

From the Editor

The idea of a special issue on ***Critical Pedagogy in the Mexican ELT Classroom*** started with the need to reflect on the stance that we, English teachers in Mexico, have about our own profession and practice. The members of the UABJO research group (Cuerpo Académico en Linguística Aplicada) believe that it is necessary to delve into the political and ideological issues that concern the learning and teaching of English in Mexico. For this reason we invited some researchers and practitioners from around the country to begin a dialogue, whose result is the positional paper entitled *A Call for a Critical Perspective on English Teaching in Mexico* included in this issue.

During our discussions, we also decided that this positional paper had to be published in Mexico to be read by Mexican teachers. We were in complete agreement that the most appropriate forum was *MEXTESOL Journal*. However, being aware that we wanted to include more voices and views and that we needed to extend the discussion to more practical grounds, we decided on a special issue, that would represent the wide range of points of view and experiences of teachers and researchers working within the paradigm of critical pedagogy in Mexico. Based on ethnographic accounts and discussions in other parts of the world (Pennycook, 2001; Norton and Toohey, 2004; Canagarajah, 1999 and others), we believe that our profession must take a stand on political and ideological issues that concern the learning and teaching of English in Mexico.

The articles included in this issue have responded appropriately and in a variety of ways to the rationale that underlies this enterprise. They present subjective (as opposed to 'objective') and personal accounts that show a critical stance to English language teaching and learning in Mexico. Some of the authors also dealt with some social inequities (ethnicity, race, and class) and explore the relationship between language learning and social and educational change. In addition, some of the contributors demonstrate how ethnographic approaches can throw some light on the way teachers and learners make sense of their own experiences, illustrating issues such as agency, identity, resistance, etc.

As stated before, *A Call for a Critical Perspective on English Teaching in Mexico*, is a collaborative work in which ten authors representing four public Mexican universities put forward their critical position on the ELT profession in Mexico. Addressing relevant issues such as the native/non-native speaker teacher dichotomy, linguistic hegemony and already established and imposed standards of English, they pose essential questions for the English teacher to reflect on when carrying out their everyday activities in a country "so close to the United States, yet so far from God!". The papers that follow this positional paper are certainly a good example of how we can begin to express our critical position on these issues.

In ***Entering the Circle: Mexican Graduate Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Language, Identity and New Discourses in U.S. Universities***, the authors, Rebeca Gutiérrez Estrada and Nolvía Cortez address a specific scenario of ELT: Mexican graduate students studying in U.S. Based on the experiences of four students, the authors identify strategies of linguistic survival, resistance and appropriation that contribute to their identities as 'scholars-in-the-making'.

From a general perspective, Nolvía Cortez' contribution, ***Learning English is No Neutral Choice: Contributions of Critical Perspectives to Classroom EFL in Mexico***, has as its purpose to make the reader realize that Bakhtin and Bourdieu's ideas are central to ELT discourse in Mexico. She specifically addresses three important issues that seem to be uncontested: the value of the textbook, the connection between students' efforts and outcomes and the reason for learning English.

Drawing on personal anecdotes as a language teacher, Carol Lethaby's ***Appropriating English in Mexico***, rejects "traditional extremes" for considering ELT in Mexico and opts for Canagarajah's "third way" which states that English learners can learn and use the language "in their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs and values" (1999, p.176). After a discussion involving concepts such as linguisticism and culturism, she encourages Mexican teachers to reflect on ways to 'appropriate' English taking into account their students own reality and situation.

Gerry Mugford's contribution, ***Critical Pedagogies: Interpersonal Language and Teacher Development*** applies Canagarajah's third way for understanding English learning to practical contexts. He focuses on the pedagogical positions of teachers from two training courses on interpersonal language use. His results, very promising, show that student-teachers "are trying to identify new ways of responding to their own students' inter-personal language needs".

In the area of research methodology, Oscar Narvaez' ***Teachers as Ethnographers: Listening to Students' Voices for (Self) Development***, encourages teachers to explore their classrooms and pay attention to the voices of their students. This ethnographic approach is presented step by step, so that the inexperienced ethnographer finds her way, so that she can focus on "what the students have to say, as opposed to what the teacher wants to hear".

In ***Teacher Educators and Pre-Service English Teachers Creating and Sharing Power Through Critical Dialogue in a Multilingual Setting***, Mario E. López Gopar, Julia Stakhnevich, Heidi León García and Angélica Morales Santiago, illustrate what a critical dialogue looks like when teacher educators and pre-service English language teachers decide to work together. The result reflects on everybody's empowerment and praxis. Dealing with aspects of critical pedagogy, feminist theory and critical applied linguistics, they analyse four categories (native vs non-native speakers, authentic materials and textbooks, issues of

bilingualism, and the participants' praxis) and conclude that. "the role of language educators is essential in the construction of a more egalitarian society". The last contribution of this collection on critical pedagogies, ***Can I Have a Voice in the Nation's Classroom?*** by William Sughrua, explores a very different kind of intellectual genre in dealing with the discussion on critical pedagogies. Using self-reflective, literary analysis, social theory and historical fiction he composes a critical tale for language teachers to ponder their own locations within the classroom. Sughrua frames his concerns within the relation between the localized social and political context of language students and the broader context that defines and confines these local actions and desires. It is a cautionary story, stressing that no matter how bold and progressive you think our voice as teacher can be by pushing that voice too hard or too dogmatically, you may find yourself located in the 'Nation' that surrounds the classroom instead of being inside the "nation" of the students.

As a way to conclude this introduction to the present collection I would like to refer to Sughrua's father's advice, which is to give ourselves as teachers a break in the classroom by working with and in the interests of the students.

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