Is Critical Pedagogy for me?
A critical evaluation of some central themes in Critical Pedagogy

A recent UK QTS graduate with abundant classroom experience in instructional strategies for the discipline of ICT, for Key Stages 4 and 5, I came face-to-face with another teaching style, if I may call it teaching style, Critical Pedagogy (CP). It happened during the summer of 2003, when I was in Canada attending a teacher educator course – I was formally inducted into the ways of CP, I was informed of the benefits of CP to both the teacher and the student and I also had the opportunity to put CP into practice in a Canadian classroom. I was very much convinced that CP was the way forward for me.

Upon my return to UK and at the start of the lective year, all my convictions evaporated. I looked at my pre-prepared lesson plans, the teaching strategies that should make students not only enjoy the class but also learn new content, the learning check-points that kept me informed whether learning was taking place or not in my classroom, the assessment criteria, the guidelines of the curriculum and student monitoring was all in place for reporting purposes. All seemed perfect. "Where should I incorporate CP?" was the first question I asked. The second that came to mind was "Is there any real need to incorporate CP?" and the third, the title of this essay "Is CP for me?".

Nonetheless CP kept persistently echoing in my mind - *CP is pedagogy of freedom, it emancipates those who come into contact with it*, *CP has to be lived and experienced and not read about*, *CP is of utmost benefit to students* and *CP produces students who are capable to taking their lives in their own hands*.

The echoes drew me to research on CP: What it means? Where did it come from? Knowing the historical basis and the application setting of this pedagogy would help situate it better within my own learning context. What are the basic features of CP? I had been introduced to some indicators[1], which I practiced while in Canada, but I wondered about their further use. What were the central themes of CP? Finally, I wanted to know how CP should be used. In what context (countries and subject

areas) has CP been successfully applied. Has it been tried and tested in the UK context? These would probably answer my question and reveal the importance of CP to my practice.

The scope of research very much depends on the how the research question is approached. If wide, it can lead to directions, which may not have initially been contemplated. Keeping this intricate aspect of research in mind, I would like to point out that this literature search though summative in nature, is by no means be an exhaustive exploration of the field of CP. The rationale is very much biased with my personal interest in CP and thus the analysis of the relevance of CP in my context i.e. the UK classroom. The research however does have scope for replication in terms of other teachers who may find themselves faced with a similar dilemma. The conclusions reached by me can probably be theirs as well.

Depth and breadth of analysis are the different sides of a coin. One can only see one of them at a time. This piece of research is no exception. The main argument has been looked at in depth to give a better understanding of the intellectual paradigms that the following authors have developed their theory and/or practice from: Alexander(2000), Freire(1973,1993), Habermas(Kemmis, S. and MacTaggart, R., 2000), Oakeshott(1972), Peukert(1993) and Walkington(2000). There is also the need to acknowledge authors like Bantock(1965), Boyd(1956) and Dewey(1915) whose previous works and the contributions have been felt in various degrees across the globe. The remaining authors in the bibliography, are ones who have made explicit the traditions they are drawing from and in the process have given their own views on CP. Careful scrutiny and selection of these has been the most difficult task. The many varied preferences and different orientations found in the various authors, have been incorporated within the scope of the essay in a manner to balance the resulting intellectual bias. One case is that of including Bonnett(1994) in the analysis of Oakeshott in order to understand Oakeshott better and the other of confronting Peukert(1993) with his own critical evaluation of Habermas.

An important first step of analysis in a research process is the dissection of the words. Thus, I plan to look into Critical and then Pedagogy to arrive at a definition of CP, which I would then confront with UK classroom context.

'Critical' in Critical Pedagogy

The analysis of Critical in CP calls for a brief history about the origin of Critical Theory – a series of concepts developed by the members of the Frankfurt School (FS) between the 1930s and 1960s. A lot of work has been done by Gibson(1986), Peukert(1993), and Aitkinson(1999) among others on the historical contribution of the four main members of the FS to Critical Theory, namely: Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcusse and Jurgen Habermas. I will not restate their work.

I will however point out that Critical Theory started developing because the members of the FS were influenced by the political movements of their time (in Germany and the US) and started challenging the "acute feeling that oppression and injustice characterised the world" (Gibson, 1986, p.21) through the three intellectual traditions of Marxism, Instrumental Reason and Freudianism.

To the many prevailing social injustices associated with class, race and gender they:

1. Applied the notions of <u>early or orthodox Marxism</u> – which blames the motive of economic efficiency for negatively influencing education and culture in the society. The members of the FS were very strongly against the dictum of maximum efficiency for a maximum number of people that capitalism promulgates;

2. Exposed social injustices by using <u>Instrumental Reason</u> - The members of the FS did not agree with a Utilitarian view of society that is concerned with ends rather than the means or the purposes. They were also very much against the view that prefers the intellectual and analytical over the emotional. The members of the FS questioned this paradigm of barbarism and dominance (Peukert, 1993), which led to the subjugation of some human beings towards others. Thus, Rationality in the form of Instrumental Reason, for the members of the FS, breeds the lack of the principle of solidarity in the society;

3. Drew upon the principles of psychoanalysis to identify the root causes of the societal ailments and consequently transform the assumptions of individual

human beings. Members of the FS unanimously agreed that self-knowledge and self-awareness liberates and emancipates individuals and groups in society to find their right place and not to accept oppression but to live a life of dignity. Thus, their use of Freudianism.

