Teacher Educators and Pre-Service English Teachers Creating and Sharing Power Through Critical Dialogue in a Multilingual Setting[12]

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Abstract

This article reports on a qualitative project that explored how teacher educators and pre-service English language teachers applied critical pedagogy to their practices in order to create and share power. The context of the article is the multilingual and multicultural state of Oaxaca, Mexico. It draws from aspects of critical pedagogy, feminist theory and critical applied linguistics as its theoretical framework and offers insights into a critical dialogue as a way to become better language educators, learners, and researchers. The article highlights critical instances organized in four categories: native versus non-native speakers, authentic materials and textbooks, issues of bilingualism, and the participants' praxis. It is concluded that the role of language educators is essential in the construction of a more egalitarian society.

"There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope"
(Freire, 1994:91).

Introduction

In this article, we report on a project that focused on the exploration of how teacher educators and pre-service English language teachers applied critical pedagogy to their practices in order to create and share power. The article describes and analyzes a critical dialogue among four participants: two Oaxacan multilingual pre-service English teachers of Mixtec descent (Angélica and Heidi), a multilingual Oaxacan teacher educator (Mario) and a multilingual Russian-American applied linguist (Julia). As both the project participants and its authors, we chose to keep our real names and use first-person plural and singular as evidence of our agency. In what follows we hope to retain our four distinctive voices as we express the ideas and experiences that we co-created.

In our vision, we see teachers on all levels of the educational system engaging in critical analysis of their teaching practices and their effects on

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language attitudes, policies and community language use. It is our dream to see that multiculturalism and multilingualism are truly valued and appreciated not for profit or political advancement, but for the profound positive impact that they exude on people. In this article, we share our constant questioning as to the roles we should play as language educators positioned within the multicultural/multilingual context of the state of Oaxaca in Mexico. Our perspectives have been influenced and informed by critical/feminist pedagogues, critical applied linguistics as well as authors invested in social justice. This article describes our critical pedagogy and the power we created and shared during the five months we spent together in Oaxaca.

We believe that our reflections of the encounters that we had are valid since Luke (2004) argues that "to be critical ... is a kind of distantiation that entails the capacity to watch oneself watching" (p.26). Action + reflection is also encouraged by Freire (1998). By drawing from our different perspectives and comparing our insights to those developed by critical theorists, we hope to improve our future teaching practices and work towards our vision of equality and social justice for all Oaxacans. We are aware that it is a long road, but we are already on it, had started to walk it and are building it as we move forward. We hope our lived experiences will help you walk and develop your own path as learners, teachers, and researchers.

To historically contextualize this writing piece, below is a "bird-eye" view of more than 500 years of "Mexican" history. Before the Spanish people came, the Mexican territory had been occupied by different civilizations such as the Toltecs, Mayans, Olmecs, Zapotecs, Mixtecs and others, each with their own distinct language and culture. The Aztecs, originally nomads from the North, came to the central part of Mexico (now Mexico City) and quickly became the rulers establishing a fierce empire that dominated all other groups in the region. For this reason, when the Spanish *conquistadores* invaded Mexico and fought the Aztecs, none of the subjugated groups came to their rescue. With the fall of the Aztec empire to the hands of Hernán Cortés and subsequent Spanish colonization of the region, a new language and religion were imposed on the Indigenous groups.

In 1821, Mexico won the "independence" fight, which was initiated by creoles (children of Spanish people born in Mexico who were not allowed to be part of the colonizing government) and *mestizos* (children born from the unions between Spanish and Indigenous people). Naturally, the real burden of war and ensuing social unrest lied on the shoulders of the Indigenous people. A new Mexico needed to be "unified"; hence, the "one nation, one language" policy came into place. The Spanish-speaking upper classes were not interested in learning Nahualt, Mayan or Mixtec. Instead, they insisted on granting their language, Spanish, the national status. The Indigenous people became more relegated in the society and were constantly persuaded by those in power (both the state and the Catholic Church) that if they were poor and discriminated

against it was because God wanted it that way (heaven was certainly secured for them regardless!).

One hundred years later, the same Indigenous people fought in the Mexican Revolution against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. When the autocracy was toppled, the constitution created to bring justice to all Mexican people was written in Spanish. Up to this date, more than twenty-five percent of the population in the state of Oaxaca cannot read the constitution, or for that matter any official documents or laws, all of which are written in Spanish. (López Gopar & Gunderson, in press). This constitution has been read, adjusted and manipulated by the leaders of the so-called democracy that kept the same party in power for more than seventy years and continued the oppression of the Indigenous people. Thus, for more than 500 years, Indigenous people of Mexico have been denied their rights and exploited by Spanish-speaking upper classes of creoles and *mestizos*.

Oaxaca, located in the southern part of the country, is the most linguistically and culturally diverse state of Mexico. Regrettably, many Mexicans from outside of Oaxaca as well as Oaxacan city dwellers regard this multilingualism not as the state's inherent richness but as a hindrance for Oaxacan development. A popular opinion is that it is the people from the *pueblos* (towns) with their "weird" languages, customs and ignorance that kept the same party in power and made Oaxaca the poorest state in the country with the second lowest illiteracy rate. Nonetheless, the government and the tourism industry have used the colors, flavors, and traditions created by the Indigenous people in an effort to make profit by attracting more tourists. Because of tourism, English has become part of Oaxacan linguistic repertoire sharing common grounds with Spanish and numerous language varieties of at least twelve Indigenous tongues. Interestingly, it is the learning and teaching of the English language that brought the four authors of this article together to the *Facultad de Idiomas* (Department of Languages) of the University of Oaxaca.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has been associated with the work and ideas of several authors in Europe, North and South America. (See Kincheloe, 2005 and Wink, 2005 for a detailed description of these authors and schools). Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, has been the most influential practitioner and considered by many the father of critical pedagogy. "Freire's legacy is unprecedented for an educator: None other has influenced practice in such a wide array of contexts and cultures, or helped to enable so many of the world's disempowered turn education toward their own dreams" (Glass, 2001:15).

