

conceptualizing critical thinking pedagogy in teacher education

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abstract

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in knowledge creation and distribution. Teacher education is at the forefront of this engagement. The role of teacher educators is significant in engaging teacher knowledge for shaping and informing ways of being and doing in the world. In recent years higher education has undergone considerable transformation. In South Africa there is a call for real-world transformation in pedagogical practices to address academic, socio-economic, and cultural inclusion and emancipation. As a human right for enabling student voices, a key issue for engaging relevant and fair pedagogical practices is critical thinking. Critical thinking is a *rich concept* and an attribute of consciousness required in all human activity. It is exercised through sound reasoning and dialogue. Critical thinking is also associated with understanding and engaging deep issues of socio-cultural and political domains of power and justice. However, engaging and enabling critical thinking pedagogy in education is complex and contradictory in nature. Conceptualizing critical thinking is expedient as an initial stage. The objective of this article, part of a larger study, is to provide a conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy toward addressing: *In what ways is critical thinking pedagogy engaged in South African teacher education?* Here, this article aims to address the question: *what is critical thinking and critical thinking pedagogy?* Methodologically, an interdisciplinary psycho-social philosophic educational documentary design is employed based on a selection of key critical thinking proponents. It further presents a conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy underpinned in critical theory especially those of Freire and Foucault. This article aims to spotlight the need for engaging critical thinking through a conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy in teacher education required for addressing new ways of teaching today.

keywords: critical thinking; critical language; critical theory; critical thinking pedagogy; teacher education.

conceptualizar la pedagogía del pensamiento crítico en la formación del profesorado

resumen

Las instituciones de enseñanza superior desempeñan un papel fundamental en la creación y distribución del conocimiento. La formación del profesorado está atravesada por este compromiso. El papel de los formadores de profesores es significativo a la hora de comprometer el conocimiento docente para dar forma e informar sobre las maneras de ser y hacer en el mundo. En los últimos años, la enseñanza superior ha experimentado una transformación considerable. En Sudáfrica se reclama una transformación real de las

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práticas pedagógicas para abordar a inclusão e a emancipação acadêmicas, socioeconômicas e culturais. O pensamento crítico é um direito humano que permite que os estudantes façam ouvir sua voz, e uma questão chave para que as práticas pedagógicas sejam pertinentes e justas. O pensamento crítico é um conceito rico e um atributo da consciência necessário em toda atividade humana. É exercido mediante o raciocínio sólido e o diálogo. O pensamento crítico também se associa à compreensão e ao compromisso com questões profundas dos âmbitos sociocultural e político do poder e da justiça. Sem embargo, a pedagogia do pensamento crítico na educação é complexa e contraditória por natureza. Conceitualizar o pensamento crítico é conveniente como etapa inicial. O objetivo deste artigo, que faz parte de um estudo mais amplo, é proporcionar uma conceitualização da pedagogia do pensamento crítico para abordar: de que maneira se aplica a pedagogia do pensamento crítico na formação de professores sudafricanos? Este artigo pretende responder à pergunta: o que é o pensamento crítico e a pedagogia do pensamento crítico? Metodologicamente, utiliza-se um desenho documental educativo filosófico psicossocial interdisciplinar baseado em uma seleção de proponentes-chave do pensamento crítico. Além disso, apresenta-se uma conceitualização da pedagogia do pensamento crítico sustentada na teoria crítica, especialmente a de Freire e Foucault. Este artigo pretende colocar em relevo a necessidade de envolver o pensamento crítico através de uma conceitualização da pedagogia do pensamento crítico na formação do professorado necessária para abordar as novas formas de ensino de hoje.

palavras chave: pensamento crítico; linguagem crítica; teoria crítica; pedagogia do pensamento crítico; formação do professorado.

