Critical Pedagogy: Helping Transform Student Lives Through Critical Thought

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CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: HELPING TRANSFORM STUDENT LIVES THROUGH CRITICAL THOUGHT

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PREFACE

When I made the decision to write a thesis I had no idea what a major undertaking it would be. I did know, though, that my topic had to be something I was interested in and something that pertained to my area of study. After talking with several different professors about possible topics and consulting completed theses in the library, I decided to write my thesis on critical pedagogy, a radical teaching methodology.

I was first introduced to critical pedagogy in a foreign language methodology course taught by Tomas Graman. The different methodology intrigued me as much then as it does now. I wanted to know more about Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator who re-introduced critical pedagogy in modern times, more of what critical pedagogy meant to traditional student and teacher roles, and what critical pedagogy meant in defining knowledge. When Tomas suggested critical pedagogy as a possible thesis topic, I decided it was a perfect opportunity for me to research critical pedagogy and possibly answer the questions I had already formed.

Deciding my general topic turned out to be one of the easiest parts of the process. It was difficult, though, to narrow my topic to specific areas of critical pedagogy. If I learned anything researching and writing this thesis, I learned how large a topic critical pedagogy is and how much information is available.

As I read and researched, I slowly narrowed my topic. I decided that one of the best ways to examine critical pedagogy and
its theory of knowledge was to examine the methodology which it challenges. Thus, I needed to also examine the traditional method and its epistemology. While reading information on the two pedagogies, I came across several opponents to critical pedagogy who argued that critical pedagogy, a pedagogy used to help bring increased literacy to Brazilian peasants, could not be transferred into the United States. Because this belief was so often used to argue against critical pedagogy, I decided to determine if critical pedagogy could be transferred and if it could, what it would mean to the traditional student and teacher roles.

Originally I had also planned to examine how critical pedagogy could be used specifically in a literature class at the high school level. What would be its implications in literature? How would it affect the canon issue and multi-culturalism? Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was not able to do as much research as I would have liked on these questions. In the end, I decided to leave out that section because I felt it was weak and detracted from the rest of my thesis. If I had to write this thesis over again, I would try to focus more on how critical pedagogy affects English classes.

Writing a thesis was a long, difficult, and often times frustrating process. However, I learned a great deal about critical pedagogy and I feel that my new knowledge on this topic will be helpful as I graduate and begin teaching English. Because my interest is piqued, I will continue to read what I can on critical pedagogy and its effects in literature. Looking back I can say that I am glad that I took on this challenge because it was an incredible
learning experience. However, I am relieved that I have finally finished.
The Banking Method and Its Epistemology

The traditional educational methodology, or "the banking method," a phrase coined by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, has been the basis of education in the United States for well over twenty years. In this method the instructor has very specific information or skills to teach to the learner, a student who supposedly lacks these skills. The students gain the information only from the teacher, neither bringing other information into the class nor contributing in any way (Sledd 504). The focus, in the traditional methodology, then, is on knowledge transfer. The teacher possesses a specific body of knowledge while the student does not. Through teaching, the instructor transfers his/her knowledge of the subject to the student. The student learns, usually through repetition and memorization, and claims it as his/her own knowledge after reproducing the transferred information on a test. The teacher knows that the transfer is successful if the student can pass the test. For example, in the short story "The Lady or the Tiger?" by Frank Stockton, a king uses an arena system in which the accused criminal must choose from two doors. If he chooses one door, a beautiful maiden will emerge. By choosing this door, he has proven his innocence and as a reward, the couple is married immediately. However, if he chooses the other door, a fierce tiger will emerge and devour the "guilty" party. This arena system serves not only as the kingdom's judicial system, but as a form of entertainment for the subjects as well. Textbooks comment on the conflicts involved in
the story, foreshadowing, character, and also irony. The McDougal, Littell Literature Book states

Irony is a contrast between what is expected and what actually exists or happens. The narrator says that "the minds of [the king's] subjects are refined and cultured" by witnessing the events in the arena. This statement is ironic because watching people being slaughtered is neither refining nor cultural. (164)

When using the banking method, the teacher tells the students that the statement "the minds of the subjects are refined and cultured" is ironic. There is no discussion, and the students do not question the teacher's statement. If the students can identify the statement on the test as ironic and explain why it is considered ironic, they will have mastered one of the teacher's objectives.

However, a number of educational theorists are now scrutinizing this methodology and discussing its limitations. The critique of the traditional model came about in part as people became concerned with the increasing passivity of today's youth. Because "man is [considered] a passive being" in this concept, the learner is "the object of learning to read and write, and not its subject" (Freire, Politics of Education 46). In the "banking model" of education, students are empty vessels to be filled with valuable information by the knowledgeable teacher. The educator is the one who knows the information while the student does not know.

"Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Para is Belem." The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really
means, or realizing the true significance of "capital" in
the affirmation "the capital of Para is Belem," that is,
what Belem means for Para and what Para means for
Belem. (Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed 58)

Paulo Freire is one of the leading opponents of the banking method
and an advocate of critical pedagogy, or the dialogical concept of
education. Sartre called this educational concept the "nutritionist
concept" of knowledge, which assumes that the students are
"informationally undernourished," and the teacher's job is to "feed" them the information.

Some feel that the banking method is promoting apathy among
the young people of today as well as indoctrinating them rather than enabling them to become critical thinkers. This idea of
indoctrination is one of the main problems that critics have with
this "banking" methodology. Rather than promoting new thought, the
banking method reinforces the reproduction of the same ideas, thus making schools into, as the Trilateral Commission stated,
"institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young"
(Macedo 186). The banking method does not encourage production of personal thoughts and views, it discourages it. Rather than promoting creative thought, it promotes reproduction of the thoughts and ideas of the former generation(s) in order to maintain the same values and beliefs. For example, in a history class one usually learns the reason why the United States becomes involved in an international crisis. Most still teach that the United States becomes involved for moral purposes, to make the world safe for democracy. Students should feel that the United States is a
wonderful rights and morals upholder. However, often times, the U.S. becomes involved in international affairs for many reasons other than moral. Many times the U.S. becomes involved for economic reasons. If the students learned that the U.S. becomes involved for reasons other than moral ones, they may begin to doubt the righteousness of the U.S.. Thus, many may continue to teach only the moral reasons for U.S. involvement in international affairs.