As language educators interested in critical pedagogy, what can we learn from Freire? Our first lesson is that critical pedagogy is not a method. It is a state of mind; a way of teaching that sees in each and every student the potential to learn, but, most importantly, the potential to teach something. Using her daughter's words in a conference in Seattle, Alma Flor Ada (1998; as cited in Wink, 2005: 108) said that "the only way to do [critical pedagogy] is to deeply, deeply believe in the learner." In other words, critical pedagogy is teachers and students working together to change their lives and transform the world into a better and more beautiful place.

Using Marxism as his starting point, Freire (1998) worked on the notions of oppressor and oppressed from the perspective of social classes. Weiler (1991), a feminist educator, rightly criticized Friere and pointed out that class distinction is not the only example of the dichotomy of the oppressor and oppressed and that we can be oppressed in certain situations and still be oppressors in others. For instance, a man can be oppressed at his job, but he may come home being a *macho*, beat his wife, quickly morphing into an oppressor. Therefore, a constant reexamination of our daily practices is needed to ensure that we are critical of ourselves and that our behavior does not have a detrimental oppressive effect on the lives of others.

Freire (1998) believed that teachers have the potential to make a difference in the fight against all types of oppression. He mentioned that if we take a passive role, we are accomplices of oppression. Do Freire's ideas translate to Mexico, or, in other words, is there oppression in Mexico? In our opinion, the answer is a definite 'yes' and examples are easy to find. One that comes quickly to mind is the unfair treatment of the Indigenous people. The other one is related to English: McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, and many other fast food restaurants in Mexico charging exactly the same price for their products as they do in the United States, but only paying their Mexican employees a tenth of what they pay to their U.S. employees. And yet, we happily teach our students how to order a "Big Mac" because the textbook, usually created in the States and Great Britain, postulates that it is an important topic and useful vocabulary every English language learner should know. By simply teaching fast-food-restaurant vocabulary and never talking about what these companies do to Mexican people who work there and to local restaurants, which cannot compete with multibillion-dollar corporations, we become agents of the oppressive system perspicuously described by Freire.

Critical pedagogues such as Freire (1998), Giroux (1988), and McLaren (1989) have been criticized by feminist theorists (Ellsworth, 1989 and Yates, 1992) and applied linguists (Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Johnston, 1999; Lin, 2004). These researchers criticize the critical pedagogues for their complex writing; for making the ideas of critical pedagogy too abstract, too theoretical and inaccessible to teachers and students; for not giving examples as to how critical pedagogy works in the classroom; for following modernist rationalism; and for constructing a master narrative from a male perspective. However,

Weiler (1991) argues that feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy are quite similar, stating:

> Both feminist pedagogy as it is usually defined and Freiren pedagogy rest upon visions of social transformation; underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change. Both pedagogies assert the existence of oppression in people's material conditions of existence and as a part of consciousness; both rest on a view of consciousness as more than a sum of dominating discourses, but as containing within it a critical capacity -- what Antonio Gramsci called "good sense"; and both thus see human beings as subjects and actors in history and hold a strong commitment to justice and a vision of a better world and of the potential for liberation (p.450).

In order to emphasize the aspect of transformation and social justice inherent in critical pedagogy, several critical authors have "reinvented" critical pedagogy as Freire suggested, naming it "a pedagogy of love" (Darder, 2002), "transformative education" (Ada & Campoy, 2003), "transformative pedagogy" (Cummins, 2000), and "revolutionary pedagogies" (Trifonas, 2000). The concept of dialogue is crucial in all these pedagogies.

Dialogue

Freire (1998) noticed that in traditional education, learners were regarded as empty vessels in which teachers could *deposit* knowledge; therefore, calling this banking education. The teacher was the active one while the student waited to be filled with facts or truths. The learner in this type of education played a passive role. Freire believed that students were treated like *objects* and that it was important for them to become *subjects* to be part of a *dialogical action* with the teacher, thus becoming the antithesis of banking education. The teacher and students would then construct knowledge together and learn from each other as they move towards their constant liberation.

Freire (1998b) states that there are certain requirements for dialogue to take place. Dialogue cannot occur if people (teachers) place themselves above others (students), believing they are the owners of truth. This is similar to what Gabriel García Márquez (2002) said in his last letter to the public: "Un hombre solo tiene derecho de mirar a otro hacia abajo, cuando ha de ayudarle a levantarse" (a man has the right to look down on another, only if it is to give him a hand to bring him up). Dialogue, Freire added, requires "an intense faith in humankind, faith in the power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human" (p. 71). Furthermore, he asserted that "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education" (pp. 73-74).

Macedo (1997) and Freire and Macedo (1999) responded to the teachers who interpreted their role in the dialogical model as being a facilitator who is there to *converse* with students, rather than being a teacher. Freire decisively argued that he considered himself "a teacher and always a teacher" (Freire & Macedo, 1999: 46). In other words, teachers should not give up "teaching" or providing students with knowledge. However, "facts" should be presented as someone's perspective and not as the absolute truth. It is also the teacher's job to help students make connections between the learner's life and the new knowledge. By doing this, teachers will help students not only to construct new knowledge, but also to engage in their own learning, which consequently may help students gain a more powerful identity. Freire and Macedo (1999) emphasized that dialogue should be always grounded in *praxis* (action + reflection working towards the transformation of the world into a better place). Dialogue without aiming to transform is simply a sterile *conversation*.