Blake and Masschelein(2002, p.55) have characterized Critical Theory as trying to "keep alive this critical utopian motive" whereby the individual is in constant dialogue with the society and the culture in order to unveil the injustices such as racism, sexism and lack of democratic freedom. Learning via question posed dialogue, they inform us, is a Socratic tradition acquired from the Enlightenment era. In a Socratic classroom a teacher would not consider himself/herself a teacher, but only a mediator between knowledge and student, and would facilitate the process of learning through questioning and via dialogue lead the student to discovering the knowledge for himself/herself. The awareness that this question-posing process creates in the mind of the student is what, the members of the FS say, will lead to an emancipated form of life in the society. Thus, **Critical Theory is dialogical in nature** and demands a high level of intellectual engagement both by the teacher and the student.

It is with this rationale of dialogue and how knowledge constructed in the dialogical way can lead to emancipation that Paulo Freire, a Brazilian, first came into contact with Critical Theory in the late 1950s. The situation of peasants in Brazil was appalling. Oppression of peasants by the landlords was everywhere – but the fact that triggered Freire into action was the characteristic of this oppression – the peasants were happy with their oppressed state. The peasants saw nothing wrong in their situation. Hegemony![2] The paternalistic government organised literacy campaigns – the peasants who could now read and write a little - continued to be oppressed peasants under the oppressor landlords. Thus, the deposition of knowledge or banking concept of education did not free the peasants.

The banking concept of education Freire(1973) explains is based on the assumption that students are empty vessels to be filled with content in such a way that they are able to reproduce it in exactly the same manner. The teacher becomes the narrator, the student the passive listener and the classroom a mere place where acquired

knowledge is limited to the transferred information. The banking concept creates good, organised and domesticated citizens who will live by the book and accept the hegemony of the false illusions of democracy, of social justice and of cultural domination (passive citizenship). Freire(1973) expresses an urgent need for liberatory and emancipatory education practices that develop the critical consciousness of individuals through problem posing and creative thinking acts of cognition. For it is problem-posing education that gives people the know-how to unveil the hegemony of the false illusions of democracy, of social justice and of cultural domination, thus giving them the confidence to trust their own creative powers to free themselves from the hegemony that surrounds them.

This process of self-engagement in self-liberation gave birth to "***Critical Pedagogy***" a pedagogy whereby the peasants achieved emancipation. Freire called this process "conscientização" (Freire, 1973, p.17) which is the act of learning to critically perceive the social, political and economic fluxes in any given situation and then take appropriate action. For helping the oppressed achieve freedom, Paulo Freire is a pioneer and therefore the ***father of Critical Pedagogy***.

'Pedagogy' in Critical Pedagogy

During my training as a teacher, pedagogy was not a much-used word. Instead the focus was on instructional strategies. Pedagogy would be defined as an appropriate way to deliver content to a group of students, be it using a group activity or different set of teaching aids, that helped achieve the desired learning outcome – same as instructional strategies. To get the theoretical paradigm right, I decided to look at the most recent study on "Culture and Pedagogy" by Robin Alexander(2000). I am unable to do justice to the breadth and depth of Alexander's research and findings on the subject, therefore I will limit myself to briefly extrapolating his views on pedagogy and his explanation of why there is no mention of pedagogy in England – items of concern related to my question.

Pedagogy, Alexander(2000) argues with Watkins and Mortimore, is not "any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance the learning in another"

(Alexander, 2000, p.549) but pedagogy is both the act of teaching and the discourse of "theories, beliefs, policies and controversies" (Alexander, 2000, p.540) that the teacher and the student engage in once they start describing, comparing, evaluating and judging the activities and tasks incorporated in the learning content. For e.g. in the learning of history – the historical facts about the content of the Second World War get intertwined with how the teacher presents and describes the Nazis, the Jews or the British alliances to the students. This gets further entangled with the student's past encounters with the information either on TV or through family discussions. The resulting reality – a biased or a critical perception of the Second World War - is that new knowledge was constructed from the theoretical content, past experience and current assumptions of both the student and the teacher. Thus "Pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure and mechanisms of social control" (Alexander, 2000, p.540).

If I have understood Alexander correctly here, the following e.g. should illustrate this. As I enter a classroom full of students from different ethnic backgrounds, with different up-bringings, having different mental dispositions, the free-standing lesson plan that I prepared keeping the curriculum and learning outcomes in mind suffers the discourse of dialogue which raises questions of values, beliefs, assumptions, priorities and purpose – my own and that of each individual student in the classroom. Illustrating this further, lets us look at a lesson plan for the making of commercial posters. The students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds use colour combinations unique to what they have seen in their homes and within their world – reds, yellows and oranges; pinks, purple and reds; blues, whites and reds. The idea of dominant corporate colours (black, white, blue and red) is always a question of negotiation between personal preference developed from what they have grown up seeing and the purpose of the poster they are currently engaged in doing. The students have to understand not only their individual cultural capital[3] but also that of the dominant culture and it's the teacher's duty to enable them to transparently engage with it. Therefore, I agree with Alexander that pedagogy is much more than instructional strategy – "it is an act and a discourse" (Alexander, 2000, p.540).