When all of the power rests in only a knowledgeable few, the danger of indoctrination increases simply because the few in power have the ability to define what all the others need to know. Those that see problems with the traditional method also argue that schooling is being used "as a device through which a corporate society reproduces its class-based structure" (Shor, Critical Teaching 2). Corporate society has the power in our society and they have the ability to control through the use of indoctrination. By serving cultural reproduction, we are undermining independent thought, and strengthening the "manufacture of consent" (Macedo 204). For example, how did so many arrive at tying yellow ribbons on their houses during the Gulf War? Was it individual analysis of the situation or simply public opinion and like-mindedness that led to this behavior?

Afraid that we were producing a society of like-minded robots, some educators began to grow concerned with not only "what" the students were thinking but "how" they were thinking and how to gain this knowledge. One of the key issues in education today is determining what kind of knowledge learners/students must possess in order to engage in and with the world as active, informed people.
Thus, educators began to look into the different types of knowledge and the type of knowledge that the banking method produces.

According to Deanna Kuhn, knowledge can be "measured" on a continuum ranging between two poles. In her schema for distinguishing among different kinds of knoweldge, she places at one pole the kind of knowing that "prevails because the knower never has considered otherwise. . ." (Thinking As Argument 173). I associate this type of knowledge with the banking method. The students know only the information given to them by the teacher. Other information or points of view are not considered. The students are not asked to contextualize this information, or to examine the assumptions or the implications of the information. They are not asked to make such information meaningful by discovering how it is related to their experiences. In the case of the irony found in "The Lady or the Tiger," the fact that members of some cultures value human life and justice differently than we do, and the fact that different historical contexts affect the definition of "refined and cultured" are not considered. An African tribe living in the Congo in the early 1900's may consider this system very refined and not at all barbaric, and the definition of "refined and cultured" at that time versus the definition in 1994 will be very different. By not allowing for discussion on different definitions of barbarianism according to historical context, the teacher is restricting the kind of knowledge that the students gain. By allowing for discussion, the students are able to analyze not only their own culture and what this culture considers barbarian, but that of other cultures and time periods as well. This analysis, in contrast to the more stratified, static
knowing promoted by information transfer, would promote a different kind of knowing, which Kuhn places at the other end of the continuum. At this end, "knowing is an ongoing process of evaluation, which the ever present possibility of new evidence and new arguments leaves always uncompleted" (Kuhn 173). Knowing, on this end of the continuum, is a dynamic enterprise. In a classroom that focuses more on this end of the continuum, a discussion of the different possibilities of what is barbarian and what is refined and cultured is possible. By embracing this end of the continuum or focusing more on the continuum as a whole, one gains a different and more encompassing kind of knowledge, the kind of knowledge reinforced through critical pedagogy.

In critical discussions such as the one that could occur with "The Lady or The Tiger?" students use two different kinds of knowledge. One kind of knowledge is based on their own processed and critically analyzed experience while the other kind of knowledge is that which people gain from an uncritical study of reading, and writing. Michael Polanyi describes two different kinds of human knowledge. He states,

What is usually described as knowledge, as set out in written words or maps, or mathematical formulae, is only one kind of knowledge; while unformulated knowledge, such as what we have of something we are in the act of doing, is another form of knowledge.

(The Study of Man 12)

Polanyi identifies this first type of knowledge as explicit knowledge and the second type as tacit knowledge. This distinction can be
clarified with an example: John knows how to ride a bike. This knowledge is tacit knowledge because he "knows" through "doing", through experiencing. However, John certainly does not know explicitly how to ride a bike and would not be able to write out a set of directions for bike riding. The difference between using the banking method and a critical method to talk about a topic such as "The Lady or The Tiger?" is that while one uses and may gain explicit knowledge, one does not usually use the tacit, experience-based knowledge within the banking method. The traditional method pays attention to explicit knowledge which I feel is limiting because by focusing only on this one type of knowledge, we are not using all of the knowledge creating resources naturally available to us. In critical discussions, however, both types of knowledge are used. Thus, we are using more of our natural capabilities in order to learn. The best example, I think, of making use of tacit knowledge within the dialogic or critical framework is, as Kuhn points out, permitting students to gain experience at argument. In putting forth an argument, students must think on their feet and test their argument by entering open debate, where evidence and logical argumentation are required. In this way, just as an expert violinist only becomes an expert violinist by practicing, a critical, argumentative thinker only becomes such through practice.

**Critical Pedagogy and Its Epistemology**

Critical pedagogy is a methodology that not only activates both explicit and tacit knowledge, but relies on critical thought as well. In critical pedagogy, tacit knowledge of experience forms the basis
of more abstract, theoretical explicit knowledge. For example, when studying *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair in a literature class, discussion may be grounded in the students' work experiences rather than in jumping straight to the book, thus giving the students a beginning point to serve for comparison and contrast. Such an approach is also supported by Piagetian research in cognitive development. This research has found that all new knowledge is based on the former knowledge of the students.

