

Original Paper

The Time Is Now: Modeling the Tenets of Critical Pedagogy for Our Future Teachers at Hispanic Serving Institutions

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Abstract

At this historic moment, the quest to develop equitable and inclusive curriculum is even more imperative to support all students in the learning process. This urgency becomes even more relevant when our K-12 schools need teacher education programs to prepare future teachers from diverse backgrounds with necessary tools to engage and empower underrepresented groups in social justice practices. One of the best guides for this task is critical pedagogy. This study sought to determine if Education Preparation Programs (EPPs) at three Hispanic Serving Institutes (HSIs) in North Texas were devoting their curriculum to principles of critical pedagogy. The study was guided by a critical pedagogy framework developed by Giroux (2020). This framework was used to analyze the EPPs required courses' syllabi. In our article, we discuss how the EPPs are supporting preservice teachers' knowledge of critical pedagogy aspects and inconsistencies found among the HSIs in our region. Additionally, implications are shared for further use of the framework to assess EPP curriculum, guide program revisions, and encourage discourse among EPPs at HSIs on how to best serve our students.

Keywords

critical pedagogy, teacher education, preservice teachers, culturally relevant, curriculum development, critical literacy

1. Introduction

Our study was initiated as 2019 concluded. As the new year progressed, we had no clue what was in store for us in 2020. However, as critical educators, we already knew the severity of inequities in our educational system and the lack of justice for our communities of color. As we proceeded with this study and into 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, George Floyd was killed, and the United States Supreme Court had to intervene to protect LGBTQIA employees and DACA recipients. These events began to scratch at the wounds of inequality and injustice revealing the putrid scars our country had attempted to hide. The context of 2020 made it even more imperative for us to engage in discourse over the need for educators to be engaged in anti-racist practices.

Multiculturalism and diversity scholars have been calling for reforms to K-12 education for decades (Banks, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 1999). Each new wave of programs and initiatives attempted to encourage teachers in being more inclusive in the content they teach and also in the styles of instruction used (Gay, 2013; Irizarry & Anthrop-González, 2007; Paris, 2012). Additionally, each new variation reflected different terms such as culturally relevant pedagogy; culturally sustaining teaching; critical literacy; equity pedagogy; and anti-racist pedagogies. We could go on with many more. Each one of these concepts are related like a family, and this family is rooted in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy requires us to confront oppression and support an educational system that works towards emancipation (Freire, 1973). This need for reform in the K-12 educational system cannot happen without adjusting our practices in Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs). While many EPPs throughout the country have recognized the need to prepare equitable and inclusive preservice teachers for K-12 classrooms, are EPPs modeling tenets of critical pedagogy within their own classrooms?

Since the larger focus of critical pedagogy is to emancipate ourselves and our students from oppressive structures and societal injustices, our study sought to determine if EPPs at our local Hispanic Serving Institutes (HSIs) were devoting their curriculum to principles of critical pedagogy. This knowledge was imperative for us as members of the Latinx community, as faculty members at an HSI, but also as teacher educators. If our professional field recognizes the need for critical educators at the K-12 level because of the diverse student backgrounds, then the same practices should be happening at universities that serve college students from underrepresented populations.

1.1 Understanding Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has a legacy reaching back to Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. After the introduction of critical pedagogy, Freire continued for decades to call upon educators to confront inequality, but he also called upon us to support our students' emancipation from structural and institutional injustices through critical thinking. Henry Giroux (2010) merged Freire's collective works to describe critical pedagogy for educators.

Critical pedagogy, unlike dominant modes of teaching, insists that one of the fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world,

a world in which the discourses of critique and possibility in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom, and equality function to alter, as part of a broader democratic project, the grounds upon which life is lived. (p. 717)

Giroux's definition reminds us that no student lives or learns in a self-contained vacuum. Critical pedagogy calls upon us to recognize the social context that encompasses our students.

