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In any multilingual country, it is imperative that the curriculum provide for a critical dialogue on the politics of language. Educators must address questions of linguistic and cultural identity especially in the context of the spread of English. Contrary to popular and academic conceptions, English has never been just a 'link' or 'library' language, and the epithets non-native speaker teacher/learner and second language teacher/learner echo a sense of marginality and displacement (Browne. 2005. Cummins.1996. Kachru.1982. Rampton.1990.Shondel.2005). For "...language itself is content, a referent for loyalties and animosities, an indicator of social statuses and personal relationships, a marker of situations and topics as well as of the societal goals and the large-scale value-laden arenas of interaction..."(Fishman.1972: pp.4). In this context, the need to understand the nature of empowerment and evolve formal educational interventions for negotiating it becomes an urgent concern.

Policies of education influence the course of the development of languages (Braine, 2005. Pennycook, 1994. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1994. Tollefson. 2002). The promotion of English in India, for example, has led to numerous problems which have been the subject of an on-going debate in both academic and non-academic forums (Agnihotri and Khanna,1997. Khubchndani, 1991.). It is not easy "to break the vicious association between English and social status in India" (Ram. 1991.p.52). Many young English-medium educated Indian learners of today cannot read or write in their first language, and share this "handicap" with great Indian writers like Tharoor (2005). Thus, economic (and intellectual) empowerment, as the goal of English language education, has come to mean emotional and cultural disempowerment in many countries (Canagarajah. 2004. Ibrahim1999. Pennycook.1994).

Higher education in English : limitations

As Tickoo says, "English in India continues to be taught as though it were a language of social survival rather than a strong additional language whose unique contributions lie in relating scientific and technological developments to the country's socioeconomic needs, aspirations and challenges" (1994.pp.332) The conceptual thinness in our educational context must be attributed to the fact that English teachers and learners do not have the opportunity to realize the value of critical enquiry which will equip them with the intellectual tools to negotiate the tensions of second language education in a multilingual context.

The absence of a tradition of critical enquiry prevents us from realizing that pedagogy is a tool of empowerment. The fact that teaching is an interactive process between society and the classroom is often ignored and questions of culture, development, equal opportunities, identity, and most importantly

self-esteem do not form a part of the English language curriculum. As a result, the teaching community has failed to evolve indigenous critical tools without which empowerment remains only a dream.

The teacher

The 'how' of teaching and learning has always been on the back burner where our English language education is concerned, and this has pushed the teacher, as Freire observes (1970), into the position of a "...narrating Subject" who "makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat..." (Freire, 1970:46). The English teacher, instead of evolving his own pedagogy, accepts the methods and materials imported from the West. He, thus, accepts the supremacy of not only the language but also the pedagogical practices. Although disappointed with the consignment, he fails to evolve any indigenous practices for lack of orientation and infrastructure. He becomes an agent of cultural invasion in more than one sense.

The learner

The emphasis on the teacher as a giver prevents the learner from evaluating the value of the "deposits" made by the teacher. Very few students realize that "...in the banking system of education" they "have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But, in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other"(Freire.1970.pp.46). But, rarely does our curriculum create a forum for critical enquiry into the personal and social relevance of English language education.

Critical English Language Education

The discussion points out the need for a critical dialogue on the politics of language in the university curriculum. I do not claim that this alone will address the conceptual thinness in our approach to English language education. But, it may raise the awareness of everyone concerned in the right direction. As Fairclough observes (1995) "if problems of language and power are to be seriously tackled, they will be tackled by the people who are directly involved", and their success depends upon the "theoretical and analytical resources" they have access to (p.221). They require "programmes of ...critical language awareness... to develop the capacities of people for language critique, including their capacities for reflexive analysis of the educational process itself."(ibid., p. 221). The language critique, hence, should form an essential part of the language education curriculum. How are languages and language users politically located? How is linguistic identity related to cultural identity? When does language behave like a tool and when does it become an instrument of emotional and cultural oppression? It is by examining the legitimacy of our practices, through such questions, will we be able to evolve democratic principles of legitimation (Fairclough,1989. Tollefson,1995).

The influence of social needs on the curriculum and vice versa has to be addressed by critical pedagogy which problematizes and legitimates every aspect of education in its specific social context (Freire, 1970.Giroux and McLaren,1994. Pennycook,1999). The teacher and the learner must view academic activity more in terms of an awareness-raising critique whose aim is to identify the positive and negative aspects of the process of English language education. They must develop meaningful

alternatives which can turn the various verbal and non-verbal means of education into effective instruments of self-affirmation. It will help them understand their roles as subjects of research and agents of change. Language pedagogy in the context of English in countries like India, has primarily two aims. It must raise the stakeholder's awareness of the political nature of his position, and initiate the process of his negotiating it to empower himself.