In continental Europe, instructional strategies are called "didactics" i.e. specific methods of teaching which are central to school subjects (maths, science, etc.). The Germans and the French train teachers in didactics and in pedagogy. Didactics is for the subject specific teaching. Pedagogy is considered as a "broad intellectual domain, which encompasses the study of education and a variety of forms of human enquiry and of teaching" (Alexander, 2000, p.543) that all teachers should know and apply to their teaching practice across the curriculum. In England, Alexander's(2000) research has highlighted that there is some form of didactics, especially for the core curriculum subjects – English, Maths, Science and ICT - and pedagogy is understood in the context of cross-curricular themes such as Citizenship and RE.

Alexander(2000) traces the history of education in England from the 11th century up to present day politics, which still continue to drive the education policy. In fact, Freire(1993) discussing the political nature of education, says that education can never be apolitical. Politics has greatly biased the availability of education to the public at large and thus taken it from a purely intellectual domain to that of the elite. The term "'politicity' of education" (Freire, 1993, p.22) demands the question of what sort of politics do we want in education? In whose favour should the curriculum be developed? In whose interests should the school function? Alexander(2000) alleges that the UK education policy instead of setting out values in the broader context of the purpose of education, has "reduced teaching to a set of competencies or 'standards' and teacher training to the task of demonstrating to OFSTED's inspectors that these were complied with" (Alexander, 2000, p.541-542). For the British, on Alexander's account, teaching is actually about performance management, classroom organization, assessment targets and curriculum delivery.

Faced with this scenario how can any teacher think of or apply pedagogy in the classroom? I too confused pedagogy with instructional strategies i.e. didactics. Looking at my pre-prepared lesson plans, I can see that I was operating from the paradigm of banking or depositary concept of education where subject knowledge is to be imparted to beings that have none and I devised ways of making that knowledge interesting and appealing. With the insight on pedagogy I can now see

the importance of making the subject knowledge relevant to the knowledge and experience that students bring to the classroom and thus help them extrapolate their own meanings and create new knowledge.

<u>Critical</u> and <u>Pedagogy</u> – I will bring them together in light of what Freire has to say at two different times in the span of his own lived history and investigate for emerging commonalities and differences.

Critical Pedagogy

In 1973, in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire, a political exile, wrote in the context of adult literacy programmes - "This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed and from that reflection will come the necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and re-made" (Freire, 1973, p.30).

Freire(1973) first carries out a theoretical analysis of the power relations between the oppressed (those with less or no power) and the oppressors (those with power). The oppressed both desire and fear freedom. Freedom and the desire to be free for the oppressed is to become the oppressors. For they know no other reality. The oppressors on the other hand carry in their hearts the belief that they have the right to power. Denying them this right would be like turning them into the oppressed. This keeps the vicious circle of oppressed and oppressors in place. Pedagogy of the oppressed uses dialectical thought from the Critical Theory traditions to unveil the world of oppression i.e. to find reasons for the emotions that one feels when one has no power. This means trying to analyse why the oppressor is oppressing and why the oppressed are accepting the oppression. What is it that is maintaining the status quo in the situation?

Freire then seeks the power of speaking aloud the "word" i.e. to express one's oppressed state - to identify, define, describe and thus understand through dialogue the oppressed-oppressor situation. According to Freire a voiced thought is always accompanied by a deeper understanding of the thought in the context of the world

i.e. Literacies[4]. To elucidate this, one can say that while speaking the word 'triangle' one becomes aware that it is three sided, but at the same time it could be a table, a building or a patch of garden depending on what it actually is in the context of the world.

Finally comes the association of literacies with Praxis[5], again described by Freire as an uttered word that only becomes real and authentic when it is not "deprived of its dimension of action" (Freire, 1973, p.68) meaning that people should do what they say and say only what they can do. Thus, words should be accompanied by action and vice versa, in a transformation process.

To Literacies and Praxis, the main themes of CP, Freire(1973) adds the precept of problem-posing education. This he says is what develops the spirit of inquiry and self-action in individuals so that they are equipped to fight for their liberation and attain emancipation – 'conscientização'.

In 1993, in "Pedagogy of the City", Freire, in the capacity of the Secretary of Education for the City of São Paulo, and writing in the context of public compulsory education, totally agrees with the Deweyian concept that schools should be creativity centres, where one teaches and learns with joy. On this view in order to get a "truly competent public school system" (Freire, 1993, p.68) one should respect the class, the cultural patterns, the values, the knowledge and the language of all students. Freire(1993) further points out that "a school that does assess the intellectual potential of lower-class children with evaluation tools created for those whose class conditioning gives them an undeniable advantage over the former" does not understand the dialectical relationship that exists between the school and the society i.e. the role that a school can play in transforming the society (Freire, 1993, p.69).

In order for a school to play a transformatory role: students need to be exposed to an appropriate reading of the word and develop a critical awareness of the world surrounding them; teachers should apply the notion of praxis in their teaching i.e. discuss the problems encountered in their practice and while reflecting on them use or create theory that will further inform their practice. The ***notion of reflective practice[6] is at the heart of CP***. Freire(1993, p.50) also calls for progressive teachers

and defines them as ones who are able to constantly demonstrate to their students their - competence, love, political clarity, coherence between what they say and do, tolerance, ability to understand and empathise with diversity and the will to fight against hostility. The progressive teacher's role is to "stimulate doubt, criticism, curiosity, questioning, a taste for risk taking, the adventure of creating" (Freire, 1993, p.50).