Critical thought also plays a large role in critical pedagogy. For Plato, true knowledge comes when one person makes a statement and another asks, "What do you mean?" Such a request forces the speaker to "re-say," that is, to say in different words, what he or she means. In the process he sees more deeply what he means, and responds to the perspective of another voice/viewpoint (Gee, 269). "Seeing more deeply" really is a key idea in critical thought. By questioning and analyzing, the learner makes the knowledge his "own" knowledge and applies it in his life. Knowledge is the most useful when one can apply it. For example, in studying *The Jungle*, one might be learning about the working conditions of the time and the new laws that came about as a result of those terrible conditions. However, if one can see how these laws have affected and impacted one's own life, such as the conditions that one is currently working in, the knowledge is much more meaningful and is more likely to be remembered and applied.

Critical thinking is the kind of thinking that enables one to create meaning as opposed to simply digesting the meaning others attribute to the information. In order to participate in critical
thinking, though, in order to create meaning and analyze alternatives, one must have an active imagination. As Comley states, "The stimulation of the imagination, and thus of creative thought, is integral to critical thinking" ("Critical Thinking/Critical Teaching" 624). Ann Berthoff states, "The making of meaning is the work of the active mind, of what used to be called the imagination—that power to create, to discover, to respond to forms of all kinds" (Forming Thinking Writing 2). An active mind is continually engaged in critical thought. According to Kuhn, central to this process [of thought] is reflection on one's own thinking—metacognition in its most basic and important sense—and beneath its surface is the structure of argument. It is this structure that must be in place for someone to hold a reasoned belief or make a reasoned judgment, which we can think of as the building blocks of educated thinking. (173-174)

This structure does not just happen as Kuhn and other researchers in cognition have discovered. It must be developed through actively undertaking critical thinking. A person does not learn to think critically because he/she has the details and facts.

Knowledge formed through critical thought is more meaningful and is therefore more easily applied to other areas. When studying percentages in a math class, a student may not feel that the information is very important and although the student may be able to pick up enough information to pass a test, the information will probably not slide into the student's long term memory. Only when the information is meaningful to the students will it get into the
long-term memory. The student may ask questions such as, "Why do I need to know percentages?" and "What do percentages have to do with me?" If a teacher can answer these questions or help the students to realize the answers to these questions, the information will be more meaningful. Thus, in the example, if the student realizes that he/she will need to know percentages in order to figure out how much a $245 stereo system will cost if it is 35% off, he/she will be more likely to be involved in the class and more likely to learn and apply the information.

Knowledge whose meaning is more readily seen is articulate intelligence because one can articulate or explain linkages and connections with other forms of knowledge. Critical thought and the articulate intelligence it produces can be contrasted with inarticulate intelligence. "Inarticulate intelligence can only group its way by plunging from one view of things into another. Knowledge acquired and held in this manner may therefore be called a critical" (Polanyi, The Study of Man 16-17). Critical pedagogy, a methodology considered radical by many because it questions the systematic reproduction of knowledge as the basis of education, produces the articulate intelligence based on both tacit and explicit knowledge. Educators committed to critical pedagogy believe that students need to engage in the use of both explicit and tacit knowledge and engage with different kinds of knowledge that span the entire continuum. We all have the capability to think and gain knowledge on all parts of the continuum, and by not bothering to use our tacit knowledge, we are not working to our full potential. Since the banking method only touches on certain kinds of knowledge, that knowledge which can be
gained through the uncritical studying of writing and reading, I feel that student learning could improve if we used a different methodology that focuses on all kinds of knowing and allows the students to become more active in their own education process thus liberating and empowering them to critically reflect on and discuss what is likely and what is not and how to improve on an idea or refute it. Deanna Kuhn, author of "Thinking as Argument" states I claim not only that this kind of thinking lies at the heart of what we mean--or should mean--by real-world intelligence, but also that no other kind of thinking matters more--or contributes more--to the quality and fulfillment of people's lives, both individually and collectively. (156)

In other words, it is this kind of thinking that truly forces the learner to become active and participate in the acquisition of knowledge. The educational method needed to enhance the possibility of learners gaining this control over their lives is critical pedagogy.

**Modern Beginnings of Critical Pedagogy**

In modern times, critical pedagogy had its beginnings in Brazil with educator Paulo Freire. Born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil, Paulo Freire spent his early life in poverty. His life of poverty enabled him to gain first hand experience of how the Brazilian educational system was largely responsible for maintaining the apathy and listlessness of the poor and creating a "culture of silence."

Overcoming his early education (or lack thereof), he eventually
became a professor of history and philosophy at the University of Recife in the early 1960's. He became involved with the peasants in the Brazilian Northeast during a literacy campaign he initiated and during his experiences with them, he developed a theory of literacy. This theory was based on the belief that every human being is capable of critically engaging the world in a dialogical encounter with others (McLaren 291). Every human being is capable of participating in a true discussion of ideas, analyzing the thoughts and opinions of others while formulating his or her own, and determining for himself or herself which ideas to hold on to and which ideas to throw out. This belief was extremely important because many of the peasants felt that they were not capable of joining others in a dialogical encounter.

Such critical engagement was facilitated by learning to read and write in a critical way, and the critical engagement not only resulted in increased literacy—the ability to encode and decode written language—but also enabled them to claim a kind of cultural freedom under an oppressive government system. Freire felt that by carefully studying their own lives, the lives the peasants were living uncritically, his students could begin to change their powerless places in society (Shor, Critical Teaching 48). The peasants had no power; only those people who held the higher positions, those who already "knew," were allowed to think and make decisions. Because the peasants did not know, they were not allowed a voice in their society, and they were denied, through a poor education system, the possibility of ever becoming "knowers." Thus, the students were relegated to a "culture of silence." In my
experience, this culture of silence, this having to already "know," also describes our educational system in the U.S..

Once in a "culture of silence," it is extremely difficult to break out of that mold, to realize that one does have a voice and an opinion which is just as good as any other. In the "culture of silence" the masses are "mute," that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore prohibited from being [fully human] (Freire, "Adult Literacy" 308). Because every human has the capability to creatively take part in society and in his/her own life, by not participating in this way, they are not working at their full human capacity and are thus denied the chance to become "fully human."

