

Chapter 14

Critical Intercultural Pedagogy for Intercultural Communication in the English Language Classroom: Third Spaces, Participatory Action, and Social Justice

Beatriz Peña Dix

University of los Andes, Bogota, Colombia

ABSTRACT

The proposed empirically-based chapter investigates how the teaching of English as a foreign language can advance towards intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and reflective intercultural communication through the lens of critical intercultural pedagogy (CIP). Intercultural perspectives in education advocate for approaches that celebrate diversity, social justice, human rights, and peace education (De Leo, 2010). The chapter examines a case study where 20 pre-service English language teachers (PELTs) who are low-income students of a scholarship programme at a private university in Colombia employ CIP as a mechanism to seek intercultural communication in the English language classroom. Intercultural English language teaching (IELT), inspired by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TdO), helps create oral dynamics that go beyond the mere teaching of the linguistic-communicative dimensions of the language and create a critical reflective classroom ecology. The author concludes that, supported by the aesthetic dimension of TdO, PELTs understand and approach CIP as a positive way to develop ICC and aim for socially and politically engaged intercultural communication leading to dialogue and mediation for more harmonious societies.

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If you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice.

–U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, October 9, 2009

INTRODUCTION

A major challenge in today's contemporary education is, indisputably, the struggle against growing social inequity, as well as people's inability to rethink education as a practice of freedom (Giroux 2020). Research suggests that higher education may reinforce societal inequity when pursuing traditional goals and practices that are perpetuated in neoliberal environments and where marginalised and under-represented students may lack real egalitarian opportunities for learning and growth (Giroux, 2020). As a result, there is a call for "actionable approaches" to teaching and learning in higher education that promote social justice (Parson & Ozaki, 2020, p. 1). These considerations are further accentuated in the teaching-learning of English (in TESOL situation, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in higher education settings as language represents symbolic and cultural capitals through which asymmetrical power relations can be established and strengthened. Research supports that, despite social and cultural benefits, the teaching-learning of English may also perpetuate inequality by furthering modes of domination and subordination between individuals of different status (Gonçalves & Schluter, 2020).

English has been widely recognized as an international language for communication. As such, access to the language has been massive as in most non-English speaking countries (Butler, 2015). This global spread of the language has been acknowledged for a number of positive aspects such as English as a social and economic (linguistic currency) mobilizer (Munandar, 2015) and career advancement and engagement in the global community (Canagarajah, 2012). On the other side of the coin, important concerns emerge from the lack of, limitations or quality access to English language learning (Sayer, 2018), and accordingly, how it may contribute to a socioeconomic divide in many societies, where this linguistic proficiency sometimes works as a polarising agent that refers to those individuals proficient in the language and those who are not. Besides this polarisation, processes of exclusion may be added: local cultures and languages are rarely acknowledged when debates around bilingualism and multilingualism take place, while English-Spanish bilingualism in Colombia, for example, seems to be the rule and a major concern in the national education arena.

English in Colombia has long been observed as the most important foreign language in the country that is mandatory in both public and private education (Vélez-Rendón, 2003). As such, language educational policies have been designed to shape the State's goals and promote proficient English speakers as a part of the international economic strategy towards advanced globalisation (Fairclough, 2007). This has led to an important number of English language teacher education programmes in the country that incorporate a significant sector of English language teachers whose English language proficiency and language pedagogical knowledge may vary considerably due to the difference in quality between public and private education (Sánchez-Jabba, 2013).

In this scenario, after a long tradition of structural methods based on grammatical encyclopaedic knowledge, teaching philosophies in pre-service and in-service English Language Teaching (ELT) have been influenced by functional approaches. These underscore the importance of the instrumental value of language that enables communication with native speakers within culture-as-a-nation borderlines

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