Freire's entire pedagogy is based as he himself says on "a certain understanding of education that is committed to the necessary emancipation of the oppressed classes" (Freire, 1993, p.65). From the above two different strands of education: first for adults and the second for children – no dichotomy can be found in Freire's practice. He commends reading the word and the world critically and the notion of Praxis to both. There is also no dichotomy in Freire's stance as to the purpose of education both in adult literacy campaigns in the late seventies or in the school reform of the nineties. It is about emancipation and about creating individuals with a mind frame able to generate and pursue change to create a better world.

In fact, Freire(1993) himself claims that he has consolidated much of his thinking of the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' in the 'Pedagogy of the City' and mentions the case of 'conscientização' or emancipation. To the original definition "coming to consciousness with curiosity and critical reflection" he has added "wanting to know 'rigorously' within of course the same paradigm. It is anyone's and everyone's duty to search with rigour, with humility, without arrogance … to unveil the truths hidden by ideologies that are more alive when it is said …" (Freire, 1993, p.109).

Moreover Freire(1993) also appeals to an undichotomised "reading of the text from the reading of the context" (Freire, 1993, p.110) i.e. a critical reading of the reality. To cite Freire's(1993, p.110) own example of this: it is not enough that the teacher explains the grammatical construction of a language to a student. But he/she must also give explanations of why when one thousand women are in the room with only one man, the Latin languages achieve agreement with the masculine form. Both the teacher and the student's knowledge should be based on the rigorous comprehension of ideologies prevalent in the society (text and context). Only then can 'conscientização' or emancipation be said to have been achieved.

The differences between Freire's CP in 1973 and in 1993 are contextual. When a theory that has been proved useful, is replicated in another environment, it is likely that some adjustments need to be done. So is the case for Freire. When he applied CP from an adult literacy context the stakeholders[7] (adult learners) were different in age, experience, abilities and origin to the school stakeholders (children). The objective in the former was to obtain freedom whereas in the latter it was to educate for freedom. Alexander's(2000) research also shows that culture and context drive the pedagogy. Hence for Freire, the contextual differences can be justified.

So far CP has dominated the discussion and in order to balance this and to provide an evaluative perspective, I will look at another view of education – an understanding of what education is from a reknowned British philosopher/political theorist – Michael Oakeshott – who lived from 1900 to 1991.

A view of Education in the UK

For Oakeshott(1973) education has two central characteristics: <u>One</u> – it is a transaction of knowledge between generations, where newcomers are initiated into the ways of the world they are supposed to inhabit and <u>Two</u> – it occurs in the form of an engagement, an engagement of the individual with the 'culture' of the world that he/she is supposed to inhabit. Culture for Oakeshott is not the everyday culture that we see around us, rather he means the 'high culture' that is central to the human tradition such as art, music, philosophy and poetry among others. By engagement Oakeshott means the understanding of the world that one gets through learning and appreciation of high culture. Individuals according to Oakeshott(1973) are not born knowledgeable. Individuals are born with a capacity to learn and it is this ability to learn, that when directed by formal study, effort, patience, courage and humility makes one a human being.

During his lifetime, this human being in the course of various interactions with the inherited 'high culture' develops relationships, creates new history and thus has a large view of the future. Articulating the emancipatory role of education, Oakeshott

claims that an emancipated human being is one who is capable of moral and intellectual adventure, which is part of the human life (Oakeshott, 1973, p.48). This initial engagement requires conscious effort of the individual and takes place in a special place called 'School' (Oakeshott, 1973, p.48).

Reference to legislative policy and alternative education for the poor show Oakeshott's discontent with the new aim of education – that is to produce individuals capable of performing social functions and contributing to the economic life of the country – named as apprenticeship education. Apprenticeships, states Oakeshott are ways that the political structures use to contain the contemporary world order and maintain the status quo. Professor Karl Mannheim's[8] discourse cited in Bantock(1965) is all about social planning, which he calls for through the education system in Germany. Bantock like Oakeshott is also concerned with how the education system is being used to maintain the status quo. It can be argued that if a human being is only given a mirror of his life then that is what he will make of his life – a mirror of the current situation at his birth – this will maintain the status quo of the society. This human being will never aspire to acquire a "more ample identity" (Oakeshott, 1973, p.41). The 'engagement of education', as Oakeshott(1973) calls it, should be to initiate all human beings into the difficult unfamiliar inheritance of human understandings and sentiments provided by the great traditions of thought. A firm grasp of the world – a critical understanding of the social reality – is what a human being requires to begin the cumulative history building process of living through cultural interaction.