conceitualizando a pedagogia do pensamento crítico na formação de professores

resumo

As instituições de ensino superior desempenham um papel fundamental na criação e distribuição do conhecimento. A formação de professores está na linha de frente desse trabalho. O papel da formação de professores é significativo no que diz respeito à mobilização do conhecimento dos professores para moldar e informar as formas de estar e atuar no mundo. Nos últimos anos, o ensino superior sofreu uma transformação considerável. Na África do Sul, há um apelo para uma transformação real das práticas pedagógicas, a fim de abordar a inclusão e a emancipação acadêmica, socioeconômica e cultural. Sendo um direito humano que dá voz aos estudantes, o pensamento crítico é uma condição essencial para a adoção de práticas pedagógicas relevantes e justas. O pensamento crítico é um conceito rico e um atributo da consciência necessário em todas as atividades humanas. Ele é exercido através do raciocínio sólido e do diálogo. O pensamento crítico está também associado à compreensão e ao envolvimento em questões profundas relacionadas a domínios socioculturais e políticos de poder e justiça. No entanto, mobilizar e possibilitar a pedagogia do pensamento crítico na educação é complexo e contraditório por natureza. É conveniente, num primeiro momento, conceitualizar o pensamento crítico. O objetivo deste artigo, parte de um estudo maior, é conceitualizar a pedagogia do pensamento crítico para abordar: de que forma a pedagogia do pensamento crítico está envolvida na formação de professores na África do Sul? Então, este artigo pretende responder à questão: o que é pensamento crítico e pedagogia do pensamento crítico? Metodologicamente, foi usado um desenho documental educacional-filosófico-psicossocial interdisciplinar baseado em uma seleção dos principais proponentes do pensamento crítico. Além disso, é apresentada uma conceitualização da pedagogia do pensamento crítico baseada na teoria crítica, especialmente a de Freire e

Foucault. Este artigo tem como objetivo destacar a necessidade de mobilização do pensamento crítico por meio da conceitualização da pedagogia do pensamento crítico na formação de professores, necessária para pensar novos modos de ensinar nos dias de hoje.

palavras-chave: pensamento crítico; linguagem crítica; teoria crítica; pedagogia do pensamento crítico; formação de professores.

critical thinking and critical thinking pedagogy in teacher education

a prologue in memoriam

As head of academics at a leading school in South Africa, Ms. Moors was concerned with the quality of new teachers entering into the profession. With the increasing shortage of school leavers opting for a career in teaching, an initiative to attract students into the teaching profession saw the introduction at higher education institutions of a post graduate teaching certificate to “fast track” demand. Requirements to becoming a teacher was a completed undergraduate degree with a relevant teaching subject like English or Mathematics. While this qualification appeared to provide a foundation to building a teaching career on, Ms. Moors doubted whether the many new recruits had had adequate deep and meaningful learning experiences with critical exposure to meeting the challenges and realities of diversity and complexity within South African classrooms. With the increasing demands of international, national and local assessment bodies to meet and keep standards, and the pressures on curriculum and school reform, Ms. Moors knew that spending a year in teacher preparation was tantamount to a “crash course”. She reflected that this period could not possibly provide for a rich and robust learning experience that fully prepared initial teachers with the kind of knowledge and skills required for today’s learning, teaching and assessment. Knowledge and skills for a relevant and empowering pedagogy that could address the vast disparities among communities represented in her school. Knowing that this certificate comprised at least fifteen courses, she realized that while such a qualification allowed for teacher recruitment, it was inadequate and could only be a superficial encounter with new knowledge and skills. Though Ms. Moors was pleased with the enthusiasm of her new teachers and appreciated the many professional development workshops that they could access, she was concerned with their lack of critical thinking and decision-making knowledge and skills. She understood the view that some knowledge and skills in critical thinking were assumed to be embedded within course content and institutional ethos. Critical thinking pedagogy, however, was not explicitly focused on. She recalled her own rigorous higher education that placed little overt attention on the many critical

thinking approaches needed for the day to day decision-making, reflection and dialogue that had to be engaged and enabled crucial to her work in placing importance on learners. Her hope was that the work of Freire, Foucault and Fairclough, among others, and the many critical thinking pedagogical approaches would be explicitly engaged in teacher education programmes which could provide a critical foundation for initial teachers. She observed that after several years as a classroom teacher and member of the school management, issues of diversity and integration in high excellence environments -especially in schools deeply rooted in tradition, culture and belief systems- were growing in intensity. She resolved to raise awareness, engage in dialogue, and act towards building healthy relationships and positive change at her school that valued a high academic focus. However, knowing that tensions could flare if decisions of transformation were haphazardly engaged, without thoughtful sensitivity to all, she hoped to discuss the inclusion of a programme on critical awareness, reflection and dialogue. Of importance, Ms. Moors needed to find out how much of an emphasis critical thinking pedagogy had in teacher education at higher education institutions in South Africa. She believed that it was here that future teachers needed to be explicitly engaged in critical thinking theory and practice to be fully prepared for a new generation of learners that they would face.