Under the government system, peasants were taught information in chunks, unrelated to anything. For example, a student in a Spanish language class learning to speak or read about green grass or the blue sky is an example of a student learning unessential information that is unrelated to anything. Why is learning to say "green grass" important? Will the student ever hold a discussion with a native Spanish speaker and need to know how to say "green grass?" Students need to learn essential information, information that they will use in their lives and they need to be allowed to think for themselves. The peasants were not allowed to think for themselves. Instead of stimulating the peasants' decision-making power, the teachers tended to act as parent-figures, keeping the peasants in a state of dependence (Freire, Politics of Education 32). By learning to think critically in the classroom, students learn to apply their new thinking in their own lives, in the work place, in the
home. According to C.H. Knoblauch in "Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue and Commitment,"

the ultimate motive for any transformation is, the need to be more fully human, the need to be more completely and more freely in the world. The instrument of transforming is dialogue, where competing representations of reality dynamically challenge each other to compose alternative forms of action. (125)

For Freire, dialogue, the "instrument of transformation," has to play an active role in education. In order to begin the act of knowing, students and teachers engage in authentic dialogue, a true exchange of ideas between teacher and students, as opposed to the teacher underestimating peasants' creativity and knowledge. This dialogue, by engaging students' imaginations and experiences as well as relying on information, transforms the students from dependent beings to independent beings. When participating in dialogues with others, one must process the information, analyze it, and then make decisions. These decisions are made independently. In contrast, those people who do not participate in dialogue with others end up with their decisions being made for them and they remain dependent on the other "decision-makers." Dialogue truly is the heart of critical pedagogy because it is through dialogue that one learns to think for oneself and gain power over one's own life.

Freire believes that a critical transformation needs to take place not only in the classroom, but in daily life as well, and dialogue in the classroom facilitates this transformation. In his theory of critical pedagogy, the students are converted from
manipulated objects into active, critical subjects. In so doing, the peasant would be seriously attempting to develop his/her self-expression so that it could be critically introduced into the real world of the peasants' environment. According to Ira Shor, a leading advocate of critical pedagogy in the U.S.,

For Freire, the literacy process, as cultural action for freedom, is an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator. . .a process through which men who had previously been submerged in reality begin to emerge in order to re-insert themselves with critical awareness. [They learn] the right of self-expression and world expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process. (48)

Critical education is important because it enables students to begin a personal transformation. While engaging in a personal transformation, often times, students begin to be their own agents for social change. As Shor states,

Critical learning aids people in knowing what holds them back; it encourages them to envision a social order which supports their full humanity. Through critical education, students gain skills which enable them to separate themselves from the manipulation of others (48). In leading to deeper meaning, the inward and critical analysis required ought to surpass any simplistic overview that leaves the learner on the surface of what is being discussed. For example, one
could simply say that that the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand was the cause of World War I. However, if one looks closely, one realizes that several internal conflicts led to the assassination. Thus, was it the assassination itself that caused the war, or was it several other things that simply culminated with the assassination? One could also learn that Hitler was the driving force of the Nazis during World War II and not look any deeper at the creation of the Nazis. However, something must have been going on in Germany to cause the German people to look to Hitler as a leader. By asking "Why did the Germans look to Hitler as a leader?," one is looking more deeply into the reason for the Nazi formation during World War II. As Freire states, "in the critical view we are here defending, the act of looking implies another, that of "admiring" or appreciating facts and opinions. We admire, and in our looking deeply into what we admire, we look inward and from within; this makes us see". (The Politics of Education 37). This critical attitude in studying is what has enabled me to begin seeing the reasons behind facts, not only in the subject areas but in the world as well (Freire, Politics 2). Like Freire, many people consider the best students at school not the ones who best, most completely memorize formulae, theories, or ideas, but the ones who are aware of the reasons for them (Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness 125). For Freire, the purpose of studying is not to consume ideas but to create and recreate them. This ability, though, does not necessarily come naturally once we get the facts. And the two are not logically sequential, but rather can be acquired together so that they work to support each other by building bridges to memory as well as
constantly experiencing the schema for critical argument or thinking. Critical thinking is a difficult process and takes practice. However, the time spent in practice of this process is well spent. As Shor states,

Critical teaching challenges the limits on thought and feeling. A critical classroom pushes against the conditioned boundaries of consciousness. When the class examines familiar situations in an unfamiliar way, transcendent changes become possible. Such an animation of consciousness can be formulated as extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary. (93)

One example of experiencing the familiar in an unfamiliar way would be to study the slave narratives from the time of the Civil War in a new way. The Civil War is a familiar topic and students are familiar with the usual curriculum which consists, for the most part, of works from the white male's point of view, ranging from stories told from the southern slave owner's perspective to that of the northern soldier. A slave's point of view about the Civil War would be very different from that of the slave owner's or the soldier's, and the familiar would become unfamiliar. Voltaire also commented on this concept. He stated,

A Carthaginian would not have written about the Punic Wars in the same tone as a Roman, and he would have charged Rome with the same bad faith that Rome imputed to Carthage. (37)

Thus, if we were to study the Punic Wars from Carthage's point of view, we would be learning an entirely different perspective than
those who study the Punic Wars from Rome's point of view. I feel that in order to fully learn about the Punic Wars or anything else, one must look at all perspectives. In so doing, we would be engaged in more critical thought.