Oakeshott(1973) also has limited sympathy towards the Baconian notion of education that concerns with learning from life experience and understanding how things in the world work. New knowledge constructed from the experiences of learners and from solving everyday life problems will not transform lives, argues Oakeshott. An education system dominated with child-centred learning will not emancipate the individual. According to Oakeshott, an individual is born with potential value and can only be valued as a human being for what he/she can become through learning. To this proclaimars of Child-Centred Learning approach, such as Dewey would ask where does the individuality that is demonstrated by the

three year old in his/her actions and innate sense of direction in taste, inclination, feelings and emotion come from? (Bonnett, 1994, p.45)

Bonnett(1994, p.46) raises the concern that - if Oakeshott is saying that a person only becomes a human being by acquiring a bank full of information about the understanding of his/her culture – then this would limit the human into either replicating the same culture in his/her own history (thinking within the box) or clearly this would limit the extent to which the person can think outside the dominant cultural perspective. Is this the notion of an individual we want to create through education? Should a person be valued for his/her culture rather than for what he/she is as an individual? If we take aboard Oakeshott's this particular view on education then aren't we stereotyping individuals into yet another status quo – that of a particular culture?

Notwithstanding the above critique of Oakeshott, there is much to be learnt from him with regard to the purpose of education and his arguments about the 'socialization' of education (apprenticeship) in a technologically advancing world.

When Freire and Oakeshott meet!

To further engage the theme of CP – a hypothetical encounter between Freire and Oakeshott can be imagined.

The commonalities in Freire's and Oakeshott's thinking can be expressed as their discontent with the education system in their countries, which favoured the culturally elite and economically affluent. In Freire's case it was the peasants that suffered. In Oakeshott's case, the poor who underwent the apprenticeship programmes. *Reading the world and the word* – in Freire's can be equated to – *critical understanding of the world* – as per Oakeshott. For both education played an emancipatory role of enabling human beings to transform their lives, generate a better quality of life for themselves and contribute to the overall culture of the society. Freire's CP gave personal freedom to the oppressed peasants, who were then able to transform their lives. The engaged process of education, for Oakeshott,

opens doors for a human being to seek to fulfil his/her potential and contribute towards the shaping and building of human culture.

In spite of the similarities between Freire's CP and Oakeshott's aims of education, a difference emerges.

Oakeshott, a theorist and a philosopher examined the situation of education in the UK and in Europe and gave his views. Freire's doctoral research of 1959 develops his thoughts on the oppressor/oppressed situation in Brazil. But Freire went a step further. He added the aspect of practice to his theory of CP. Freire devised a solution from his thoughts and put it into practice in different contexts. This practice came to be called *Critical Pedagogy*. Herein lies the difference between the two. Freire is a practitioner, a theorist and a philosopher whereas Oakeshott's thoughts remained in the realm of ideas.

In fact, Oakeshott would agree with Freire that a philosophical base to any understanding is crucial because when one reflects on social issues – as theorists do – then the real becomes the abstract and it is in the realm of the abstract that solutions and ideas are developed. Therefore, what the abstract offers to the concrete is invaluable when put into practice. Then again Oakeshott would add that there are some things that cannot be put into the concrete - Praxis is unavailable as in the case of 'high culture' - for how can one express feelings and emotions that a piece music generates or describe the sense of awe from a sunset!

Following Freire's thought about the congruency of theory and practice[9] it is worthy noting that Mathew Arnold with all his knowledge and insight on education and its purpose, took the decision to address the concerns of "industrial and bourgeois Britain in the 1860s" (Alexander, 2000, p.23). Both Bantock and Alexander refer to Arnold's contribution to the Education Act of 1870 in making education more liberal, but both also agree that Arnold was too passive in his position as an inspector and could have influenced the UK education scenario (Bantock, 1965, p.101) towards the aims of education professed by himself and as well as Oakeshott.

The dichotomy in theory and practice appears to stand out when decisions are made: either globally or institutionally or individually. It is this dichotomy that shapes how we will live and what we will do. In our daily life, in our professional and personal spheres – we are judged by the coherence of what we say and what we do. Thus, simplistically defined Praxis would be to do the things that one says and only say those things that one can do. ***This notion of praxis is crucial and centre point of CP*** as Blake and Masschelein(2002, p.54) highlight.

Reflecting on practice should uncover and reveal the relationship that the practice has to the individual, the social and the cultural dimension of the context in which the practice takes place - therein the relationship of praxis with critical theory. Blake and Masschelein are referring to the various levels of meaning and explanations of practice that a particular context can provide us. Gibson's(1986, p.12) categorization of the levels of explanations – personal/interpersonal, institutional and structural – can provide ways to look at for e.g. a school policy – what does it mean to each of the stakeholders personally and what shared meaning does it create for all the stakeholders interpersonally; the institutional explanation could be that the school has a history of behaviour related problems and thus needs a tight policy; structurally it could be that the school is located in the back streets and thus needs extra precautions.

For teachers the extremely relevant concept of Praxis has another name – Reflective Practice. Theory and practice always go together in the teaching scenario. A teacher learns: the theoretical basis of a subject; the instructional strategies for that subject content; and then puts them into practice in a classroom context. Theory informs practice and it can also be said that practice is based on sound theoretical assumptions. The missing piece in the process of theory-practice identified by many critical reflection gurus is the incorporation of Critical Thinking in the reflection process. Brookfield(1995, p.186-189) has identified and summarised the benefits of using critical thinking in the reflection process: as an aid to better understand the theory in one's practice; as showing oneself another alternative to current practice, so that one does not dwell in circles; and consequently develops an aptitude to shift the locum of practice from oneself to the social context. He ends with the thought of teachers "'putting *ourselves* into practice rather than putting theory into practice'

(Collins, 1991, p.47)" in order to be critically engaged with students (Brookfield, 1995, p.188).