Ms. Moors' call for awareness on critical thinking pedagogy at her school came altogether too late when thirteen-year-old NQ in Miss H's class committed suicide. His note indicated that his teacher did not understand or listen to him as he was black.

introduction

Education is about social and cultural reproduction. It is the "biological and spiritual transmission of life as a social endeavor" (Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999, p. 121). However, education is located and led by those who hold dominant political and economic power. Institutions of learning are anchored in such power and are never neutral. Christie (1999) contends that education embodies social relationships drawn up by dominant groups reflecting certain views and values embedded in their experiences. These values produce particular patterns of

success and failure. Their consequent creation of inequality, discrimination, and injustice are seen in issues of race, class, and ability, among other psycho-social factors. And as such, education is used to perpetuate a social and cultural reproduction of marginalization and disadvantage (Adams et al., 2013).

Education today is undergoing a radical paradigm shift. Challenged by societal upheavals and constant flux, the need for education to remain relevant is at an all-time high. Meeting the challenges of diverse 21st century living requires high quality critical knowledge of cultural and social contexts especially within diverse learning communities. This knowledge involves a high degree of skills in cross-cultural communication and social awareness, critical and creative thinking, and decision-making in building healthy social relationships.

Of necessity, teachers need to possess qualities and behaviors to create and lead strong cultures with vision and purpose (Freire, 1970). This vision is transformative in the face of increasing social and cultural diversity and complexity. But, such behaviors and qualities cannot be assumed. There is a need to engage and grapple explicitly with new ways of teaching and learning for meaningful student experiences. Such engagement may contribute to bridging the vast divides that separate teachers and student, school and society, and peoples from each other. These divides are especially characteristic of places like South Africa seeking social and cultural emancipation post racial liberation.

Regarded as a developing democracy, emerging from a system dominated by minority rule and inequality, with a tremendous legacy of injustice, socio-economic disparity, and unequal education to remedy (Sayed & Ahmed, 2011), South Africa's democratic political shifts since 1994 has seen government's legislative attempts at redress and transformation. Yet, policy has not translated into practice (Soudien, 2014). Research reveals an acute socio-economic disjuncture in South Africa, referred to by Christie (2009, p. 84) as "two nations". Though much responsibility has been levied on teachers in their inattention to a relevant pedagogy (Christie, Butler & Potterton, 2007), a spotlight has to be shone on the quality of initial teacher education practices (Council on Higher Education Report, 2010), that are equally contributing to this disjuncture.

A key issue that has been receiving much attention for engaging and enabling relevant and fair pedagogical practices is critical thinking (Schleicher, 2018). Critical thinking holds cognitive and social esteem in education (Huber & Kuncel, 2016). It is recognised in higher education as an essential marker for student achievement. Described by Paul et al. (1989) as a *rich concept* with no one particular definition, critical thinking is associated with cognitive capacities for creativity, higher order thinking and reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, reflection, innovation, and lifelong learning success. Moreover, there have been accelerated expectations for the acquisition of critical thinking skills and competencies in education for thriving in a technologically advancing, globally competitive, and complex world (Schleicher, 2018).

As part of its 2030 vision for global prosperity, protection of the planet, and peace, the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have been at the forefront of leading change towards a competence approach to education. Sustainable development goal 4; Quality Education, aims to *ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning*.³ Seeing education as a means for enabling upward socio-economic mobility, reducing inequality and reaching equity, SDG 4 claims to *empower people to live healthy lives fostering tolerance and promoting peaceful societies*⁴.