Some educators who have adopted Freire's dialogical action suffer from the savior complex, naively hoping to deliver liberation to their students, thus instantly empowering them. This notion is highly problematic, as empowerment should not come *from* the teacher *to* the student. Indeed, this false interpretation, no matter how well intentioned it is, propagates further oppression and takes away agency from the students, again making them into passive recipients of whatever their teachers have to offer them. Cummins (1996) defines empowerment as "the collaborative creation of power, where power is created in the relationship and shared among participants" (p. 16), as opposed to coercive relations of power which refer "to the exercise of power by a dominant group (or individual or country) to the detriment of a subordinated group (or individual or country)" (p. 14). In our approach to critical pedagogy, we adopt this notion of empowerment since it builds on student's and teacher's identities and confidence to succeed, resist and transform oppressive situations.

It is important to recognize that the word "dialogue" is used and manipulated by different groups such as politicians, corporations and diplomats. Burbules (2000) cautioned us not to be naive enough to believe that in every dialogue, participants see each other as equal and worthy of being listened to. He also criticized Freire because his take on dialogue was too idealistic and unproblematized. He argued that:

> The crucial shift in perspective outlined here is from a prescriptive model of dialogue as a neutral communicative process, a procedure in which all participants are treated equally, concerned only with the search for knowledge, understanding, and perhaps agreement, to dialogue as a situated practice, one implicated by the particulars of who, when, where, and how the dialogue takes place (p. 261).

Critical Applied Linguistics and Critical Pedagogies in Language Learning

The previous section focused on critical pedagogy in education in general; in the following section we discuss how critical pedagogy relates to applied linguistics, specifically to Teaching English as a Second or as Foreign Language (TESL/EFL). Typically, language teachers consider themselves on the periphery of the educational system in general. In other words, we just teach language, but we do not "educate" people. "ESL/EFL teachers commonly see themselves as contributing to general welfare simply by helping people to communicate with other people" (Crookes & Lehner, 1998: 320). Consequently, researchers, language policy makers, textbook and curriculum designers have seen our area as unproblematic or *color de rosa*, focusing only on mastering the sounds, syntax, and lexicon of the English language. That has kept us away from mainstream teachers and their concerns with politics and pedagogies such as the critical one we have been referring to. Such is the distance between ESL/EFL and mainstream teachers, that the Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) has little to do with Bilingual Education Organizations, even though both organizations clearly have been developing second language education as one of their goals.

It is inaccurate to say that there have been no ESL/EFL teachers who have been incorporating elements of critical pedagogy into their teaching practices. In 1978, Crawford (as cited in Crookes & Lehner, 1998) attempted in his doctoral dissertation to connect Freire's ideas to second language curriculum design and proposed twenty critical pedagogy principles relevant to ESL/EFL (see Crookes & Lehner, 1998, for ten examples). Auerbach (1986) noticed that although ESL teachers were teaching students how to follow orders in low paying jobs, they were not questioning the nature of those jobs. Graman (1988) also criticized adult ESL classes and argued that the instruction, which focused exclusively on linguistic aspects and was not tied to students' lives, was irrelevant to students and did not engage them. He proposed Freire's "generative themes" as a way to develop a curriculum that was challenging, relevant and humanizing. Although these articles were published in major professional journals, regrettably, they did not have a major impact on the field of applied linguistics and TESL/TEFL.

In 1992, Phillipson published his book *Linguistic Imperialism* arguing that English had been spread for economic and political purposes and posed a major threat to other languages, thus incriminating our *color-de-rosa* profession. In the late nineties, critical pedagogy again gained momentum with a special edition of The TESOL Quarterly entitled *Critical Approaches to TESOL* edited by Pennycook (1999). He wrote in the editor's note: "The variety of papers attests to the profession growing interest in the application of critical theory in ESOL teaching and research" (p.325). In 2001, Pennycook elaborated more on his term "critical applied linguistics," stating that critical applied linguistics "is more that just a critical dimension added on to applied linguistics" (p. 10). He also said that "it involves a constant skepticism, a constant questioning of the

normative assumptions of applied linguistics. It demands a restive problematization of the givens of applied linguistics that seeks to connect it to questions of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology and discourse" (ibid). Pennycook went on to say that critical applied linguistics was not completely welcomed by some applied linguists who even called it "hypocritical applied linguistics" while others demanded "objective applied linguistics."

Subsequently, many ESL/EFL teachers needed to know how critical pedagogy or critical applied linguistics could be applied to their classroom practices. For example, Ewald (1999) demanded reports on its classroom application. More recently, Norton and Toohey (2004) edited a book called *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*. They started by saying that "advocates of critical approaches to second language teaching are interested in relationships between language learning and social change" (p. 1). Norton and Toohey introduced the term *critical pedagogies* in order to "describe *local* situations, problems, and issues, and see responsiveness to the particularities ... [and to] resist totalizing discourses about critical teaching, subjects, and strategies for progressive action" [emphasis in original] (p. 2). Canagarah's (1999) book *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching* is another exemplary work in the way language educators and students exert their agency to resist those totalizing discourses. Finally, Morgan's work (1997, 1998, 2004) shows how ESL classes, developed around community concerns, can still teach grammar and intonation aspects critically. In this article, we attempt to describe "our critical pedagogy" with its struggles, tensions, achievements, and challenges. In order to do so, we have to situate our dialogue in space, time and methods.

Situating the Dialogue

Where?

The Department of Languages of the University of Oaxaca opened in 1974 and provides language instruction in English, French, Italian, Japanese, German, and most recently Zapotec. To respond to the increasing demand for English teachers in the state of Oaxaca, in 1992, the Department first offered the B.A. Degree Program in TESL. In Oaxaca, as in most states in Mexico, proficiency in English has become a must-have skill, often required for many jobs related to tourism and international business, for educational purposes and as one of the prerequisites for many scholarships. All over the state, there are many private English language schools and institutes offering instruction in English. Many private pre-schools and elementary schools use English classes to attract more students (English instruction begins in public institutions at the level of junior-high school).