Critical Thinking in Reflective Practice if considered in light of Brookfield(1995) is Praxis. Teachers are well versed in post lesson reflections: to identify the strengths of their class/lesson; areas of growth; and strategies to address these areas in future lessons. This is very much tried and tested – even by myself – and with reasonable success.

At this point a question arises – Is Reflective Practice the only form that CP can take in a UK classroom? Consequently, I reformulate one of the sub-questions of this essay: "Has it been tried in the UK context?" to "Can CP be applied to the UK classroom practice, to a UK school? Is there any evidence of practice, testing, research and findings?".

A critical consideration of the arguments posed against Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy in education will add more to the discussion.

Critique of Critical pedagogy

CP is a relatively new field and not much research has been done on its critical appraisal in different contexts and with diverse school subjects. CP just like Critical Theory is made up of many contextual strands. Depending upon the inclinations developed through their own experience, the critical pedagogue comes to favour one or more issues related to social injustices – illiteracy, racism, sexism and gender bias among others. It is difficult to find a consolidated piece of work that covers all the areas of emphasis common to CP. However, an appraisal of CP can nevertheless be taken aboard. It would mean looking at it through the lens of a particular issue: class, race, culture, gender, language, etc. – issues that surround the CP indicators like Hegemony, Hidden Curriculum and Cultural Capital as well as through the critique of Critical Theory itself. What I have found are critiques of either instrumental reason (Peukert, 1993), or of the role and authority of the teacher in a CP classroom

(Lisman[10], 2003) or the teacher-student relationship (Foucault cited by Lisman in Skellert, 2003). There of course are others.

Empathy with Lisman can be justified because he is presenting his views from a telos i.e. the end. Emancipation to him means 'the end' that needs achieving, has been achieved – the student has received the knowledge that he gave and is able to reproduce it. The quasi insignificance of the dialogical process in learning is summarised in an authoritative model of teaching and banking concept of education. To make matters worse Critical Theory uses Socratic dialogue, which its founders Horkheimer and Adorno rewrote as 'Negative Dialectics' within of course their context. Blake and Masschelein(2002, p.39) say that Peukert finds "the negativity of Critical Theory as its most irritating characteristic" and Lisman (Skellert, undated[11]) elaborates that CP provides "a nice 'rationalization' … mainly foments further dissatisfaction … being yet another faux radicalism, pretend critique, mind games of professors and students working themselves up into a rage about the conditions of inequity that provide them their very secure university haven of classroom 'radical' discussion".

For Lisman, CP is just verbalism and no action - no Praxis is present in the CP he has so far observed. He does not agree with decentring the authority of the professor/teacher in the classroom context and strongly believes that the professor/teacher's authority and power should be used to foster learning and direct the growth of the student. Lisman's opinion is conducive with Oakeshott's perspective of an engaged education.

Hooks(1994, p.132-135), a Critical Pedagogue, might just agree with Lisman, but with a slight discord. She would say that a teacher in a CP classroom has the authority and the power just like any another teacher. But Hooks would add that a CP teacher would use his/her authority and power to direct and re-direct the learning dialogues in the classroom and not control the learning of the students that traditional teachers are in the habit of doing.

Let us look at the lesson whose objective is to make students aware of how groups work, what challenges they may face and how to deal with those challenges. In a

traditional classroom, the teacher would present the students with a model of Belbin's[12] research on groups – the roles that each person can play and the different phases that the group undergoes before it begins to perform. Naturally this would a priori condition the group formation and working modes of the students. In a progressive classroom, the teacher would start with a dialogue trying to suss out from the students their experience of working with groups. This she would then enlist on the board as to the requirements of group working. Juxtaposed to this the teacher would increase the student's knowledge and ask them to critically appraise Belbin's work in light of what they had discussed and constructed as the requirements of groups. This is where the role of directing and re-directing dialogue plays a critical part.

 A Critical Pedagogue will never impose his/her ideology on the students, instead he/she will allow students to make their own ideologies. The relationship between personal identity and professional identity creates the fear of critique in a teacher, says Hooks(1994, p.144) and this is why teachers are wary of CP. For when a teacher enters a CP classroom, he/she bares not only the content but also his/her assumptions to critique and the students learn from this critique. Let us look back at the group work lesson plan – the teacher might have had a very good or a bad experience working in groups. How is he/she going to portray his/her assumptions on group work to the students? CP is not an easy option to practice!

Let's look at Peukert's irritation of the negative dialectics of instrumental reasoning in Critical Theory. Peukert's main criticism is that the founders of the Critical Theory, namely Horkheimer and Adorno, who negated the total rationality of instrumental reason, themselves fell into its trap. Using Instrumental Reasoning, they rationally presented the social injustices and inequalities and the more they rationalised the more they entered into the mind game of psychoanalysis which took them further and further away from reality. Freudian psychoanalysis is not without its pitfalls. The utopia presented by Horkheimer and Adorno at the end of their lives, was according to Peukert(1993, p.159-162), so distorted that it was devoid of any moral and human emotion/action. Thus, Peukert lost empathy with the emancipatory nature of Critical Theory.