The Critical Educator

Education demands critical educators and not just subject experts. Unlike the latter, the former realize the ever changing nature of the components of the educational context. The critical pedagogist realizes that the change is a result of the constant interaction between every component of the context with every other component and the nature of this interaction has to be reflected upon in relation to the classroom within the classroom. He is sensitive to his role as a change agent and subjects his own pedagogical practices to clinical investigation with a view to formulate those principles of language use which will help him acquire a perspective on his relationship with English especially in the context of his identity as a self-respecting bilingual or multilingual. He adopts a clinical and intellectual approach to the issue and aims at arriving a solution that will contribute to social harmony. In the name of research, he does not embark upon a fault-finding mission which will hurt the society.

Being critical encourages the educator to examine education as an interactive process between the present and the future of his society. And, being closest to the grassroots, he is a practical think tank who guides others including policy makers, textbook writers, examiners, and students. He realizes that pedagogy offers him "... an opportunity to... move beyond the particularistic politics of class, ethnicity, race, and gender (*add language*). ...to develop a radical democratic politics that stresses difference within unity... Central to such a politics and pedagogy is a notion of community developed around a shared conception of social justice, rights, and entitlement. Such a notion is especially necessary at a time in our history in which the value of such concerns has been subordinated to the priorities of the market and used to legitimate the interests of the rich at the expense of the poor, the unemployed, and the homeless" (Giroux.1992. p.81.). It is in this context that the critical educator makes organized and consistent efforts to expand and enrich the general pool of knowledge about his specific educational context and thus, adds intellectual integrity to the whole process of education. He is constantly thinking about " what should I do in my situation?" As He An E observes (2005) "on the basis of my... experiences at the school, I reframed my assumptions and beliefs of ELT, and applied and tested them in my own practice. This series of actions coincided with the process of an experiential learning cycle, namely, concrete experience, observation and analysis, abstract reconceptualization, and active experimentation. Reflecting on my limited but valuable experience, I realized that the significance of the experience did not lie in the fact that I had been to the classroom, but in that I became consciously aware of the importance of teaching experience as the inspiration for ELT and teacher education. (p.20) This shows that the critical educator approaches a piece of knowledge only as a tool of further enquiry. To him, teaching involves a continuous scientific study of the interaction between the various components of the educational context. He is an agent of self-affirmation, and understands that his research holds the key to depoliticizing the process of education.

The Critical Learner

The critical language learner is conscious of his responsibilities in the context of the relationship between language use and social development. He is sensitive to how social, economic, and political

forces determine the nature of acceptance of a language and its user. This encourages him to find answers to questions, which every democratically inclined academic should address, in a multilingual society. What can he, as an educated user, contribute to the awareness that all languages are equal? What efforts should he make to preserve his linguistic and cultural heritage?

He is conscious of the power of language and uses it only to widen his scope of understanding. And, he considers it to be his responsibility to spread this awareness. Thus, he contributes to a healthy balance between the use of different languages in his society. In other words, he realizes that he is responsible for the exercise of teaching/ learning English for employment not preventing his society from adopting a critical outlook towards the language and the culture that it brings along.

The critical learner steps outside of himself and subjects his own language use and language learning practices to an investigation. Through this exercise, he contributes not only the knowledge related to language learning but also the tools to examine this knowledge. In sum, he understands higher education as an opportunity, created for him by his society, to empower himself and the process of language education as well.

Conclusion

“English is spoken as ...the second language by ...375 million speakers,... has official or special status in at least 75 countries with a total population of over 2 billion... such staggering number of ... users could only be taught by indigenous non-native speaker English teachers. Nevertheless, little is known about these English teachers outside their own countries. There are a number of reasons for this. The field of English language teaching – in terms of textbook publishers, journals, teacher-training programs, and teacher organizations – is dominated by British and American interests”(Braine. 2005. p.xii). Empowerment, in this context, would mean taking control of all these factors to create a knowledge base which will guide the second language user to negotiate his use of English in relation to his linguistic and cultural heritage. And, as teachers from various countries report (Braine.2005), pedagogy holds the key to the empowerment of the individual and the society. Given the situation, the critical educator and the critical learner, especially in nonnative countries, need a stimulating environment to reflect on pedagogical practices and reconceptualize and redefine English language education from a socio-cultural point of view.

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