However, pitted against the rising phenomenon of the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions (4/5IR); described as the most rapid advancement of new technologies (McNulty, 2018⁵), and, the focus on socio-economic and cultural emancipation, the charge for critical skills and competencies is a weighty enterprise deserving robust treatment within higher education. As a tool for engaging with 21st century global and local concerns, critical thinking competencies compels a timely deliberation in higher education. Conceptualizing critical thinking as pedagogy may offer a means to grapple with this phenomenon in higher education seeking fair and contextually sensitive approaches.

³ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/4.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.niallmcnulty.com/2018/07/are-south-african-schools-ready-for-the-4th-industrial-evolution/>

Responding to such global expectations in South Africa, severely grappling with issues of poverty, unemployment, and the malevolence of apartheid, both invites and threatens critical cognitive pedagogic engagement. This is so as enabling students with knowledge that involves creative and critical thinking with a view towards addressing socio-economic and cultural inequalities and inequities poses discomfort and disruption (Le Roux & Mdunge, 2012) to the prevailing status quo.

Of importance, critical thinking and dialogue are complex, difficult, and uncomfortable to engage. Wheatley (2002) notes that complex topics like race, class, and culture among other real-world issues are disturbing conversations to handle in education. Le Roux and Mdunge (2012) submit that issues of oppression and discrimination explored within initial teacher education classrooms were difficult and uncomfortable. Their study reveals that initial teacher candidates refuse participation and exit classrooms during critical discussions (Le Roux & Mdunge, 2012).

However, perpetuating a disregard of the diverse contextual and cultural needs within society is transgressional to a child's human rights (UN, 1989). If left academically unaddressed, the situation portends a widening of the knowledge and economy gap for most students who already are at the fringes of society (Blommaert et al., 2005). Blommaert et al. affirms the need for the creation of safe critical and creative learning environments that need to employ appropriate critical pedagogical approaches. These approaches need to be cognisant of the individual, social and cultural contexts of students while advancing civic and self-awareness, understanding and empowerment.

In addressing the research gap revealed above, this article asserts that there is an urgent need to engage overtly with critical thinking pedagogy in teacher education. Investigating critical thinking theory and practice in initial teacher preparation is thus compelling. For "building a shared destiny across historic divides", critical thinking, underpinned in metacognitive, contextual, dialogical, experiential, and intentional oral and textual practices-, must be explicitly

engaged in teacher education as it is “far too urgent and important a project to defer” (Christie, 2009, p. 85).

Thus, as a compelling means of pursuing new ways of teaching, support for the inclusion of critical thinking theory and practice in teacher education is offered in this article. An overt conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy in teacher education, either as an approach underpinning curriculum or within discreet courses could effectively contribute and enhance teacher preparation for diverse learning communities. Towards addressing this claim, a conceptualisation of critical thinking and critical thinking pedagogy is necessary. This article hence aims to address the question: *what is critical thinking and critical thinking pedagogy?*

critical thinking

Thinking is a natural process. The ability to think critically, however, is one of the highest human activities requiring the enabling of high-level thinking skills, tools, and strategies (Dewey, 1906; Lipman, 1988, 1998, 2003). Considered by Dewey (1906) fundamental to all knowledge acquisition in school and society, critical thinking is seen as an educational goal and scientific habit of mind (Dewey, 1906; Gaudelli & Lavery, 2018) especially relevant in social inquiry and individual development. The process of enabling critical thinking has become especially relevant for 21st century education for lifelong academic and social success (Schleicher, 2016).

The notion of critical thinking in education has enjoyed wide-spread, favorable, and increasing attention over recent decades (Huber & Kuncel, 2016). There is, however, a growing expectation for critical thinking skills at all levels of education, recognised as an essential marker for high student performance and academic achievement (Tan, 2017). More so, there is an accelerated call for higher order critical thinking skills associated with problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation to thrive in a technologically advancing, globally competitive, and complex 21st century world (Schleicher, 2018).

