Critical language teacher education?

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Abstract

One of the features of the impact of the arrival of neoliberal governments across swathes of the world from the late 1970s onward has been the progressive marketisation of education at all levels from pre-school through to university and the accompanying politically motivated recalibration of teacher education designed to produce efficient and disciplined bureaucrats with a narrowly prescribed knowledge base. From the perspective of neoliberal government, education is about the production of workers with the skills and dispositions needed to compete in the global economy, and teachers' specific remit is to facilitate this. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of neoliberalism, marketization and the conditions of labour in neoliberal capitalism, making clear the complexity of these phenomena before outlining the serious implications that they have for second language teacher education. It then moves to a consideration of data in which these key issues can be seen to play out in a teacher education programme in ways which - it is suggested - give cause for serious concern. Specifically the chapter explores how marketization has impacted on an initial teacher preparation programme in the UK – the state sector Post Graduate Certificate of Education in Modern Foreign Languages (PGCE-MFL) - as emblematic of the kind of the deskilling and discrediting of teachers which has typified the neoliberal era in many global settings. The chapter then turns to a consideration of the possibility of critical language teacher education within the context of the neoliberal recalibration of what it means to be a teacher and the ways in which this has addressed by a groups concerned teacher educators committed to critical pedagogy. The chapter concludes by listing a selection of key readings for readers who wish to pursue the issues raised further.

Introduction

The fact that the title of this chapter (suggested by the editors) ends with a question mark is significant, as it makes what might be taken to refer to a particular kind of language teacher education appear literally questionable. And indeed, there are a number of questions that might be asked - What is critical language teacher education? Does it actually exist – and if so, what does it look like? If it doesn't exist, why is this the case? And by extension, what can be done about this? This chapter is an attempt to shed some light on these questions. In doing so I will give an account of what critical language teacher education is generally held to mean and suggest that it does indeed exist – but that it is marginal and that the forces arrayed against it globally, and indeed any kind of genuinely critical educational endeavour, are considerable, particularly at the present historical moment. In adding this caveat I am reminded of Didier Eribon's ([2009] 2013: 121) lacerating assessment of these forces as they impact on schools:

> I cannot help but see an infernal machine in the school system, given the way it functions right in front of our eyes. [...] A war is going on against the underdogs and schools are one of the battlefields. Teachers do the best they can! But in fact there is little or nothing they can do when faced with the irresistible forces of the social order, forces that operate both in secret and in the light of day, and that impose themselves everywhere and on everyone.

This is a particularly bleak view of education and of the role of teachers - and while I share Eribon's anger, ultimately I take the view that his assessment is unduly pessimistic. That said, he draws attention to the importance of the field of education for the neoliberal project (discussed below) and its specific recalibration of education across much of the world from the late 1970s onwards. Although Eribon's comments were made with regard to the French educational system, they are nonetheless applicable to many educational settings globally. In the same way, although the examples focused on in this chapter relate to the UK, they can *mutatis mutandis* be seen as similar to what has happened to education in many other countries throughout what might be called the neoliberal era (i.e. late 1970s-present). The chapter begins with a discussion of neoliberalism as the main impediment to critical education in general and then moves to a consideration of data (from Gray and Block, 2012 and Block and Gray, 2016) in which these key issues can be seen to play out in a modern foreign languages teacher education programmes in the UK. Such an approach is

necessary if it is to be understood why critical teacher education remains a marginal activity - and why the need for it is so pressing. The chapter then turns to a consideration of critical language teacher education as an alternative model of teacher preparation and development (Groenke and Hatch, 2009; Hawkins and Norton, 2009), and looks at how this is being attempted in one very particular English language setting – the education of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers in the UK, and from which it is suggested mainstream teacher education has much to learn. Here I draw on interview data with a group of critical teacher educators – Dermot Bryers, Melanie Cooke and Becky Winstanley - whose work is based on Freirean principles (discussed below), and examples of the activities they advocate. The chapter concludes with A consideration of the way forward for critical language teacher education.

The neoliberal project and the recalibration of teacher education

In discussions on the nature of neoliberalism, Philip Mirowski (2016) and Marnie Holborow (2018) retell the same joke which can be paraphrased as follows:

> Two young fish are swimming in the sea and as they swim along they meet an older fish heading in the opposite direction. The older fish greets them, saying 'Morning boys. How's the water?' The two young fish are baffled by this and continue swimming without speaking. Eventually one of them turns to the other and says 'What the hell is water?'

