applied in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Secondly, I will discuss some examples of how I have applied critical pedagogy in an English Year 9 bilingual classroom. This is a subjective teacher's exploration of the journey towards bringing theory into practice in the unique environment of teaching English in a Māori-medium classroom.

Critical Pedagogy

It is almost impossible to discuss critical pedagogy without calling on the seminal work of Paulo Freire. Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has arguably shaped much modern thinking in the global educational landscape. This work continues to resonate with generations of educators and is central to many programmes of study for teacher training. Its universal message transcends the context of feudal Brazil that it originally emerged from. Within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, values intrinsic to critical pedagogy in Māori education are reflected through the Kaupapa Māori schooling movement. This movement was initiated by Māori in response to the dire position of te reo Māori identifying that the mainstream education system was systemically failing and disenfranchising Māori children (Nepe, 1991; Ka'ai, 1990; Renwick, 1991; Smith, 1997; 2000 & 2003).

At the heart of Freire's (1970) pedagogy is the humanisation of society and the acknowledgement that education has the capacity to liberate at sites where unequal power-relationships exist. He challenges the ways in which dominant cultures reproduce knowledge that maintains the status quo which then denies power to the disenfranchised. Of particular importance is Freire's fervent opposition to the "banking model" of education preferred by the dominant culture. This model that treats learners as passive receptacles into which teachers deposit knowledge (p. 52). The traditional didactic approach

described here is brought into question. To counter the 'banking model', Freire proposes a dialogic approach that encourages a two way conversation. This conversation relies on a reciprocal relationship between teacher and learner to emancipate the subjugated through education (p. 102).

The journey towards liberation is recognised as a shared interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed. It is not something that the oppressor 'gifts' to the oppressed or something that the oppressed can acquire without the oppressor recognising that making 'space' is necessary. Emancipation is a 'conscious' and deliberate process whereby transcendence from oppression is possible. As already indicated, in Freire's world emancipation can be realised through a dialogic approach. Within this context, the dialogue necessary exists between the dominant culture, derived from a eurocentric worldview from a British colonial heritage and Māori as the indigenous people. Within the context of a school, power and success is readily afforded to those who are from the dominant culture and assimilation is necessary for many Māori learners (and educators).

While Freire (1970) believes that a dialogic approach can circumvent these power-dynamics, Fanon (1961) on the other hand believes that "decolonisation" can only be realised through violence. He argues that "decolonization" which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder" (p.35). Freire's focus on dialogue as the pathway to transcend oppression is countered by Fanon's (1961) theory in which decolonization cannot be actualized through "friendly understanding" (p. 36). Reflecting on my own practice, a Freirean dialogic approach aligns more closely with my pedagogy. There is no place within my classroom for violence in any form. Compassion, including that for the oppressors makes more sense for me and the way that I teach. I do however accept that violence is not necessarily of the physical kind that we all immediately think of. Resistance in a multitude of ways can characterize the insurgence that challenges power and

equates to the 'violence' of which Fanon approves. In this connection, it is relevant to note that one example of the power of violence in achieving transformation is the suppression of te reo Māori as part of the process of the colonization of New Zealand. This involved, among other acts of violence, the enactment of legislation that excluded te reo Māori language from classrooms, which represented a systematic attack on the intergenerational transfer of language (Barrington & Beaglehole, 1974; Cacciopoli & Cullen, 2006; Penetito, 2010). This act of violence towards Māori and their ancestral language shows how the dominant culture's values can supersede those of the minority culture. The values of the dominant culture infiltrate the collective social psyche and, in the absence of critique of unequal power-relationships the dominant mindset reigns supreme.

As (Fanon, 1967 p.38), among many others, have observed, language and culture are intimately related and "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (p.127). Thus, one of the first stages in the colonization of indigenous peoples is often to launch an attack on the ancestral language in which their culture is embedded. However, critical pedagogy has tools that can be used to help counter the impact of this, tools developed by, among others, Darder (1991), Freire (1970), Giroux (2001) and McLaren (1994). The work of bell hooks (1994; 2003) is particularly relevant when considering Māori education in the context of critical pedagogy because her work draws on spirituality and wellbeing as part of her pedagogic framework and these have a natural place within a Māori worldview.