However, it is in the claim that critical thinking pedagogy may be pertinent for building and strengthening democratic principles in challenging environments

of inequality and inequity (Freire, 1970; Lipman, 1998), as well as for enabling academic and social inclusion, that a conceptualisation of critical thinking is explored in this article. In conceptualizing critical thinking, this section presents definitions, assumptions and claims of key proponents.

what is critical thinking? defining critical thinking

The term critical thinking is described as a “rich concept” with more than one uncontested definition (Scriven & Paul, 1987, p. 70). Developing historically and philosophically as a teaching practice and vision of Socrates over more than 2500 years ago (Paul, Elder, & Bartell, 1997), critical thinking is about the human desire to know; the search for knowledge and meaning through inquiry. Kohan (2013) elucidating the above Socratic foundations asserts that to think is to encounter “as a way of learning to question knowledge” and “as a means to acquire positive knowledge crucial for living a good life” (p. 2, 10). Increasing in attention since the mid-20th century, the term’s most widely recognised descriptions are found in the works of Ennis (1964), Glaser (1941), Lipman (1988), Paul (1989), and Siegel (1985).

Siegel (1985), defines critical thinking in terms of appropriate thinking moved by reasons. Pointing to the human mind’s tendency to be influenced and shaped by thoughts and beliefs other than reasons, that is, desires, fears, social rewards, and punishments, Siegel (1985) associates critical thinking with the classical philosophical ideals of rationality in educating for reasoning. This notion of critical thinking, while still highly valued and expected in academia is limited. In support of Thomas and Walker (1997), Siegel’s conceptualisation is insensitive to application in diverse academic and cultural educational settings.

Glaser (1941), conceptualizes critical thinking in three ways: as an attitude predisposed to thoughtful ways that influences one’s experiences; as knowledge of logical inquiry; and, as reasoning and skills in applying thinking methods. Viewed in terms of one’s disposition, based on self-experiences and self-application, The Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal instrument, a standardized test for critical thinking, holds sway at several higher education institutions around the

world (Bahr, 2010). However, in accordance with Bahr, Glaser's pragmatic definition is in the assessment of an *absence* of critical thinking. It is disparaged as a deficit approach lacking contextual application and appreciation.

In extending a focus on dispositions and beliefs, vigorous proponents of critical thinking in education, Richard Paul, and, Linda Elder, further recognize the complexity of critical thinking, define critical thinking as possessing two components: a set of information and beliefs for generating and processing skills, and, as an intellectual habit *guiding* behavior rather than for acquiring and retaining knowledge (Paul et al., 1997). Conceptualizing critical thinking within the cognitive sciences, Paul and Elder (1989) see critical thinking as disciplined, self-directed thinking appropriate to particular domains of thinking. Widely used and researched in subject discipline areas across higher education (Gashan, 2015), the Critical Thinking Framework was developed to teach and test critical thinking of Paul et al. (1997). Though well received as a cognitive psychological approach to habitual practice of critical thinking for personal and academic success, Paul and Elder's definition, as argued in Celuch, Black and Warthan (2009), omits a focus on social processes and behaviors.

In slight contrast to the above, and based on criteria, Ennis (1964), presents a definition that involves reflective thinking on one's decisions around one's actions and beliefs. In focusing on the metaphysical, Ennis's (1964) notion of reflective thinking, influenced by Dewey (1933), is *interchangeably* used with critical thinking, metacognition, critical inquiry, and thinking (Huntley, 2008). This seminal notion of critical thinking remains sought after in education for deep learning and academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It offers a key foundation for criterion-referenced thinking. Yet, in like manner to the definitions presented above, Ennis's notion of critical thinking avoids a focus on social and cultural influences.

A notable definition of critical thinking adopted by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a key global competence for academic and social lifelong learning success is that of Lipman's (1988). Influenced by Vygotsky, Freire, Dewey and Arendt, Lipman (1988) defines

critical thinking as: "skilful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it (1) relies upon criteria, (2) is self-correcting, and (3) is sensitive to context" (p. 39).