As educators, we must be willing to acknowledge the barriers our students face and create a space for them to confront these barriers. Readings that represent our students and their lived experiences are imperative to the work of critical educators. This is a good starting point; yet, it is not enough for us to address sociopolitical contexts through course readings. Many educators are currently working to actualize the theory of critical pedagogy through collective action in the classroom (Duncan-Andrade, Jeffrey, & Morell, 2008). One of the ways educators can engage with students is through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), which has become a foundational element within urban education (De los Ríos, López, & Morell, 2015). Another example of how critical pedagogy comes to life in classrooms is through the use of testimonio (Delgado Bernal, Burciago, & Flores Carmona, 2012). By engaging in the genre of testimonio students engage in critical reflection both individually and communally to document a collective experience and build solidarity among the community for action.

In order to frame our conceptualization of critical pedagogy for this study, we used the nine principles of critical pedagogy laid out by Giroux (2020). According to Giroux's synthesis of critical pedagogy work, critical pedagogy should include the following aspects:

- Education produces political subjectivities
- Ethics is central to education
- Need to understand difference in identity formation
- Need to understand how different types of knowledge are given priority in schools
- Should pursue new forms of culture and knowledge
- Claims to objective knowledge should be challenged
- Must include a vision of a better world
- Teachers should be "transformative intellectuals"
- Students need a critically conscious "voice"

1.2 Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education

According to McLaren (2009), critical pedagogy is designed to highlight and question the social function of knowledge, class relationships, cultural capital, and the linkages between culture and power. In addition, he calls for us to interrogate the ways by which hegemony, ideology, and discourse function to preserve relations of power. Lastly, as educators, we should be willing to critique the politics of curriculum and the implicit messages that are delivered to students through hidden curricula. Regrettably, the integration of critical pedagogy to EPPs in the United States is still in its early stages and higher education institutions continue to foster a traditional curriculum which still favors the

interests of the elite. If critical pedagogy was integrated into the curriculum of EPPs, teachers will learn critical and emancipatory best practices needed to confront and transform the unjust status quo. Also, it will prepare educators to promote a social justice and anti-racist agenda which encourages them to identify and question potential harmful educational ideologies and practices (Bartolomé 2004). In addition, critical pedagogy can assist teachers in guiding students towards an understanding of how hegemony plays an active role in oppressing underserved populations and how students can take positive action (Sardabi, Biria, & Golestan, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to insert in teacher education content that will encourage critical thinking and prepare teachers to fight for social justice. When armed with the capacity to challenge unjust structures of schooling, teachers and students might then be equipped to intervene to ensure that our educational system “transmits the status and class positions of the wider society” (McLaren, 2009, p. 78).

One particular challenge in the United States is that teachers have an educational foundation built upon neo-liberal ideologies that focus solely on instruction for the sake of the work force or future professions. Additionally, it has suppressed the urgency to seek social justice for the conditions that circumscribe many of our citizens (Giroux, 2016). Another challenge is that many teachers were educated through an EPP system where they simply store information relayed to them by the instructor or the class is merely meant to prepare them for a certification exam. This concept is what Freire (1970) called banking education. This has kept our preservice teachers from an opportunity for holistic growth, the development of critical thinking skills, and to have globalized perspectives. Many EPP students become prisoners of teaching practices that promote lectures, extensive reading, and memorization in a closed curriculum that leaves out any type of critical pedagogical practice.

In order to combat these hegemonic practices, EPPs must redesign their teacher education curriculum and start by training teachers with several educational implications focused on critical pedagogy. These implications are explained in the work of Olmos de Montañez (2008), and include the *relationship between theory and practice*, *critical-dialectic rationale*, *contextualization*, *collaborative and deliberative action-research*, and *ethical purpose*.