Who?

Heidi and Angélica are students in the B.A. TESL Program, currently in their 7th semester (5th semester at the time of the dialogue). It is important to note that both Heidi and Angélica come from the same town, Tlaxiaco; both attended the same regional high school; both have Mixtec-speaking parents; both have chosen English as their career; and both have had experience teaching English in small local communities. At the same time, although both of them feel very close to the Mixtec culture, Angélica is a much more proficient speaker of Mixtec. Angélica wrote, "I am proud of myself because I can speak Mixteco and Spanish as well. When people ask me this question: 'What language do you feel as a native speaker?' and I reply 'I don't know. I think I am bilingual"[13]. Heidi, who lost most of her Mixtec, is eager to revive her language skills. When asked to describe herself, Heidi wrote:

> For me it's very difficult to say who I am. I think in Mexican culture, women are always called as the daughter of, the girlfriend of, the wife of, the mother of, so and on. I am against that because I think that every woman has to be called by her name and not as the "wife of". For me it sounds she is a part of a decoration and I don't like that. When you asked to define who I am, the first thing I said was "I am Heidi".

Julia is a multilingual TESL educator at Bridgewater State College in Boston, USA. She is originally from Russia and came to the United States ten years ago to attend graduate school. When we first started communicating via email, she wrote: " I am interested to see how individuals negotiate their identities through different languages available to them and how communities in Oaxaca respond to the dangers of linguistic imperialism and develop political strategies to maintain their language and culture." We started collaborating in June 2005.

Mario is a multilingual language educator originally from Oaxaca. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. His main interest is to collaborate with teachers in order to find ways to critically teach English and Spanish, preserve Indigenous languages, and meet the educational and linguistic needs of all Oaxacan people, especially that of Indigenous groups. This is especially difficult in Oaxaca with its complex post-colonial sociolinguistic context that is being rapidly changed by widespread language loss among the Indigenous population, long-established dominance of Spanish and an advent of English.

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13 To preserve the authenticity of our voices, we have kept the grammar, spelling, and punctuation as they were in the essays, journals and conversation exchanges between the participants.

When?

During his first academic term in the B.A. Program, Mario was asked to teach four classes: Grammar Teaching, English V, Teaching English to Children, and Teaching English through Literature. The last two courses were electives for which Mario was asked to design a syllabus. Heidi and Angélica were Mario's students in the last three classes.

The English V class was an advanced English course in which students practiced the four language skills while using authentic materials. In addition, the course allowed students to use English to discuss academic matters. Since students are required to pass the TOEFL exam with at least 500 points, this course was a preparation for this exam as well.

Teaching English to Children was an introductory and practical course. This was a very-much needed course since there are many job opportunities to teach children in private institutions. The course focused on linguistic, social and cognitive development in childhood. Classroom management techniques and strategies such as using songs, drama, children's literature, and games were also demonstrated. Finally, topics related to literacy development and the use of thematic units were discussed.

Teaching English through Literature was a reader's workshop where students were introduced to children's literature and read different authors and genres. The importance of reading to build one's vocabulary, the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Theory put forth by Cummins (2000) and his idea that concepts and skills transfer from one language to another were emphasized. The class also debated such notions as "Mexicans do not read" and many other ideas commonly held both by general public and teachers.

These courses were not designed to follow critical pedagogy as a method. Instead, during the progression of these courses Mario established a dialogue with his students and shared his constant questioning of the profession while listening to students' perspectives.

How?

The dialogue that we engaged in took different forms, but most of our sessions happened during regular classes. Mario kept a journal about "critical moments" (Pennycook, 2004) that happened in class and resulted in new insights and understandings. As part of their English class assignments, Heidi and Angélica wrote several essays, many of which were autobiographical in nature and discussed their language learning experiences, practices, and aspirations for the future.

During her two-month stay in Oaxaca, Julia kept a researcher's diary, in which she recorded her personal observations of our sessions. In addition, Julia

and Mario had several private conferences with Heidi and Angélica, where they facilitated a deeper understanding of their backgrounds, current perspectives and language practices, both present and past. We also discussed topics regarding the status of Mixtec, Spanish and English in Oaxaca. As their university instructor, Mario wanted to find out more about the impact that his conscious and unconscious messages as well as the teaching of other educators from the Department had on Heidi and Angélica's perspectives on language, identity and their future task of teaching English. Finally, Mario and Julia spent several afternoons throwing ideas back and forth about the role of the TESL teacher as a critical educator in the context of Mexico. Our conversations were geared toward the analysis of Mario's experiences and practices. We also discussed the role of the researcher in post-colonial multilingual contexts and agreed that we should be always mindful of our actions and the impact that our intervention might have on the community. Mario and Julia concurred that our motivation for this project was to encourage social and educational change that would prize multiculturalism and preserve linguistic diversity.

Discussion about Critical Moments

Instead of reporting chronologically, in this article we highlight critical instances that we found relevant for us and that we believe may be relevant for English teachers in Mexico as well as in other countries. These critical moments are organized in four broad categories: the first one dealing with the issues regarding native versus non-native speakers; the second one relating to authentic materials and textbooks; the third one addressing issues of bilingualism; and the fourth one describing Heidi and Angélica's reflections and future action, their praxis.

The Native Speaker Ghost

Before starting the B.A. in TESL at the University of Oaxaca, Mario had lived in the United States for two years; he had gone to that country in the same way that many Mexicans do and with the same purpose: to make money and to learn English. Even though his command of English grammar was good, and he was getting excellent grades in grammar courses, Mario felt that there was a constant reminder of him being an outsider, a Mexican with broken English. Loosing his Mexican accent and sounding like a "native speaker" was his goal in order to be accepted by the mainstream group. After completing his B.A., Mario went to Canada to pursue graduates studies. Later on, he went back to the United States to work in bilingual schools. He had succeeded academically and professionally, but his Mexican accent had remained, and he was still regarded as "a non-native speaker."