Seen inseparable from critical consciousness, creativity, and care, and adopting a socio-philosophical approach, Lipman's (1988) definition of critical thinking is one that *starts in awe and proceeds to reason* (p. 20). Aligned with Young (1992), and Ennis (1964) who purport that critical thinking is about opening up problem-solving processes that seek new solutions through deep reflection, reasoning and dialogue, Lipman's conceptualisation of critical thinking in education is about the need to wonder at, ponder and question, to be curious about the world, toward habitual practice, to engage in high levels of thinking and reasoning beyond mere memorisation and regurgitation of facts. Employing a philosophical slant, critical thinking for Lipman is about enabling democratic engagement and social awareness. Based on this conceptualisation, Lipman developed a pedagogical approach and method for explicit engagement with critical thinking pedagogy and practice within a community of philosophical inquiry; his Philosophy for Children (P4C). P4C may find a strong affinity for application in diverse and democratic contexts sought for in places like South Africa.

Lesser known and in contrast to Lipman's philosophical approach, resonating more with Paul and Elder's (2006), psycho-sensory process approach, Schiering (2016), defines critical thinking as synonymous with creative thinking inclusive of *reciprocal* thinking. Critical thinking here is the second of a tri-phase process involving transcendence. For Schiering, transcendence begins in cognitive awareness, proceeds to critical and reciprocal thinking, and then to metacognition. Pedagogically approached through a set of processing skills and knowledge sensitive to the social context, Schiering's (2016) Interactive Methodology (IM) through a Sociology of the World framework (SOW and REAP), provides an overt approach to engaging critical thinking.

Given the above seminal conceptualisations of critical thinking, within the science of education discourse critical thinking has come to focus on two essential

aspects as part of human development. On the one hand critical thinking is about complex cognitive processes and skills used to evaluate and make sense of information, often associated with pedagogical strategies aimed toward nurturing and developing student's capacity for logical inquiry and reasoning within formal education (Cowden & Singh, 2015). On the other hand, it is about moral, ethical, and political intentions, and purposes for seeking to nurture critical thinking in education as social practice (Cowden & Singh, 2015). Crowden and Singh (2015) assert that the latter notion of critical thinking is an: "educational philosophical approach that seeks to connect forms of education to wider political questions by arguing that processes or acts of learning and knowing are themselves inherently political" (p. 559).

Here a Foucauldian (1976) notion of critical thinking as power is conceptualized as a form of social and political participation and deliberation. Such participation and deliberation are to engage in a culture of critical thinking that "subsumes to different notions such as: freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, autonomy of the person, rights of resistance to oppression and free development of personality" (Arbeláez-Campillo et al., 2020, p. 6). Maintaining an external prudent distance with all forms of power that produce and reproduce institutionalized political, economic, scientific and religious orders (Foucault, 1980), critical thinking is about questioning the types of authority that resist systematic criticism and change (Arbeláez-Campillo et al., 2020, p. 6). In so doing, critical thinking is to enable continuous improvement in the relation of knowledge and power; a way of being in the world (Arbeláez-Campillo et al., 2020; Kohan, 2013).

Gaudelli and Lavery (2018), drawing on Dewey's account of culture (1910), argue that critical thinking is about developing "thoughtful, socially responsible beings" (p. 23). Emphasizing the role of inquiry as a "conjoint expansion of humanity and nature" Dewey's concept of "mind" is described here within a culture of social participation in a "shared life of meaning and value; the basis for our having a sense of self and sense of other" (p. 28).

It is also in the call for critical thinking as a skill and competence, fast growing in traction, being led by the United Nation Organisation (UNO), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills, and The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, among others (Tan, 2017) that a conceptualisation of critical thinking must further be considered in today's understanding.

critical thinking as skill and competence

The term *skill* is a broad term referring to a state of knowledge, work habits, and character traits that as a core belief upholds importance for successful living (Tan, 2017). Critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, information media and technology, and cultural literacies are regarded as essential skills for thriving in the world of today (Schleicher, 2016). These skills may be embedded into, and overtly applied to all academic subject areas, and across all educational, career, and civic settings throughout a person's life (Schleicher, 2018).

The claim that to successfully function in today's exponentially changing world there is a need to become competent in 21st century skills has become a pressing mandate (OECD, 2023) for education. The concept of a 21st century education is embodied within the above essential 21st century competencies being called for in both political and economic arenas (Schleicher, 2016). However, such 21st century essential competencies have to be held in attention when thinking about a culturally sustaining and socially relevant and just education today (Alim et al., 2017), especially for places in search of a cohesive social and cultural identity.