**Movement of Critical Pedagogy into the U.S.**

Although many educators see the importance of critical education and would like to use it in classrooms in the United States, some educators feel that it may be difficult to "import" this methodology to the United States from Latin America. However, even though many differences exist between the Third World peasants of Brazil and the students in the U.S., the two are also similar in several ways, making the move of critical pedagogy to the U.S. relatively simple. As Macedo states,

> Both the instrumental literacy for the poor, in the form of a competency based skills banking approach, and the highest form of instructional literacy for the rich, acquired through the university in the form of professional specialization, share one common feature: They both prevent the development of the critical thinking that enables one to "read the world" critically and to understand the reasons and linkages behind the facts. (Literacy for Stupidification 187)

The students of the U.S. are clearly not illiterate Brazilian peasants. Some are, however, illiterate and/or poverty-stricken. U.S. students are usually powerless in the classroom and in society as well, and are usually dominated by the literate "knowing" segment
of society. Students, if taught in the traditional method, consume along with facts, the habit of not questioning assumptions, not questioning what others take as givens. Students are "dominated" unawares, by unquestioned knowledge and assumptions. U.S. students are powerless in many classrooms because they have no say; their input is not asked for when forming the syllabus, their opinion is not asked for during discussions. The teacher controls the entire classroom. The students are told what to think and believe; in this environment, dominant ideologies and common beliefs prevail. In this sense, like the Brazilian peasants, U.S. students often find themselves in a "culture of silence."

Also, like most of the Brazilian peasants, some U.S. students do not realize that they even have the capability of becoming active learners. Students, because they are so accustomed to having information handed to them and being told what to think, forget or may not realize that they are capable of investigating and finding this information on their own. Thus, when confronted with a critical class in which they are expected to dialogue with others, many are "incapable." They are incapable not because they lack the ability, but because they familiarity with the concept (or activity) of dialogue.

Like the students in Brazil, the students in the U.S. need to be able to "read the world critically and understand the reasons and linkages behind the facts" in order to realize their full potential as thinking human beings. (Macedo 187) Thus, the goal of teaching U.S. students is the same as for teaching the Brazilian students: teaching the students how to think critically and thereby helping them to take responsibility for their future. In using a critical
attitude towards studying, continually questioning, analyzing, and seeking answers, students reaches a much deeper meaning and his/her knowledge is more subtle and accurate. A different kind of knowledge results. The students now apply general concepts and the theoretical ideas to their own lives and the concepts become much more meaningful for the students because the information is important to them. The student who realizes that he/she needs to know percentages in order to determine the price of the sale-priced stereo will be much more likely to remember and apply the information. Percentages are important in his/her life. For this reason, he/she will be much more likely to learn.

Because critical thinkers identify and challenge assumptions, critical thinkers are a threat to existing social and political standards. They pose a threat because not only do they "identify and challenge assumptions," but also because they "imagine and explore alternatives" (Comley 623). For example, many times people assume that pie charts and bar graphs show accurate statistics. In a traditional class, the teacher may present these charts and graphs to the students and then expect students to learn the information from the charts for a test. Even if the information is incorrect, if the charts or graphs are flawed, the students will still learn that information. Some may not even look closely enough to realize that the graphs are flawed. However, in a critical classroom, a teacher may present the graphs to the students and then encourage the students to analyze and discuss the charts and the findings. Students who engage in critical pedagogy will not necessarily take the information from the charts for fact simply because they look
scientific or because the teacher presented them. Instead, these students will examine the graphs closely. It will be these students who discover that the percentages in the pie chart do not add up to 100 and thus can not be correct. Critical thinkers examine all alternatives and possible points of view. Students who engage in critical pedaogy will listen to the environmentalists who say we must save the trees, who say we must end logging because we may kill off the spotted owl or ruin the ozone layer. However, before jumping on the bandwagon, these critical thinkers will also examine the other side of the issue because they realize that there are other points of view. Before deciding that we need to stop all logging, these will students examine the logging industry, determining the number of possible job losses with the elimination of the logging industry and what the elimination of the logging industry will do to the economy. Before adopting opinions and decisions, critical thinkers become as fully informed as they possibly can. This enables them to make accurate, well-informed decisions which may lead to social change, an important part of critical pedagogy. They also continually work to develop their ability to think, especially about data and social and political issues. As Shor states, "Critical education prepares students to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture" (48). We need critical thinkers examining and questioning information, people who will think an issue through before acting, rather than acting impulsively on information they have simply accepted.
**Critical Pedagogy in Classroom Practice**

In critical pedagogy, classroom practices seek to enact or promote four experiences that help create learning. These elements include: motivation and cognitive disequilibrium, rigor and authentic dialogue. First, in order to begin the process of learning and knowing, the students need to become motivated by seeing a reason to learn, to ask questions, to enter into dialogue. Without motivation, the lesson will not go anywhere. The teacher and the students need to establish some meaning or reason why the material itself is important, instead of relying on some outside motivating factor like grades, etc.. As Shor says in *Pedagogy for Liberation*, "Tests, [external] discipline, punishment, rewards, the promise of future jobs, are considered motivating devices, alienated from the act of learning now" (5). This is all motivation outside the action of studying and learning. The students will be much more responsive if the motivation comes from within the students or at least from within the act of learning. One way a teacher and students can establish this type of motivation is if the students themselves develop the reasons for studying a particular subject which apply directly to their lives.

Another key factor in motivation is cognitive disequilibrium. To truly have an effective critical class, the teacher needs to promote the opportunity for some kind of cognitive disequilibrium or dissonance within the students by promoting a conflict regarding issues, or values of concern. The disequilibrium will allow the class to challenge previously unexamined assumptions aiding them to
change, or re-construct their way of thinking (Comley 625). People frequently work to overcome such dissonance in order to "equilibrate" themselves. They may also try to avoid the dissonance altogether. By re-organizing one's way of thinking about a topic in order to establish a cognitive balance, they will have successfully completed key processes in critical thinking and will be more likely to remember and use their new knowledge. Because of the discomfort created by disequilibrium, it increases student motivation. We should remember that part part of the discomfort also comes from instructional background that fosters passivity.