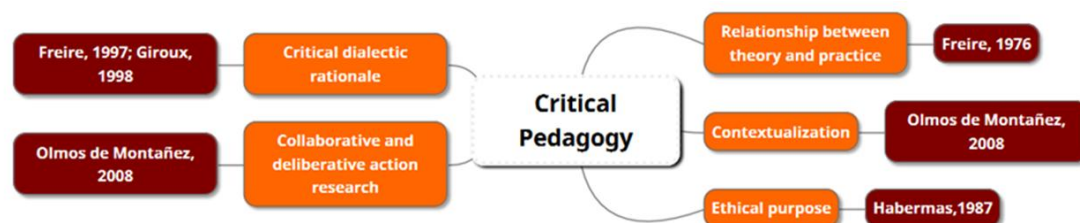


Figure 1. Critical Pedagogy Implications

The first educational implication of critical pedagogy is that it finds a direct dialectic relationship between theory and practice, where the process is enriched through critical reflection and aims to transform reality. Here an agreed emancipatory action research exists between teachers, students, and

the community and praxis is constituted via action-reflection. According to Freire (1976), learning should be a dialectic process that engages both action and reflection. This convergence of student-teacher praxis generates new and innovative actions (Olmos de Montañez, 2008, p. 163). Another implication is a critical-dialectic rationale, which refers to the autonomous and responsible actions of a teacher engaging in critical self-reflection to free themselves from bias and dogmas. This critical self-reflection leads to more informed decisions made by knowledge acquired via dialectical thought, consensus, and the social construction of the curriculum by involving shared perceptions and diverse views. In addition, we find contextualization. According to Olmos de Montañez (2008), critical pedagogy favors production of knowledge of the student in close relationship with their context and the context of others within their learning community. The context refers to all elements of their context: socio-historical, economic, cultural, geographical, and political. Regardless of many critics, education does have a political character that guides it towards social transformation and the development of the people in all its dimensions (Freire, 1997; Giroux, 1998). The teacher should recognize the sociopolitical and ideological contexts in order to educate democratic participatory citizens (Olmos de Montañez, 2008, p. 163). The next implication focuses on collaborative and deliberative action-research. This is a process carried out between teachers (colleagues) and learners, and focuses on their daily pedagogical practice. The objective is to improve our teaching practices by reflecting on the pedagogical theories that guide our construction and reconstruction of curriculum. In this way the curriculum becomes a collective and integrating task of knowledge. Lastly, we find ethical purpose. According to Olmos de Montañez (2008), the purpose of the pedagogical practice is to develop good morale through action. This includes being flexible and open to revision rather than being committed to a preset or prescribed curriculum. Critical pedagogy is a practical science for ethical purposes, which implies considering the relationship between reason and morale at the time of reflection and action-practice (Habermas, 1997).

Critical educators assume responsibility for their teaching (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2008; Yedaide, 2016) and consider various cultural contexts as new spheres for education (Silberman-Keller et al., 2011). This responsibility extends beyond K-12 and into higher education. Therefore, it is important that preservice teachers gain educational training from their professors that provide them with the necessary tools to study, analyze, and denounce the tricks made by the establishment (Apple, 2015; Giroux, 2016). As educators, we should become advocates against the injustices made to the most vulnerable sectors by producing educational materials, participating in conferences, and making our voices heard when allies are needed (Bidaseca, 2010). Finally, critical educators should learn how to question the system and have confidence in the power of dialogue as a strategy to start powerful classroom discourse about diversity, inclusion, decolonization, oppression, white privilege, dog whistle politics, racism, and many more necessary topics. All of these can't be given or embedded into a teacher education course. Therefore, the curriculum needs to be revised and moved towards a humanistic approach and aligned with the issues students face in the 21st century.

2. Method

For this study, we utilized qualitative document analysis. According to Bowen (2009), organizational and institutional documents can be an essential data set for qualitative research. Following this premise, we decided to use document analysis to analyze curriculum. Our research was guided by our research question—How do EPPs at our local Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) support principles of critical pedagogy? According to López-Noguero (2002), this form of empirical research allows scholars to discover the internal structure of the information as well in its composition, organizational structure, or dynamics.

To conduct the study, we chose three HSI's from the north Texas area and named them *University 1*, *University 2*, and *University 3* to protect their identity. The U.S. Department of Education defines HSI as an institution of higher education that is an eligible institution; and has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application. From each of the three HSIs, we examined the syllabi from their required EPP courses. In addition to coding the university names, we did not list the course titles in order to protect the identity of the institutions.