Upon his return to Oaxaca, Mario joined the Department of Languages from which he had previously graduated. Many of his teachers and some of his

classmates who also became faculty knew him, but the students did not. As a new teacher, he heard terrifying stories about the students being critical and suspicious of non-native speaking Mexican teachers like himself. The teachers' professional knowledge was constantly monitored: any spelling mistakes, mispronunciation, or unknown words would constitute sufficient proof that the teacher was no good.

Upon entering his classes, Mario felt insecure and wanted his students to know him so that he could gain credibility. As he later explained, "I did not want my students to know me personally, rather subtlety, I wanted them to know that I had lived in the States, that I had completed a diploma program, a master's degree in Canada and a teaching license program in the States, and that I had taught in both of these countries. That would certainly give me the 'right to speak' (Norton, 1997) and prove my legitimacy." Mario noted that this experience reminded him about something one of his American friends told him when Mario first arrived in Oregon to teach at a bilingual school: "I am glad John put that University of Oregon sticker on your car, so that people will know that you are educated and not just any Mexican." Although at the time Mario found that comment extremely insulting, he was doing exactly the same thing in his own classroom: "Not in words, but in actions I had told my students, 'Listen, guys, I am not just any Mexican. I am a Mexican who had lived, worked and been educated in *English speaking countries*'." This insight prompted Mario to critically ask himself what message he was sending to the students by trying to reposition himself as a "legitimate speaker" (Bourdieu, 1991).

As if in response to her teacher's inner query, Angélica commented in an interview: "[I am bilingual] in Mixteco and Spanish because I still do not consider myself bilingual in English because I just know a little bit.... Maybe if I learn more English I will take it into account." On a different occasion, she commented: "It is my dream to get a scholarship to study in the States or Canada. I want to be in the community where people speak the language that I am learning. That way I can learn faster. Now I have some knowledge, but I would like to improve it." In her study of similar attitudes among pre-service English language teachers, Pavlenko (2003) showed that the exposure to the ideas of multicompetence had a healing effect on how teachers construed themselves, eventually leading them to a more positive self-positioning as competent bilingual educators. On that account, Mario made a note in his journal: "Even though I shared this idea with my students later in the courses, my 'deed' had sent a stronger message to Angélica."

Heidi, on the other hand, had a different perspective on the issue. She wrote: "I am a native Spanish speaker learning English. So I am bilingual, but in the future I am going to be multilingual because I want to learn Mixtec. I see English as a tool that is going to give opportunities." In the Teaching English to Children class, Heidi emphatically defended non-native speakers as better language teachers. She had conducted a mini-research among Mexican students

and had found that beginning students preferred non-native speakers. Again, "lived experience" had gone a longer way than classroom rhetoric.

According to Pavlenko (2003), the non-native versus native speaker dichotomy and the ghost of "the naturally competent native speaker" will be preserved as long as we continue using these terms. This dichotomy stills exists and negatively impacts the life of thousands of language teachers around the world (see the TESOL Position Statement: *Against Discrimination of Nonnative Speakers of English in the Field of TESOL,* TESOL Board of Directors, 2006). If we intend to stop this discrimination, it is time for us as educators to convey to our students a message that second language learners and teachers are not second-rate language users, but are multicompetent bilingual speakers who have varying degrees of command of their languages. Kathy Escamilla, a bilingual educator, wisely put it in a workshop in Oregon: "If you ask me to rate my English in a scale from zero to ten, I would give myself an eight because I am not Shakespeare. I would give myself a five in Spanish because "el subjuntivo" is killing me (2002). According to my mathematical knowledge, eight plus five equals thirteen."

Authentic Materials and English Textbooks: Effective or Discriminating Tools in Mexico?

In most of the TESL literature, authentic and colorful materials are recommended as effective tools to teach the language. In both the Teaching English to Children and Teaching English through Literature courses, we discussed the importance of critical analysis when selecting and using these materials.

Mario argued elsewhere (López Gopar, 2005) that many textbooks do not reflect the lives of Mexican students. In fact, they are discriminatory. After a quick analysis of a grammar lesson on the teaching of the uses of *can*, in different textbooks, he found that many of the exercises and suggested vocabulary might make students feel inadequate, inferior and lacking in skills. For instance, many textbooks included examples such as, Can you play the piano? Can you play tennis? Can you ski? Can you speak French? Can you use a computer? A student from a small community may not be able to do any of these things. They can do many, many other things, but American and British textbooks do not take into consideration their abilities.

Angélica reflected on this issue and shared her strategy of dealing with this lack of appreciation for local cultures and realities:

> Last week I needed to teach about food in my class. Most of my students have never come to the city. I checked some of materials I wanted to use, but most of the vocabulary included hamburger, pizza, hot dog, etc. There were many items that would not be

> relevant to my students. That is why I decided to develop my own materials and teach vocabulary like 'beans, tortillas, tamales, eggs, etc". I also would like my students to feel good and proud of the things their parents feed them.

It is important to note another aspect of the practice regarding authentic materials that Mario developed in his courses and we discussed during our dialogic sessions. As part of the English V course, students wanted to practice their listening skills and expand their vocabulary. Mario decided to recommend the sitcom *Friends* since he owned a DVD with one of the seasons of this show. As an ESL teacher, this is how he defended his rationale for selecting this material: "This sitcom provided 'authentic' language. The vocabulary, expressions, grammatical structures were contextualized. The speed of the speech was "real". It was short, funny, and engaging. We moved from the use to the non-use of closed captions, and from my explanations of the meaning of selected vocabulary to my students trying to figure out the meaning within the context of the episode."