Hooks' (1994) emphasis on 'wellbeing' resonates closely with my own aspirations for critical pedagogy in my classroom. Humanising my classroom and vehemently rejecting the banking model which serves to dehumanise provides a place where dialogue and wellbeing can flourish. I aspire to bring compassion, connection and reciprocity into the teaching and learning that occurs in my classroom. The well-being of both the

learner and the educator is of the utmost importance for meaningful and transformational learning. The interconnectedness of both the teacher and the learner is of also of the utmost importance. Added to this is the importance of incorporating Māori pedagogy or expressions of Kaupapa Māori unto pedagogical frameworks, thus adding the layers of responsibility and energy required to enact critical pedagogical approaches. It is this type of approach that hooks (1994) had in mind when she observed that 'progressive, holistic education', 'engaged pedagogy' is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. Unlike them, it emphasizes wellbeing and so teachers must be actively involved, and committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students (hooks, 1994 p.15). This 'self-actualization' shares common characteristics with Freire's (1970) notion of conscientization which involves both the oppressor and the oppressed coming to know themselves within their respective contexts and, in doing so, bringing about transformation, acting as 'change agents'.

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (hooks 1994 p.207).

So much is involved in hooks' concept of educational transformation that reflecting on it can be daunting for Māori educators. Finding ways for educators to make connections between the literature and their practice is important work. There are so many challenges and barriers to be overcome in a context where mainstream power dynamics prevail. Even so, it gives us hope. Our learning space *can* be re-imagined to reflect our ideals. Pedagogy based on aroha and liberation and

underpinned by our ancestral language *can* sit at the centre of our practice. Finding allies within the mainstream *is* possible.

From theory to practice: Critical pedagogy in a Year 9 bilingual English classroom

I am powerfully aware that teaching English in a bilingual programme (or any Māori-medium programme) is a political act in itself. An English teacher has the capacity to subjugate through teaching within a curriculum area that traditionally carries the literature and societal values that come directly from a eurocentric worldview. However, the capacity to emancipate and conscientise is always present in every classroom. To do so, however, in an English classroom within a Māori-medium setting requires careful planning in order to ensure that the classroom is not a site of struggle.

Critical pedagogy requires practitioners to bring theory into practice. Within bilingual classrooms there is often a mixture of learners: some are fluent in te reo Māori, some have limited te reo Māori; and some with none at all. Furthermore, some students do not have Māori whakapapa (genealogy) and choose a Māori-medium pathway for a number of reasons. Some are attracted to the whānau environment and some are interested in offering a bilingual pathway for their children. Providing a space for inclusiveness and providing for differing bilingual (and inevitably multicultural) needs in the classroom demands careful consideration. Can the voice and prior knowledge of each student be appropriately considered in a context where the acquisition of academic literacy skills necessary for successful interactions with the wider world is so important? The answer to this question is provided by Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008, p. 51):

In no way, shape or form did our focus on academic literacy compromise our commitment to critical pedagogy and to literacy education for individual freedom and social change. In fact, we felt that it was only within a pedagogy firmly committed

to freedom and social change that we were able to motivate students to develop sophisticated academic literacies.

The nature of an English classroom offers a teaching and learning environment conducive to a critical pedagogy approach. As English teachers, we have the opportunity to look deeply at text, to unearth meaning and to critique and question. The lens that we look through can either oppress or liberate the students within our classroom. There is the temptation within a classroom committed to critical pedagogy to choose texts that feature 'marginalized' and 'othered' people. However, Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008, p. 52) note that "an oppressive rendering of a culturally diverse text is still oppressive". In fact, close critical examination of canonical texts can provide useful opportunities for liberatory practice, opportunities to infiltrate the psyche of the dominant culture and to critique its values and ideologies. There is significant power in the ability of learners to draw comparisons and to see themselves in the characters and themes of canonical texts such as those by Shakespeare, Toni Morrison, the Romantic poets and even ancient Greek plays and literature (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, pp. 52-53). The most important element in implementing critical pedagogy when addressing texts such as these is ensuring that the process of exploring the texts is liberating for learners. It is certainly important that Māori learners within a Māori-medium setting have "something to say about Shakespeare" (p.53).