A third critical element is that of rigor. According to Freire, "Rigor is a desire to know, to search for an answer, a critical method of learning," or it could also be considered as communication that challenges the other to take part, to engage in an active search (Shor and Freire 14). The concept of rigor is not a static one. Rather, it is constantly changing because it is tied to the time and culture of the learner. This concept of rigor is not only an external rigor such as tests. It is an internal rigor as well because the students must actively search for and create meaning. To think critically is not an easy task. Rigor and responsibility are required if one is going to be involved in the "liberating" process of critical pedagogy; a process that "frees" individuals from the group mentality and encourages individual thoughts.

The final and probably most important element in critical pedagogy is authentic dialogue. According to Freire, "Dialogue is the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study . . . dialogue demands a
dynamic approximation towards the subject" (Shor and Freire 100). Although the teacher may be more familiar with the study material than the students, he/she re-learns the material as he/she engages in authentic dialogue with the students. In authentic dialogue, communication and intercommunication take place with the teacher and the students, and there is a relation of empathy between the teacher and students because they are engaged in a joint search (Shor 95). The student and the teacher are on the same plane in authentic dialogue as opposed to the hierarchical structure of anti-dialogue. Anti-dialogue is the dialogue that usually occurs in the traditional classroom, although the teacher often feels he/she is engaging his/her class in authentic dialogue.

Tomas Graman calls these two types of dialogue authentic and pseudo-dialogue. According to Graman, there are "six basic principles that characterize authentic classroom dialogue" (12). If any of these principles is compromised, the dialogue is no longer authentic and thus is not effective in promoting critical thought. In sum, Graman insists that authentic dialogue requires 1) that there be no hidden agenda, so that the teacher and students can work together to form questions and construct rational answers in order to arrive at a mutual understanding and 2) that the teacher and the majority of the students are interested in the topic of discussion. By keeping these ideas in mind, the teacher and the students can engage in dialogue and take responsibility for their own learning. The key is that authentic dialogue is a true exchange of ideas, not the teacher proposing ideas with the students reinforcing those same ideas, with the students fearing to share their own thoughts.
The type of dialogue suggested by Graman is authentic or liberating dialogue, characterized by the joint search of the teacher and the student. The opposite of this dialogue is called Anti-/Oppressive Dialogue. In anti-dialogue the teacher is "over" or "above" the student rather than on the same level with the student. These two types of dialogue look like this:

**'A' is the teacher, 'B' is the student**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authentic/Liberating</th>
<th>Anti-/Oppressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (with) B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(over)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the implementation of these four elements, the roles of students and teachers change as well. The critical class is "not a class in the traditional sense, but a meeting-place where knowledge is sought and not where it is transmitted" (Freire, *Education* 150). In a critical classroom the students and the teacher engage in dialogue and explore the familiar in new and different ways in order to find or create a new way of thinking. In this democratic classroom the students' opinions and feelings are as important as the teacher's, and acceptable knowledge is not just determined from the teacher and the textbook. Students no longer have to play "guess what I'm thinking" with the teacher because it is alright to have differing opinions.
The role of the student changes dramatically in a critical, democratic class. Instead of being the object of learning, the students are now the subjects of learning. They can no longer sit passively and simply record information. The students must now create and re-create meaning for themselves. When I first came to college I expected the classes to be run in the same manner as all of my high school classes. I expected that my Spanish class, for example, although it would be more advanced, would once again consist of vocabulary and verb tense memorization with maybe a little conversation and reading thrown in for a change of pace. However, this was not the case. We were forced to actually participate in the learning process. We rarely even discussed grammar. Instead we talked and debated current issues, using the Spanish that we knew. We were forced out of our "traditional" roles as passive receptacles of knowledge and made to create our own knowledge.

Students may resist this method, though, because this new student identity is difficult to assume. In fact, critical pedagogy will probably make many of the students very uncomfortable because for the most part, the "students' past instruction shaped their perception of a literary text as a stable source of meaning the teacher should help them understand" (Robbins 22). For example, when the students are asked to determine different interpretations of whether or not the king and his daughter are barbarians in "The Lady or the Tiger?" they may have a hard time simply because they are not accustomed to this type of learning, this type of responsibility for learning, and are unsure of what to do. They have
always been told that the king and his daughter are barbarians or that the ghost in Hamlet is important. They didn't have to think for themselves before, and now they are put into a situation which is unfamiliar to them causing them to be unsure. This lack of sureness may cause the students to become defensive or withdrawn. As Shor states in *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*.

Because of so much regimentation and so little chance to practice freedom in daily life, worker students react with a highly armored, self-protective suspicion. Wary of teachers, even benign ones, they may simply choose not to notice or respond to an egalitarian mode in class. (34)

Of course, a class of un-responsive students will be very discouraging to teachers. Teachers need to realize that the goal of these un-responsive students is to make the teacher give up critical pedagogy and return to the traditional method. These students want to return to the traditional method because their role is easier when the teacher gives them the information and also because critical pedagogy is unfamiliar and therefore uncomfortable for them.

Also, because this pedagogy "requires a cooperative dialogic approach, allowing student voices to be heard and not just unending teacher talk," some students may also be scared (Sledd 505). They are not used to having to voice their own opinions, and at times, students opinions are buried under the opinions considered by the teacher to be "correct." However, teachers need to be persistent because some students may very well be ready for this new approach. It is important to remember that student's refusal to
perform is not the inability to perform. The student is, like many people, simply resistant to change. Teachers also need to remember the incredible amount of time students have spent in school; students have become accustomed to the banking model of education and "the pervasive repetition of material year after year encourages students to fade out" (Shor 33-34). The longer the students are in school the less they begin to care and although their bodies may be in the classroom, their minds are somewhere else. Thus the further along in school, the more difficult it may be to implement this critical method and make the students "fade back in," bringing the minds of the students back to join the students' bodies in the classroom. Also, our minds are conditioned to work at continual high-speed. Everything we do in our society is on fast-forward. Because of this condition, the students' minds feel uncomfortable with the slow pace of critical thought. Critical thought takes a long time and is difficult and arduous process. There are no short-cuts for critical thought. Thus liberatory learning is at odds with the fast pace of our society (Shor 65).