The revival of Critical theory by Jurgen Habermas, Peukert(1993, p.163) wholeheartedly accepts. The concept of praxis in this new revived paradigm is that emancipation can be achieved through the means of language whereas originally emancipation was achievable through self-awareness sought from Freud and instrumental reason. Freire's(1973, 1993) reading the word and the world – literacies – would fit here. Habermas' 'Theory of Communicative Action' takes the literacies concept a step further and defines it around language and how language can be used to empower and/or disempower individuals. Language is the main basis of human interaction. Our thoughts come to us in an unspoken linguistic form. In every human being there is a constant flux of unspoken and spoken language and it is the coherence of the unspoken and spoken that engages and empowers us and the incoherence between them disempowers our engagement, as Oakeshott would say.

Thus, we find that Peukert's annoyance regains the appreciation of Critical Theory, through the 'Theory of Communicative Action' and it will be interesting to follow his exploration of literacies in the realm of CP in his future works.

Critical Theory advocates on one hand the ability of the individual mind to critique the social injustices and on the other it promotes the use of communicative power of the spoken and the written language to proclaim these injustices. CP on the other hand is concerned with developing the critical faculties of students and their powers of literacy. Proficiency in literacy both verbal and written, is crucial affirm both Alexander(2000, p.566-568) and Wink(1999, p.87). Both promote Vygotsky's legacy of language: thought and verbal thought in primary education contexts. They are also dedicated to empowering children through critical learning of language and protest against assessment systems that favour only the written means of evaluation.

Language and Dialogue with Literacy and ***Critical Theory with Reflective Practice (Praxis)*** are at the heart of CP. These are central themes of CP.

In trying to demystify CP, I looked at its origin in Critical Theory and at the meaning of pedagogy. A brief history of how CP flowered in Brazil under the custodianship of its founder: Paulo Freire brought to light the importance of literacy - reading the text and reading the context – to education. Another view came from a British

philosopher political theorist Oakeshott, who argued the need for creating critically conscious citizenship. From the difference between Freire and Oakeshott emerged the concept of Praxis: Critical reflection and action – for teachers. It became apparent from the critique of CP that language plays an important part in the achievement of emancipation or 'conscientização'. It remains to look at the application of CP in the UK classroom context. For this I will turn to Walkington(2000).

Critical Pedagogy in the UK classroom context

Walkington(2000) looks at the Freire's CP framework and UK classroom context and draws from them common "elements of emancipatory education" (Walkington, 2000, p.15). Her analysis leads her to reject the banking concept of education and to acknowledge that the progressive approach[13] is one that develops the critical consciousness of the students and of the teacher as well. Walkington stresses that there is a need to move away from any model of education that does not prepare critically conscious citizens. Both Freire and Oakeshott would agree with her. She also strongly agrees with Freire, when he claims that passive citizenship breeds oppression in the society (Walkington, 2000, p.16).

Both traditional and development[14] education, can very well be problem-based to develop the critical thinking of students. The difference, Walkington(2000, p.16) adds, at least in the UK context, lies in the arena of targets and achievement. Time and energy consumed by the assessment procedures and its grandiose structures inhibit teachers from using progressive pedagogy. The emphasis on content is a bipolar issue: we are considered an information society therefore it is vital for students to know things. However, this knowledge should not result in the laissez faire 'cut and paste culture' that students adopt in order to bypass the assessment system. The critical understanding and analytical evaluation of the knowledge should rule all learning discourse. If the pre-requisite of any education system were to develop the critical thinking of students, then wouldn't all students be able to pass exams effectively and successfully go through any kind of assessment process?

Walkington(2000, p.16), further adds that Freirean thought, is ideological in nature and the teacher is encouraged to consider his/her role in making the society's next generation – very much like Oakeshott. However, there is the remarkable difference in the teacher-student relationship in the UK classroom. The inequalities of power make dialogue in the UK classroom impossible. There is more emphasis on literacy via broadening of the curriculum content and less emphasis on cross-curricular dialogue. Walkington(2000, p.16), like Wink on the other side of the Atlantic, argues that the content should be used as a "vehicle for literacy" and not for assessment purposes. They both understand literacy in Freire's words: reading the word and the world.

Interestingly enough Walkington goes a step further to hypothesize - if UK accepted Freirean thought, then what would our classrooms, schools and the education system look like? To accept an ideology is not easy and Freirean thought is an ideology. It is not a question of top down approach or a sideways dissemination that will change the prevailing traditional ideology. It is a question of the discernment and permeation into the assumptions of the many stakeholders (headteachers, teachers, parents, students, etc.) in the education system to shift their mindsets. Teachers can have: radical aims, be on middle ground or traditionalists. Student's previous experience is very much related to the parental input in their life and their own experience from the life they have so far lived. Parent's can be end or process focussed with regard to their children's performance. Schools also have histories, ethos and ways of doing things. Added to this is the politics mandating the education system, dating back to 10th and 12th century (Alexander 2000, p.120-153).

Notwithstanding the above constraints, Walkington claims that the one person that can play a crucial role in the process of changing ideologies is the ***Teacher***. For the 'teacher' is the promoter of ideologies and has a very large circle of influence. I am reminded of Bantock's(1965, p.201) characterisation of the classroom as being 'the holy ground' and the teacher as being the representative of the human culture with the responsibility of imparting knowledge in a genuine mode of concern for the students.