Although the study of these canonical texts that characterise many traditional English classrooms is important, it would be remiss to ignore the plethora of texts that draw on Māori stories. Such texts find a natural home in a Māori-medium classroom. There is powerful literature and films that explore the inner-workings, complexities and societal dynamics of contemporary and historical Māori life. The exploration of these texts provides opportunities to critique the characters and themes and discuss the ways in which they perpetuate or

challenge the power-relationships that are inherent in our society.

Within a Māori-immersion setting, particular consideration is always given to the promotion of bilingualism and biliteracy, something that adds to the development of the first language (te reo Māori) for those students who are fluent. As Cummins (1994; 2000) demonstrates, it is important to select a pedagogical approach to second language learning that does not undermine in any way the richness and fluency of the first language (in this case te reo Māori). He argues (Cummins, 1994) that there are two main types of language proficiency that need to be promoted - Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Since "[conceptual] knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible" (p. 39), it follows that the teaching of English in the context of Māori immersion schooling need not, and should not, involve the exclusion of Māori language and culture.

The strategies necessary for the development of CALP are necessarily metacognitive in nature, involving the use of strategies that engage those executive processes that promote self-awareness in relation to planning, monitoring and evaluating learning progress (see, for example, Borkowski, 1987; Brown, 1987; Flavell, 1979 & 1987). 'Thinking about thinking' involves developing self-awareness and gaining control over cognitive processes and this plays an important role in the implementation of critical pedagogy. Moving through English texts with a set plan and a pre-established and negotiated critical lens in place is one of the things that really matters. Ensuring that the learners are aware of this lens through explicit teacher modelling and ample opportunities for reflection and metacognitive engagement creates an appropriate starting point to help students achieve success.

As an example, I refer here to a unit of work I created in order to explore the concept of 'gender'. Before we began closely studying the texts that I had chosen, there was a discussion of

some of the main issues considered within the context of gender studies. The first 'hook' was a YouTube video of a slam poem written by a group of teenage boys that discussed feminist issues from their perspective. This juxtaposition of teenage boys and feminism was likely, I believed, to provide a useful platform from which to begin. After brainstorming, students used the Internet to gather information about feminism, the underachievement of boys, cultural gender roles, modern pressures that men face, changing roles, historical perspectives on gender and any other issues that emerged during the initial discussion were brought forth. Also of considerable importance was collecting information about Māori concepts of gender and relationships between gender and spirituality. After this, I selected several texts (visual, audio-visual, written, oral) that provided opportunities to explore more deeply (through reading, discussion and writing) the construct of 'gender'. This thematic exploration provided the students with an opportunity to create a presentation in English or te reo Māori (a speech, a piece of creative or expository writing or an audio visual creation). Throughout the unit, emphasis was placed on the fact that finding and creating meaning and thinking critically are fundamental to the learning of English, just as they are to the learning of te reo Māori. Transferring these skills between the two languages facilitated the development of CALP in each of them.

Conclusion

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the existing system, creating conformity or becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which people deal critically and creatively with the status quo and discover ways of subverting it and participating in the process of transformation of their world (Freire, 1970, p.34). I attempt, in my classroom, to avoid perpetuating and reproducing the status quo that subjugates

sections of society who are not part of the dominant majority, I do this by critiquing and questioning and by providing the necessary space for my learners to come to know themselves in context as Māori. Using the vehicle of our ancestral language and culture as a platform from which to explore texts in English mainstream texts to help us to reach a fuller understanding of the forces that shape our world and the opportunities that exist for transforming it. I experience that co-creation (myself and my students) of a transformatory learning environment that characterizes critical pedagogy as liberating and I hope that my students do too. Certainly, ongoing reflection on the continual sites of struggle colours my practice as a teacher.

Kaua e mate wheke mate ururoa!

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