Understandably, the jokes that required a lot of contextual knowledge of the American culture presented the biggest challenge to the students. As an after thought, Mario noted the lack of critical practice in his teaching approach: "I never stopped and discussed the sociolinguistics aspects of a sitcom like *Friends* with my students. After watching this series, what were they leaving the classroom with? How did the lives, beliefs and values of the main characters compared to those of the students and Mexican people?" Clearly, we are not arguing for any specific values or beliefs to be superior to others. What we would like to emphasize is that teachers need to be aware that languages come with ways of thinking, perceptions of beauty, success, family values, education, and so on. It is important then to stop and reflect about what impact the cultural baggage in textbooks and authentic materials may have on our students' identities and expectations.

We need to critically analyze textbooks and materials that we import from English speaking countries. In some rare cases, the authors and researchers are arrogant and ethnocentric enough to think that their ideas and creations are applicable to every context. More often though, these materials and methods are designed by well-intentioned people. However, their lack of knowledge about the specifics of the contexts where their creations will be used, puts serious limitations on the applicability of their work. It is our responsibility then to critically analyze, selectively adapt and independently create textbooks, ancillary materials and methods that will effectively meet the needs of our students and the specifics of our teaching contexts.

Speaker Evolution: From "Anonymous Bilingual Speakers" to Multilingual Advocates for Indigenous Language Preservation

As we have previously stated, Oaxaca is the most multicultural/lingual state in Mexico. Many people speak languages other than Spanish. However, many Indigenous bilingual people are constantly made fun of by some Spanish-speaking monolingual speakers, especially when they make mistakes in Spanish. Most Indigenous people come from different *pueblos* (towns) around the city and various regions of the state, contributing to a commonplace distinction usually made between people from the city and people from *pueblos*. The term "*de pueblo*" has become synonymous of exotic, weird, inexplicable behavior and low-level of education. Heidi made the following comment on her studying in a small rural settlement and eventually coming to Tlaxiaco, a larger town, to study in the local high school:

> The friends I had were from the city and they had a different perspective about Mixtec speakers, they thought that they were just illiterate people who are not going to have anything in life. I think that because of the peer pressure I did not tell them that I understand a little bit of Mixtec. Maybe that's why I stopped learning Mixtec.

In one of the interviews, Angélica offered the following comment:

> Many people think that if you don't speak Spanish, you just live in a little town and that you do not have any studies. But if you speak both [Spanish and an Indigenous language], they think that you have studied something.... I have been in conversations where I can tell that they speak Mixteco because of the intonation, but I continue in Spanish because if I ask them if they speak Mixteco, many people deny it.

During the Teaching English to Children class we discussed how we could incorporate Indigenous languages and the critical perspective in our teaching to make English an additional resource available rather than a new colonizing language that attempts to replace Spanish and Indigenous languages. We discussed the importance of valuing all types of bilingualism. (At this time, Mario did not know whether or not some of his students spoke an Indigenous language.)

In Mario's English class, students also discussed topics regarding identity (Norton, 2000), legitimate speakers versus impostors (Bourdieu, 1991) and communities of practice (Lave and Wegner, 1991). At the beginning of the course, students had to talk about a random topic chosen from the "Tell Us About" board; some of the topics were: Tell us about a good book you have read; tell us about your first date; and tell us about your dreams and hopes.

During the conversation around these topics, Mario and his students learned a lot about each other. Later, the students suggested that they should present a topic of their choice. Mario supported this student-generated idea, and the experience paid off.

Angélica's presentation was about her Mixtec culture and language. Most students who were monolingual Spanish speakers were surprised. They had known Angélica for two years by then, but they did not know about Angélica's bilingualism. Some of their comments were: "Wow, Angélica, you are multilingual"; "You speak three languages now!"; "I wish I could do that, too!" Heidi jumped in and mentioned that she could also understand some Mixtec and that she was planning to continue learning it. Angélica's multilingualism had finally given her "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1991). It was no longer a language she had to deny.

Angélica's road has not been easy, and she has fought her own battles growing up as a bilingual person. In Tlaxiaco, Angélica felt ignored and outside of the mainstream group: "When I was in third grade in junior high school, one of my classmates asked me, 'were you here from first grade?' I thought: 'Oh, my God, nobody knows me or even noticed me [for two years]'." She continued, "Language is not something that people talk about. Teachers and students do not ask whether or not you speak Mixteco or Spanish. It is an unspoken topic." Angélica never found out whether even her best friends spoke Mixteco. "Nobody asked me either," she added in our conversation.

Angélica has also experienced her siblings' rejection of Mixtec, but has become an advocate for the Mixtec language in her own family. She has been talking with them, hoping to explicate the importance and advantages of multilingualism.

One day I went to visit my sister who lives in Mexico City. I was teaching some Mixtec words to my niece who is four years old. My sister got mad at me and told me, "Don't teach her Mixteco because she is very young. If you want to teach something to her, you better teach her English." I told her, "That is not a problem. Even if she is young, she can learn both languages." I don't know why she does not want my niece to learn Mixteco. She says that maybe later she may teach her Mixteco, but for now she only wants to teach her Spanish. I am very, very sad because now young parents, they do not want to teach Mixteco to their children. They only want to teach them Spanish.

Angélica observed that one of the benefits of her being in the Department of Languages was that she was able to gain knowledge and develop appreciation of linguistic diversity, which made her feel proud of her own multilingualism and affiliation with the Mixtec language and culture. Moreover, she was aware of the struggle that many Indigenous university students go through when studying in other departments where linguistics is not part of the curriculum:

Studying here you know more about linguistics and if you speak any language, it is good for you. Now I feel proud I speak Mixteco, but when I was in high school, I used to deny I spoke Mixteco because if they say you speak Mixteco, people think that you don't know anything. They discriminated you. That is why I prefer to say I spoke only Spanish. This still happens to students who are in the university level here in Oaxaca in different faculties like accounting and architecture.