As part of the study, we analyzed the EPPs required courses' syllabi using the critical pedagogy framework developed by Giroux (2020) which consists of nine principles. Deductive preset coding was used as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents and material. Documents went through repeated review by multiple investigators and data interpretation was checked for inter-rater reliability. The nine principles of critical pedagogy were used to develop our code book for data analysis and are shown on Figure 2.

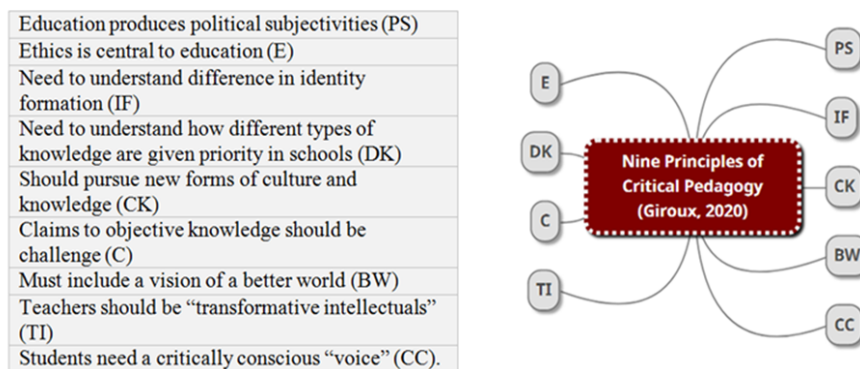


Figure 2. Nine Principles of Critical Pedagogy

3. Result

Through our document analysis of the three HSI in the North Texas region, we were able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the scale in which students are being supported in critical pedagogy practices. Each HSI in the study was assigned a chart that reflected how the nine principles of critical pedagogy were being supported in the EPP core courses.

3.1 University 1

University 1 had the most required core courses in the study with a total of five. Despite having the most required core courses, University 1 had the least amount of critical pedagogy principles covered. At University 1 the principle coded E was identified two times in course 1 (C1), one time in course 2 (C2), three times in course 3 (C3), and two times in course 5 (C5). The principle coded CK was identified two times in C1, one time in C2, and one time in C5. The principle coded C was identified two times in course 4 (C4) and one time in C5. Finally, the principle coded CC was identified one time in C4.

Table 1. University 1 Coded Principles

Courses	Coded Principles								
	PS	E	IF	DK	CK	C	BW	TI	CC
University 1									
C1		2			2				
C2		1			1				
C3		3							
C4						2			1
C5		2			1	1			

These findings indicate, the critical pedagogy support and modeling at the UNI1 EPP is very limited. However, it is important to recognize with this EPP, that they integrated ethics to the curriculum in three of the five courses evaluated. Giroux (2020) points out in principle number two that ethics is central to education. Ethics is linked to critical pedagogy since its foundation (Rabikowska, 2009).

3.2 University 2

University 2 had the least amount of required core education courses in the study. While only two courses reviewed, overall University's 2 EPP core courses reflected all principles at least once. In here, the principle coded PS was identified one time in C2. Meanwhile, the principle coded E was identified two times in C1 and two times in C2. In addition, the principle coded IF was identified three times in C2 and the principle identified DK was identified one time in C1. The principle coded CK was identified one time in C2 and the principle coded C was identified three times in the same course. Also the principle coded BW was identified two times in C2. Finally, the principle coded TI was identified

one time in C1 and two times in C2. Lastly, the principle coded CC was identified one time in C1 and five times in C2.

Table 2. University 2 Coded Principles

Courses	Coded Principles								
	PS	E	IF	DK	CK	C	BW	TI	CC
University 2									
C1		2		1					
C2	1	2	3		1	3	2	2	5

Despite having the least amount of core EPP courses, UNI2 is supporting and modeling critical pedagogy throughout its teacher education program. Another significant data point to address is that UNI2 had one course that managed to reflect eight of the nine principles. It's evident that this institution has one course that clearly focuses on critical pedagogy, especially with an emphasis on students' Critically Conscious voice (CC). This principle which was coded five times in C2 supports pre-service teachers in understanding how to create learning experiences and strategies to disrupt injustices in education (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015).