A growing body of literature affirms a correlation between critical thinking as a higher order thinking skill with increased socio-economic and cultural awareness (Kizel, 2017). Kizel (2017) believes that critical thinking in education may enable individual voices and develop socio-cultural identity. Therefore, a conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy is necessary. Drawing on Freire

and Foucault, critical theory is used to underpin a conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy.

what is critical thinking pedagogy?

critical theory: the power to act

Critical thinking as pedagogy is grounded in critical theory. Conceptualized by proponents of the Frankfurt School of Philosophy in the 1920s, critical social theorists like Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Jurgen Habermas, believe that the social world has not been true to the ideals of democracy and the promotion of critical citizenship (Habermas, 1996). In a broad sense, critical theory exposes how relations of social, cultural, economic, power, and inequality manifest and are challenged in formal and informal education (Giroux, 2013).

Apple and Au (2009), provide another more fundamental definition that questions underlying epistemological and ideological assumptions of the very purpose, practice, process, and product of education, and who should be empowered to engage in it. This more robust definition interrogates “what counts as ‘official’ or legitimate knowledge and who holds it” (Apple & Au, 2009, p. 991). This understanding of critical theory is about a realization of the importance of multiple dynamics underpinning socio-political and cultural struggles against exploitation and domination in societies, and about identity (Apple & Au, 2009).

Critical theory is concerned with understanding and addressing issues of injustice and inequality (Coffey, 2009). Institutions like schools and governments are seen as places where unequal power relationships prevail, and dominant ideologies support and perpetuate the status quo (Foucault, 1977). Morgan (1997) asserts that critical theory views society in constant conflict for the possession and enactment of knowledge, power, status, and material access. However, it is in the work of Paulo Freire (1970) that critical pedagogy has found an enabling power to act and react. Critical educational theory, interchangeable with critical pedagogy, is principled on critical social theory that actively critiques oppressive and unjust relationships produced by such power and action.

critical pedagogy: enabling the power to act

Synonymous with Border Pedagogy, radical, Freirean, liberation, and or postcolonial pedagogy, critical pedagogy is a term used to describe a discourse in education that differentiates from mainstream conceptions of pedagogy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). It seeks to especially challenge traditional forms of teacher-centered models of education. Freire (1970) provides a theory of critical pedagogy in education that may enable social critique and action.

Freire (2001) shaped his concerns for the poor around a revolutionary humanist educational pedagogy. Libertarian and condemning what he coined the *banking* model of education that disregard students as passive empty *containers* to be filled like “depositing tokens of learning” (Freire, 2018, p. 75), Freirean pedagogy is enabled through joint negotiation between student and teacher. Freire distinguishes learning opportunities as exploratory and co-constructed knowledge that develops *conscientization*, that is, social awareness.

Critical thinking for Freire is situational reflection about the condition of existence people discover themselves to be in. His *conscientização* is about deepening an attitude of awareness through dialogue and analysis (p. 109) in becoming more fully human. In educating in becoming “more fully human” (p. 44), Freirean pedagogy is about the struggle of the oppressed as a task of the oppressed. Conceptualizing a libertarian pedagogy on critical awareness, reflection and dialogue, a Freirean approach is about enabling the power to act authentically and without fear in naming and dismantling oppression through education.

Hence, critical pedagogy conceives educational institutions as spaces for critique of social conditions, encourages student-centered inquiry into forms of injustice through dialogue significant to their lives (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Teachers serve less as instructors and more as facilitators of conversations that question traditional power relations. In seeing society as dynamic, Goldstein (2007) elaborating on Freirean objectives signals that critical pedagogy is about social emancipation acting from within oppressed communities who are best positioned to struggle for their own liberation.