Angelica's presentation was a critical moment that changed our lives, especially Heidi's. It was also a way for Heidi to see that she could have someone she could relate to and that Mixtec was appreciated, at least in this community of practice. Both Heidi's father and mother spoke Mixtec and were Mixtec/Spanish bilingual teachers. In her essays, she wrote:
My grandma just spoke Mixteco but after she came to live to Tlaxiaco and she had to learn Spanish in order to survive in the city, sometimes we played that I taught her Spanish and she taught me Mixteco, but I forgot the words almost immediately because I did not practice them. It was because my father told me that mixteco wasn't going to be useful in my future (but he was wrong).

In the following essay, she explained how her perception regarding Mixtec started to change as a result of her interactions with people in the community:
In high school, I met my best friend Martha and her mom, they made that I realize about the importance of Mixtec, Martha's mother was working in a project trying to preserve the traditions and language of Mixtec culture, even she is not a Mixtec speaker she is very interested in it. Both of them and their whole family are very proud of being from Tlaxiaco, that's why I started to be more interested in the history of Tlaxiaco and Mixtec. My father gave a book about Tlaxiaco which was wrote by a "Tlaxiaqueno" and I look after it as my treasure.... Although I was trying to learn Mixtec, it was hard for me to speak it. In my house my mother did not want to speak Mixtec to me.

Heidi's perception of the Indigenous languages has been also changed as a result of her taking courses with several critical educators in the Department of Languages. In one conference Heidi commented, "Since I took Linguistics and 'Lenguaje, Cultura y Sociedad' class, I began to realize about the importance of Mixtec as a language and not as a 'dialect' as most people called it." In an essay she provided an account of her interaction with another language educator in the Department:

> Last week I wrote an essay about the importance of Mixtec for my academic language class; when my teacher gave it back he scolded me because I wrote "mixtec" instead of "Mixtec". He told me that if I was writing about as a language I should put more emphasis on the way I write it. I think he is right, I know that the way that I write it, is not going to make that people change their perspective about Mixtec as a dialect but it is a good beginning to give Mixtec

> more power, at least in a grammatical way. Now I feel that if I write "mixtec" I am not giving it importance. This fact reminds me about people feeling in a lower position when they say that they speak Mixtec. I remember when I lived in Yucuhiti and I asked to a child that I just met, "Do you speak Mixtec?", he said "yes" but with a very soft tone of voice as trying to hide it because it was bad.

As we continued our dialogue, Heidi became more aware of the impact that other people might have had on her self-positioning and language attitudes. Moreover, she began to question the validity of this outside influence. In her own words, she wanted now to feel "the push" to come from herself, "I would like people to feel proud of being from Tlaxiaco and about speaking Mixtec without other (as American) telling them to feel proud of this."

What does Heidi and Angélica's experience have to do with English teachers? First of all, by labeling us as English, ESL, EFL teachers, we are denying ourselves the role we could play as *language educators.* These two words, "language educators," are extremely important. Most of us have experienced how difficult it is to learn a new language, especially in adulthood. We have spent years and years trying to figure out how to learn and how to teach a second/foreign language, English in this case. Knowing that learning an additional language gives us more opportunities for social advancement and positively impacts our cognitive processes, we should start appreciating the linguistic and sociocultural richness that Indigenous bilingual speakers bring with them into our second/foreign language classrooms.

We can be true "educators" in our language classrooms if we discuss with our students about the linguistic diversity that Mexico has and provide opportunities to explore cultural and linguistic richness of various Indigenous groups. Without claiming the expert position on Indigenous cultures, we could position ourselves as advocates of linguistic diversity. Such an approach will allow us an incredible array of content topics to include in our language curriculum, making our language classes epicenters of social change. If we shy away from complex and often emotionally charged topics related to the Indigenous people's rights, languages and cultures, we will effectively ignore and exclude students like Angélica and Heidi and become participants in maintaining the status quo imposed by those in power. Moreover, we will communicate the inherent value of learning English, often at the expense of other 'less important, less powerful' languages.

By keeping silent on Indigenous issues we become quiet, yet willing, collaborators of the linguistic imperialism of the multinational corporations who would do anything to bond every person into a faceless consumer of generic products and services available in the global market via the English language medium. Thus, we believe that our English language teaching is by no means neutral. It can send powerful and hegemonic messages or can become a vehicle of change. The choice is ours to make.

Angélica's and Heidi's Praxis (Reflection + Action)

As we continued our dialogue, Angélica and Heidi were changing from being "anonymous bilinguals" to becoming competent multilingual speakers proud of their heritage. They now wanted to "act" on their environment in order to transform it into a more "beautiful" place where any language would be appreciated equally and where Indigenous children would not have to deny their bilingualism as a token of illiteracy.

Heidi continued analyzing her linguistic trajectory and had several open conversations with her family. These bittersweet exchanges allowed her to get a better understanding of why she never learned Mixtec and opened new opportunities for future learning:

> I was talking to my mother on Monday about why I did not learn Mixtec. She reminded me that it was my fault too because when she tried to talk to me in Mixtec I told her "Close your mouth, you look ugly talking to me in that way, you are making a strange noise." Now, I feel guilty and ashamed of this.... Talking to my mother I could realize that her perspective about Mixtec has changed; I told her about your research and the conferences that we have had. I thought that she was not going to give any importance to it, but instead of this she encouraged me to be more interested in it, and she promised to start teaching Mixtec to me during the next vacation.