3.3 University 3

At University 3 four core EPP courses were identified. Between the four courses they reflected all the principles at least once and seemed to have the most support and modeling of critical pedagogy. Here the principle coded PS was identified one time in C2. The principle coded E was identified three times in C1, one time in C2, and three times in C3. On the other hand the principle coded IF was identified three times in C2 and two times in C3. Meanwhile, the principle coded DK was identified seven times in C2 and one time in C3. Also, the principle coded CK was identified two times in C1, four times in C2, one time in C3, and one time in C4. The principle coded C was identified one time in C2 and the principle coded BW was identified one time in C1, three times in C2, and one time in C3. Finally, the principle coded TI was identified three times in C2 and one time in C3. Lastly, the principle coded CC was identified two times in C1 and four times in C2.

Table 3. University 3 Coded Principles

Courses UNI3	Coded Principles								
	PS	E	IF	DK	CK	C	BW	TI	CC
C1		3			2		1		2
C2	1	1	3	7	4	1	3	3	4
C3		3	2	1	1		1	1	
C4					1				

Based on the University 3 results, their EPP has a program that integrates critical pedagogy as a main focus for its preservice teachers. From the four courses identified, three of the courses reflected most of the critical pedagogy principles. In one of the courses (C2), there was a heavy emphasis on the principle titled need to understand how different types of knowledge are given priority in schools (DK). In addition, the principle coded titled should pursue new forms of Culture and Knowledge (CK) is consistently seen in the course. The heavy emphasis on these two principles allows pre-service teachers to build a strong foundation for culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017).

4. Discussion

The results of our study reflect the vast variations of EPP required courses and course content at HSIs in the North Texas region. Our study hopes to encourage more discourse and collaboration across universities in order to better support our underrepresented students seeking teaching jobs in the field of K-12 education. As we moved into the new 21st century, Sonia Nieto (2000) was still having to call upon teacher educators to place social justice at the center of our EPPs. While many programs focus on recruiting efforts to expand for more diverse representation in their preservice teachers, these same programs have not adjusted their practices to reflect the issues often faced by underrepresented populations, leaving students feeling marginalized in their teacher education classes (Gist, 2017; Haddix, 2017; Irizarry, 2011).

Additionally, research reflects that teacher education students report feeling valued and more prepared to teach in schools with diverse populations when professors combine pedagogical content knowledge with students' lived experiences, maintain a focus on equity, demonstrate cultural competence, and support students' sociopolitical consciousness (Castillo-Montoya, 2019; Nieto, 2017). Unfortunately, some EPPs at the undergraduate level, including those at HSIs are still not adequately supporting pre-service teachers in engaging in critical pedagogy to support inclusivity and equity. The irony is that this is especially true when students come from marginalized or underserved backgrounds.

5. Conclusion

Critical pedagogy contributes to the development of reflective educators who are devoted to supporting democratic participatory citizens and social justice for our society. It also favors moving educators from theory to practice with an interdisciplinary approach. Supporting our preservice teachers and modeling critical pedagogy is necessary within our 21st century EPPs. We must be willing to redesign curriculum to move beyond superficial diversity initiatives and focus on equity, inclusion, and justice for the 21st century classroom.

This study revealed that there is a need for EPPs at HSIs to support and model more critical pedagogy aspects for their preservice teachers. Without this focus, our students at HSIs will not feel a sense of belonging or relevancy in their education. In addition, future teachers are not getting the training necessary to be inclusive and equitable educators in today's tumultuous environment. Educators have the responsibility to disrupt education, but in order to do that they need to know how to do it. The nine critical pedagogy principles are a good starting point for EPPs to measure their commitment towards inclusion, equity, and justice. Adding several courses that specifically focus on theory and practice related to critical pedagogy could be a starting point. Additionally, EPPs could provide workshops for both preservice and inservice teachers that focus on teaching practices that are culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining. Finally, more research is needed in how EPPs, especially those serving underrepresented students, are moving away from traditional teaching philosophies and implementing curriculum that openly addresses social justice practices and confronts the real problems that are impacting our society and schools.

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