The students will react to their role changes in various ways. Some may be pleased, some angry. Others may accept it but find it very difficult, and others may be openly hostile towards the new class structure (Shor and Freire 24-25). Those that are pleased participate freely in the critical class, happy, yet wishing they had been exposed to it sooner. Others, however, may still find it too difficult. They may like the idea but the shift is too large, too fast. Thus, they neither participate nor resist. They simply sit and listen.
However, not all students will appreciate critical pedagogy and some may become angry. These students, used to passive schooling, become anxious and upset when the teacher makes critical demands on them. They would much rather sit, silently taking notes, thinking of other things they consider more important, while the teacher lectures the entire class period. Finally, some students are openly hostile to a liberatory classroom, refusing to cooperate, hoping to force the teacher to revert back to the traditional method of lecture and stop the critical thrust of the class. These students find it very difficult to accept this new methodology because they are so committed to the traditional method. They like the old way and only see this new liberatory class as a threat to comfortable, established classroom roles. For this reason, these students may actively work against the teacher and his/her method of critical pedagogy, doing whatever they can to disrupt the flow of the class.

Not only does the role of the student change in critical pedagogy, but the teacher's role changes as well. In many traditional classes, the teacher's role is that of information giver and interrogator. The teachers clearly "know more" than the students and they maintain this status by using special terminology of the discipline, obscure conceptual language, and sophisticated wording and their delegated authority as teacher. For example, in an American literature class, the teacher might explain the term Romanticism in terms of Neoclassicism. If the students do not know what Neoclassicism is, they will not understand the definition of Romanticism, nor the socio-political and historical context for the terms. And even if they had all the terms, that wouldn't imply a
critical understanding of their usefulness, purpose or value, or lack thereof. For the most part, both teacher and students are conditioned through past experiences to expect a class to follow a certain predetermined course. They automatically act and follow the unwritten traditional classroom rules. These rules include 1) the teacher can talk whenever he/she wants, 2) the teacher, not the student, asks the questions, 3) the student answers the questions posed by the teacher (Shor 30).

Unlike the traditional classes in which the teacher's word is rule, in the critical class, there is not necessarily any right answer. The goal is to search and explore, and the teacher's job is to facilitate this exploration, mainly through class discussion. Thus, the class needs to be arranged in a way that will facilitate class discussion, such as in a semi-circle or circle rather than in rows. Working in the facilitator role, the teacher tries to systematically arrange materials, activities, and people in such a way that students are immersed in powerful inductive experiences (Zemelman and Daniels 57). When immersed in "powerful inductive experiences," the students are implementing both tacit and implicit knowledge. Thus, the learners are embracing the entire knowledge continuum rather than just certain sections.

The role of the educator is very important because "as he/she dialogues with the pupils, he/she must draw their attention to points that are unclear or naive, always looking at them problematically, asking them questions like why? how? what relation is there between the statement you just made and that of your companion? (Freire, Education 124-125). Rather than just
giving the information to the students, the teacher starts the students on a pathway to discovery. The students work slowly to a new found knowledge. The teacher needs to trust that the students can work through this process. They do not need to tell the students the information just before they find it. Teachers do this quite often because they fail to allow enough wait time for students to answer questions. For example, when an English teacher, while studying James Joyce's *Ulysses*, asks the question, "what is symbolic about Leopold Bloom's key?," and expects an answer in five to ten seconds, he/she is not allowing enough time for the students to think the information through. Rather than jumping in and giving the students the answer, the teacher needs to be comfortable with a little silence while the students analyze the different areas where the word key is used and all the possible symbolic meanings it may have. It is not as meaningful if the students are given the information because it is the discovery process through one's own hard work that is the key educational component. And, if the educator keeps his/her own curiosity alive as well as the students', the subject under discussion is often revealed by the student in new and exciting ways. Nancie Atwell states in her book *In The Middle*, "These days, I learn in my classroom. What happens there has changed; it continually changes. I've become an evolutionist, and the curriculum unfolds now as my kids and I learn together" (3). What we need to remember is that the teacher does not know everything about a subject because, as Freire states, "Very often, the educator thus perceives a new dimension of that object which had, until now, been hidden" (Pedagogy in Process 12).
Although this critical method is interesting and exciting, it is also demanding on the teacher. The teacher must introduce the subject and draw the students into meaningful discussion, all the while paying attention and actively listening so that he/she can ask critical questions. "The teacher also needs to model an active, skeptical learner in the classroom who invites students to be curious and critical . . . and creative" (Shor and Freire 8). Also, in addition to using the usual participatory activities, such as class discussions or group work, teachers need to show students the constructive roles that make the students work well through a guided practice and self-evaluation (Zemelman and Daniels 54). Although the educator still comes prepared with a specific agenda for class, he/she must be ready for anything because authentic dialogue is quite open ended. In fact, preparing for a critical class will probably be more time-consuming and difficult for a teacher than if he/she was preparing a lecture for the entire class period. The planning must be very involved and the teacher must have a goal in mind. However, in a critical class, the plans are still flexible enough to allow discussion of other issues that may come up. For example, if one were planning a lesson for the book *No Promises in the Wind* by Irene Hunt, one goal may be to determine the characteristics of certain characters in the story. However, if during this time, students bring up the fact that the story is taking place during the Depression, the teacher needs to be able to incorporate this comment into the day's plans. One might ask "and how do you think this affects the characters? Does it affect the characters or the work in general?"
Because critical pedagogy is such a radical methodology in the United States and because it challenges the traditional method, one must realize that implementing critical pedagogy is still a controversial task. The teacher implementing critical pedagogy in his/her classroom runs the risk of displeasing several people, including fellow teachers, administrators, students and parents. Fellow teachers may be displeased because they may feel that critical pedagogy is unfamiliar or unfounded and does not work. These educators, either die-hard traditionalists or those that have tried but failed to implement critical pedagogy in their own classroom will make it difficult for anyone else trying to implement the new pedagogy. They will work actively against it, publicly criticizing critical pedagogy.