Heidi would like to go beyond her family and share her love for Mixtec culture and language with other people. Moreover, she believes that she can make a difference in her original community by openly discussing challenges and rewards that Mixtec speakers have to face on a daily basis. In her view, an open dialogue within the community could have a healing effect on its members and their self-positioning, eliminating self-censuring and encouraging ethnic pride.
I would like that people feel proud of being from Tlaxiaco and about speaking Mixtec without other people (as Americans) telling them to feel proud of this. Most of people (and I too) do not appreciate what we have until we lose it, or we are abroad. I would like to learn more about my culture and about my languages (Spanish and Mixtec), and after share with other people. I think that the challenge for me it is going to convince or to persuade other people to change their perspective about Mixtec as a dialect.

Heidi also commented about a friend who speaks Mixtec and is interested in learning English:

> I would like to teach her English but at the same time make her conscious about the importance of Mixtec. I think that she sees

> herself as just Spanish [speaker] and I would like to let her know that she is a bilingual person who is going to learn English too. The problem is that I don't know how exactly I am going to do it, maybe I could tell her to make a trade of language and plan a meeting where I teach her English and she teaches me Mixtec, in this way we can learn from each other.

In addition to the English language courses, Angélica and Heidi were also taking a course in teaching Spanish. One of their assignments was to prepare a presentation about an aspect of Oaxacan culture. They decided to present about Tlaxiaco and the Mixtec language. Julia and Mario were lucky to attend this presentation. For the presentation, Angélica and Heidi wore traditional clothing from the Mixtec region. They talked proudly about Tlaxiaco in both Mixtec and Spanish, and brought bread, fruit and examples of handicrafts from the area to share with their classmates. At the end of the presentation during the question and answer period, Adriana, one of the students in the audience, revealed that her parents spoke Mixe, another Indigenous language from Oaxaca and that she could understand and speak some of it. She thanked Heidi and Angélica for speaking out on behalf of many anonymous bilingual Indigenous people out there.

Later Angélica and Heidi told us that they also gave this presentation to a group of American university students who were studying Spanish in the Department. This presentation was conducted in Mixtec, Spanish and English. Heidi and Angélica were using their multilingualism to share their culture and language with others. This is a clear example of the praxis that Freire (1998) described in his writing. Heidi and Angélica were not only conscious about their Mixtec culture and language, but were acting as cultural advocates, educating others about the cultural practices and values of their community.

Both Angélica and Heidi planned to go back to Tlaxiaco to teach English during the summer of 2005. As they explained, they wanted Mixtec children to learn English so they can tell the world about their hometown Tlaxiaco, about their families, about their customs and traditions. They wanted Mixtec children to feel good about their culture and hoped that English could become a venue for children to break the circle of silence and self-rejection. Angélica and Heidi developed the syllabus and even taught three initial classes in Tlaxiaco, but could not finish teaching the course because both of them were granted a scholarship to study for a semester in Mexico City. Today Angélica and Heidi are back in Oaxaca, applying their critical pedagogy at BIBLOCA, a non-profit multilingual children's library in a low-socio-economic neighborhood. (To learn more about this project, see López Gopar, 2006). They teach English and work on Spanish literacy with young children as part of their *servicio social* (community service).

Finally, Angélica shared with us her willingness to participate in the development of a grammar textbook for the Mixtec language. She said,

> Now, there is an organization that is trying to design a grammar textbook for Mixteco. I would like to see how they are designing the grammar approach because I think people who want to design it need to speak Mixteco to know how the language is actually used. You cannot design a grammar if you don't know how people actually speak.

Conclusion

This article attempted to show how the dialogue among Heidi, Angélica, Julia, and Mario contributed to our empowerment and praxis. Sometimes contradictory and emotionally charged, our dialogue was not limited or confined to the four of us but was linked to every single person, text, and experience we have encountered in our lives. Our involvement in this project helped us in different yet significant ways to become better teachers, researchers and language practitioners.

Through a critical analysis of his teaching, Mario was able to get rid of the native speaker ghost that had invaded his classroom and developed teaching strategies that took into consideration sociolinguistic histories and positioning of his students. Self-reflection and critical dialogue helped Angélica and Heidi to embrace their multilingualism and develop personal and teaching strategies that emphasized their Mixtec heritage and culture. As Julia developed a better understanding of the complexities and contradictions of the Oaxacan sociolinguistic context, she engaged in a critical dialogue with a Mexican English language educator and two pre-service teachers and was able to apply her professional expertise to support their critical exploration of self-positioning, linguistic practices, and family histories. Furthermore, the project had an impact on how the four of us interpreted critical pedagogy and reminded us of the importance of self-reflection and professional dialogue. Finally, through our collaborative work on this project, we wanted to emphasize that critical research should always strive for social justice and a better world for all.

Critical pedagogy has been often misunderstood as a liberating process of teachers empowering their students, the imprisoned, the disenfranchised. Such short-sighted top-down interpretation of critical pedagogy fails to see its reductionist effect: in this view, critical pedagogy is another version of the dominant-dominated paradigm that permanently strips away any personal agency from those on the fringes of the society. Friere (1998) emphatically argued that liberation and creation of power is not achieved individually, but collectively. Thus, listening and interacting with our students' voices is an essential component of critical pedagogy and critical applied linguistics (Diaz-Greenberger & Nevin, 2003; Nieto, 1994; Rymes, 2002). The transformation of our world is not complete without our voices, without our practice. Hence, we as educators play a major role, but not as liberators; rather we can provide a

welcoming environment for our students to begin their critical exploration of the world, its practices, and their self-positioning within it.

We started this paper with a quote from Freire (1994) on the symbiotic relationship between dreams and hopes. Together with Freire, we believe that our ability to dream, to imagine the joys, the pains, the struggles, and the hopes of others is essential if we are to build a more egalitarian world. A person without imagination is also a person without sympathy and empathy, and without these qualities social justice is impossible. In this article, we have shared our reflections, our aspirations, and dreams as language teachers, learners, and researchers. We would like to end this article with a hope that our readers, too, will share their ideas with other people, thus building trust and appreciation for all.

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