However, Freire warns that in seeking emancipation the oppressed should not in turn become oppressors, “but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (2018, p. 44). He asserts that, “to glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie” (2018, p. 91). Calling for a critical praxis, Freire’s contribution to critical theory finds relevant affinity in this conceptualisation of critical thinking pedagogy needed for authentic teacher education today.

critical language: the search for meaning and truth

Freire was not the first to hold such libertarian views of education (Morgan, 1997). Radical neo-Marxist proponents like Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci believe that knowledge, meaning, and truth are part of history. Here individuals come together within ideologies and practices to effect changes when causes of inequities are understood. Rejecting fascism during the Second World War, Gramsci developed his theory of hegemony which explains how moral leaders including teachers in society participate and perpetuate a universal commonsense truth that serves the interest of those in power (Darder et al., 2003).

Foucault questions a *politics of truth* through what he terms the *regimes of truth* that uphold certain and not other knowledge in society (1976). In *Discipline and Punishment* (1977), Foucault analyzes educational language practices in the context of a notion of knowledge and power in search of meaning and truth.

Through a pedagogical philosophy of the human *subject* within the notion of *object* as *constructed* by discourses and practices, Foucault intricately and comprehensively critiques the construction of knowledge for power in language. His critique of truth asserts that education systems are “political ways of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, with the knowledge and power they carry” (Filloux, 1992, p. 116). Furthermore, Foucault (1970) posits in his controversial inaugural lecture entitled, *The Order of Discourse* at the University of France, that discourses are institutional practices of power. In critique of the power of education to appropriate discourses in its distribution of what it allows or prevents, Foucault (1970, p. 64) asserts that, “Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses,

along with the knowledges and powers which they carry". Within an anti-Marxist paradigm, Foucault contends that the notion of truth is about exclusion or invalidation of knowledge other than those of the dominant. This truth is produced and made legitimate through *techniques* of power (Foucault, 1970).

Foucault's systematic conceptualisation of critical language and knowledge is extensively argued in *The Order of Things* (1966), and *An Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), wherein the case for knowledge as *subjugation* is made. In what he calls an *episteme*, Foucault draws attention to how epistemological language for the subjugation of knowledge is normalized through dominant power. Foucault's conceptualisation of critical language is relevant in understanding critical theory for underpinning a critical thinking pedagogy.

critical pedagogy of hope: a language of possibility

While Freire's and Foucault's revolutionary work on critical literacy is fundamental in critical pedagogy, other proponents have taken this notion further, going beyond resistance and a language of critique to a language of possibility centered on hope (Morgan, 1997). Advocates like Shor (1980), Giroux (1983), Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) and McLaren (1996), assert that critical pedagogy as a theorized practice of teaching opposes dominant ideologies, institutions and material conditions of society that maintain socio-economic inequality.

Giroux (1983; 1994) contends that critical pedagogy is a language of critique and possibility for equipping teachers with a conceptual framework that allows critical analyses of the shortcomings within their institutions providing possibilities for the creation of new knowledge in practice. Aimed at developing respect for a more democratic, equal, and just society, the outcomes for hope that critical pedagogy as a radical movement hold is about the development of critical language and awareness, in other words critical thinking.

As an extension of Freire's contribution, Giroux (2013) sees critical thinking as a pedagogy of hope. Student empowerment and enlightenment toward liberation is enabled through praxis and active citizenship education. Employed for building and strengthening democratic principles, critical thinking pedagogy

possesses explicit possibilities of hope in education crucial for addressing social and cultural inclusion and self and societal emancipation.

In closing, this article has argued for an overt inclusion of critical thinking pedagogy in teacher education through a conceptualisation of critical thinking and critical thinking pedagogy. Drawing on seminal authors, the article has brought to attention the need to engage with critical thinking in teacher education. Further leaning on the critical thinking and language work of Freire and Foucault, this article has provided a theoretical framing in support of this call. As a human right for enabling voices, raising awareness and enabling the power to act responsibly, critical thinking pedagogy, though difficult and uncomfortable, must be engaged at higher education institutions, a crucial space for the creation and distribution of knowledge. Critical thinking theory and practice in initial teacher education as a pedagogy of hope cannot be deferred if the demands of 21st century living in South Africa is going to be met for all its citizens. As a means to engage in new behaviors and ways of teaching, critical thinking pedagogy conceptualized confirms that education the *biological and spiritual transmission of life as a social endeavor* is about social and cultural reproduction and *far too urgent a project to defer*.

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