Also, many people, including parents and administrators, like the old, traditional method and think it works fine. They do not see the relationship between the passivity of today's youth and the banking method. If it worked for them, it should work for these students as well.

As I mentioned earlier, students may have a serious problem with this new method and may refuse to engage in any kind of learning. Or, the students may really enjoy their new critical class and try to apply the methods in their other classes, frustrating the students and making the traditionalist teachers angry because the students are asking too many questions and are not "believing" the teacher.

Finally, some people, mainly students and parents, may become upset because the critical teacher, in making revisions in the
curriculum for his/her class, may fail to teach certain works and concepts that the student will be expected to know on the ACT, SAT, or GRE. Standardized tests create a huge conflict regarding what to teach no matter what methodology one uses. Until we can get away from these standardized tests, critical teachers will need to do their best to accommodate this factor by making other texts also available for students to use as resources when they are studying or preparing for these standardized tests.

There are, however, several advantages to using this methodology, mainly consisting in the type of young people that we are "producing" through the education system. Young people will be much more active; not only in school but in their home lives and in their roles in society. The students, as critical thinkers, tend to initiate change in their personal lives and in their lives as members of society. They are no longer the passive students they once were; they are now involved. Students will have questioning minds, wanting to learn and know as much as possible in all areas of interest, and will have practiced the ability to think for themselves and "on their feet."

Students will be able to think on their own and will begin to understand and participate in adult reality. Teachers, in encouraging more independent activity, allowing more student say in what happens in the classroom, and giving more responsibility to the students for their own learning, will help to increase student knowledge. Students will not need prompting from "authority" figures such as teachers and parents. This will encourage more individuality and personal thought, increasing opinions and ideas on
a number of subjects which can be expressed through rational argumentation, thus expanding the horizons of knowledge for all human beings.

**Personal Analysis**

During the last few months, I had the opportunity to make the transition from student to teacher, and I feel that we need to make some serious changes in our current educational system. The current education system does promote apathy among students rather than activity and creative, critical thinking. I have experienced the apathy as a student and I have seen the apathy through the eyes of a teacher. It was for this reason that I decided to research critical pedagogy as a possible alternative.

Critical pedagogy contains some very important elements, and I feel that its advantages are many. The most important, though, is that critical pedagogy provides the students with the opportunity to become, as Freire states, "more fully human." In a class promoting critical pedagogy, the students move from their passive roles into more active roles and this enables them, I think, to become even more active in life. If a student feels comfortable enough and feels that his/her participation and opinions are important in class, he/she is more likely to voice their opinions outside of class. In so doing, he/she will become more active in society as a whole and their natural capacity to think critically, to question, and analyze, will be fully realized. Another very important element of critical pedagogy lies in relating material to the students' own lives. If students can see how the material impacts their own lives, the
material becomes much more real and therefore interesting and important as opposed to that material which is not connected to anything with which the students are familiar. I know, as a student, that I am much more likely to remember information that I have learned if I have taken an active role in the learning process, and the material is important in my life, both here and now, and I am more likely to think critically about it in this case.

I also feel that being able to analyze an issue or situation from other points of view, which critical pedagogy advocates, is extremely important. This, however, brings up controversial issues for me as an English teacher. Both the canon and multiculturalism will be greatly affected by implementing critical pedagogy in an English class. Critical pedagogy does not lean necessarily against the canon, but it does call for a reform of the canon. I feel that this is where multiculturalism comes into play. The outcry over the canon is that it is too inclusive because it focuses only on the works of upper-class white men. Thus, the other perspectives required for critical analysis are absent. By adding in the works of women, blacks, and other minorities, the English class may become more critical. These multicultural texts can provide the basis for comparison and contrast that is normally lacking in an English classroom that only studies the "Great Works." I hope that by allowing my students to read and examine texts from other cultures, my students will be better able to understand those cultures and be better able to understand their own cultures and beliefs.

I realize, though, that the difficulties in implementing critical pedagogy are very real and may deter some teachers from attempting
to make their class more critical. Students will resist. I resisted when I was first introduced to this pedagogy as a student, and my friends resisted as well. It is more difficult when students must truly engage in a text and make their own meaning by carefully analyzing and examining it. At that time, I would have much rather used only the kind of knowledge required for memorization because I was familiar with it and knew exactly what was expected of me. I knew that I would have to reproduce the material on a test, and I was very satisfied with where I was. I was a good memorizer.

However, after studying different teaching methodologies and experiencing education from the teacher's point of view, I am now able to see the importance of embracing the entire knowledge continuum and engaging in all kinds of knowledge such as information retention and operational or analytical endeavors. When one looks at the education system the importance of active participation becomes clearer. It bothers me when I look at my students and they are sitting lifelessly in their chairs. I know that they are probably learning the information, but they are not active at all, and I know that they will not remember the information for very long. However, when I see the students forming and creating knowledge for themselves through active participation, through authentic dialogue, I know they are more likely to remember the information because it has become important enough to them to actively discuss and argue about it. I think that if the students do not feel that the information is important to them, they will not care at all. When I, as a student, created meaning and was able to apply it to my own life, the material took on a much greater
significance for me. I want my students to be able to see the significance of whatever material we happen to be studying at the time. Because critical pedagogy seems to accomplish this goal more than the traditional method, I hope to allow my future students the opportunity to engage in critical pedagogy.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