Reconciled with the education system in the UK, Walkington says "in a formal school context, radical transformation of status quo is not possible, nor perhaps even desirable, and thus the aims of development education remain diluted in practice" (Walkington , 2000, p.17). However, she certainly adds "The extent to which development education can achieve its aims hinges upon individual educators and their commitment to education for change"[15] (Walkington , 2000, p.17). The caveat in this statement is the power and authority that the teacher has in the classroom that gives him/her the added weight, the extra onus of accountability towards the society to increase the value of the world, not in economic terms, but in terms of creating critically conscious students. This should underpin all and any student-teacher interaction.

Conclusion

The answer to my question: *Is Critical Pedagogy for me?* is found here. It is in the context of creating accountable, critically conscious, creative problem-solvers and pragmatic citizens that Freirean thought and methodology of praxis and dialogue can be used and practiced by me. In a classroom environment dialogue can be used to access the previous experience of the students. Information/content can then be introduced to allow the students to develop their own associations. The learning process can be guided through posing questions, which require Higher Order Thinking(HOT)[16] so that the student's critical thinking skills are being developed. It does not matter what subject I teach for I would reflect on the process of learning rather than the content. My praxis would be all about what happened in the classroom, why did it happen, how can this be interpreted, what theory can inform this scenario, what implications does this incident have on practice and how can future practice be improved because of this reflection. What does matter is to give students a right attitude towards all the subjects so that they are able to make informed choices and right associations independent of the status quo they live in.

Language and Dialogue with Literacy and *Critical Theory with Reflective Practice (Praxis)* can be practiced regardless of the hegemony of assessment structures and prevailing target euphoria.

Sequel

> *The natural educators*
>
> *It is not enough merely to keep children alive. They should be fitted to take of themselves when they grow up. They should learn to bear the blows of fortune; to meet either wealth or poverty, to live if need be in the frost of Iceland or on the sweltering rock of Malta. The important thing is not to ward off death, but to make sure they really live. Life is not just breathing: it is action, the functioning of organs, senses, faculties, every part of us that gives the consciousness of existence. The man who gets most out of life is not the one who has lived longest, but the one who has felt life most deeply.*
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> *(Emile for Today – The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau)*

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[1] **Hidden Curriculum**, **Cultural Capital** and **Hegemony** are some of the indicators of CP. Simplistically explained - Hidden Curriculum is what is taught in the classroom without being explicit on the lesson plan, Cultural Capital is what is accepted as a norm in a particular context and in order to fit into the context, one has to practice it and Hegemony is the affirmation of one cultural knowledge versus a hidden denigration of other types of knowledge.

[2] **Hegemony** also happens when one accepts a cultural domination of the contact environment, which puts down one's own self-respect and personal dignity. This is common in power situations where some people have power over others and use it to hide the injustice that they are practicing.

[3] See endnote (i) for explanation of **cultural capital**.

[4] **Literacy** defined by Freire (1973, p.58) means "to insist that every reading of the word is preceded by a reading of the world" and "implies the critical development of the reading of the world, which is a political, awareness-generating task". It is the case of coding, decoding, understanding and applying the meaning in both the visible and hidden messages.

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[5] **Praxis** is the reflective process between the application of theory and the results of practicing the theory. Freire (1973, p.68) explains praxis as the cycle between word and work.

[6] **Reflective practice** does require elaboration to situate it within the context of this essay and will be done in the later paragraphs in light of Brookfield (1995).

[7] **Stakeholders** can be defined as the many and different persons who have a vested interest in a particular organization or issue and will be affected with actions of the organisation or the issue.

[8] in Bantock (1965)

[9] Freire has further elaborated on the concept of Praxis – Theory ad Practice where he explains that the former without the latter is plain verbalism and the latter without the former is just activism (Freire, 1973, 68).

[10] Lisman, D. is currently a Professor at Hamline University and his bio data can be found at http://web.hamline.edu/personal/skellert/radped.htm

[11] This is a quote on the website and is undated. The website was visited in December 2003.

[12] Dr. Meredith Belbin over a period of 9 years studied the behaviour of managers, from all over the world, working in teams to identify patterns of behaviour that made team work successful. More information about the different roles can be found at http://www.belbin.com visited in February, 2004.

[13] **Progressive education** as per Walkington is 'education for change' (Walkington, 2000, p.15)) where shared responses to global issues like citizenship education and sustainable development education are sought through engaging learners in action based critical and reflective thinking and dialogue.

[14] Walkington in her article uses progressive education interchangeably as development education implying that they mean the same for her.

[15] Walkington reached this conclusion through her research on the extent of which teachers can incorporate development education methods in their classroom. The results revealed that: teachers found it easier to tell children what to do rather than engage them in dialogue until they arrived at an answer; it was time consuming and extremely difficult to incorporate

cross-curricular dialogue in single subject teaching; poor literacy of children could not support the enquiry based learning and problem posing teaching methodology; and teachers did not feel prepared and comfortable to deal with the emotional and sensitive issues associated with development education. The last point was also discussed with Hooks.

[16] **HOT** as per the 6 levels of questioning in Blooms Taxonomy.