Their point is that we are often most oblivious to that which we are surrounded by and, by extension, that neoliberalism is now so pervasive a phenomenon that we can fail to recognise the extent to which our lives are saturated by it. But what is neoliberalism, and why has education been so important to it? Beginning with the first part of this question, we can say that in general neoliberalism refers to the form of market fundamentalism which has characterised the current phase of capitalism since the late 1970s. Although it exhibits regional variations and has been interpreted differently over time (Furlong, 2013), neoliberalism until now has tended to favour unrestricted free trade (although that may be changing under the Trump presidency), the privatization of state assets, the dismantling or scaling down of institutions associated with welfare-statism, the deregulation of financial institutions, labour flexibility, and the marketization of areas of life which were previously outside the market or which were seen as the preserve of the state. It has also tended to favour anti trade union legislation and low taxation of corporations and multinational companies.

Neoliberalism is also very much a project in the sense of being a collaborative enterprise which has been planned by individuals and propagated by institutions dedicated to its implementation – the most significant of which is the Mont Pèlerin Society founded in 1947. The society, which is an interdisciplinary global network of academics, journalists, business leaders and politicians, has been referred to by Mirowski (2013) as 'the neoliberal thought collective' – a term which is designed to capture the assiduousness of the society's members in disseminating their ideas globally through locally established groups and think tanks from its inception until the present.

At the same time, neoliberalism is also an ideology, understood here as an interested, class-based representation of the world, promulgated by the economically powerful through their political, business, academic and media allies as though it were common sense. Hence the circulation of ideas suggesting there is no alternative to the current economic order (Giddens, 2000); that economic austerity post 2008 is a necessity (Reinhart and Rogoff, 2010); that the poor are responsible for their own poverty (Murray, 1984); that social class is an outdated way of looking at contemporary society (Pakulski and Walters, 1996), indeed that society itself is a fiction misrepresenting the fact that there are only 'individual men and women' (Thatcher, 1987: npn); and that the market is the best and only guarantor of human liberty (Hayek, 1944). Discursively this has led to the proliferation of terms associated with the market being applied to more and more aspects of life. This has been referred to as a process of 'semantic stretching' (Holborow, 2007) in which students, hospital patients, passengers on public transport *inter alia* are reconfigured as *customers*, while teachers, nurses and doctors are recast as *service providers*, and universities, political parties, languages and even countries are talked about as *brands* (Holborow, 2012, 2015). Neoliberal discourse is also characterised by a rhetoric berating 'big government' and the notion of the intrusive state, while paradoxically relying on strong government to implement and monitor neoliberal policy, as well as being backed up by a robust carceral apparatus (Gottschalk, 2015).

With regard to the second part of the question as to why education has been so important to neoliberalism, two main reasons stand out. First, in those settings in which education had traditionally been mainly the preserve of the state, schools, colleges and universities were seen as ripe for the application of market principles, and competition for funding was introduced as a (supposed) mechanism for 'driving up standards'. Second, from the perspective of neoliberal government, the purpose of schools and other educational establishments is the production of citizens with the knowledge and dispositions appropriate for servicing the economy. In his overview of neoliberal reform of education in the UK, John Furlong (2013) shows that although British governments of different stripes from the Thatcher era onward adopted differing policies at times,

overall they shared the view that education was central to economic development, and a belief in the need for the sector to be thoroughly subjected to market forces. This, as Furlong (2013: 40) states, had implications for teacher education which

> […] had to be reformed along neoliberal lines. […] a new professionalism had to be developed to ensure that teachers would take on government-defined strategies and targets. The best way to ensure that the teaching profession did this was to maintain competitive markets among schools and providers of teacher education. While schools were required to meet targets, have inspections and be ranked on league tables, universities and other providers of teacher education were required to deliver teachers willing and able to embrace this centrally defined, target-driven culture.

But how exactly was this to be done? In the UK the first step was a sustained recalibration of what has been called 'the knowledge fit for teachers' (Cowen, 1995). This was characterised by the removal of subjects such as the sociology, philosophy and history of education from initial preparation courses - the presence of which were designed to produce a particular kind of teacher who was able to reflect on teaching in an academically informed way and capable of 'permanently re-examining the social fabric and social assumptions about the purposes of schooling within which he or she must daily practice' (Cowen, 1995: 21). Instead there was a new (and increasingly narrow) emphasis on subject knowledge, a focus on acquiring behaviours deemed 'best practice' which all teachers would have to demonstrate in regular government inspections, attention to classroom management and the administration of frequent rounds of high stakes pupil testing. At the same time, there was a move towards student teachers (known as trainees in the UK) spending more time in schools and less time in libraries and university lectures halls as part of their formation. Overall, this amounted to a redefinition of teacher professionalism and a politically motivated recalibration of teacher identity. These changes were memorably described by Bob Cowen (1995) as a shift from the model of the teacher as *reflective practitioner* to one of the teacher as *effective practitioner*. The aim, which amounted to a downgrading of the teaching profession, was to produce a narrowly educated and disciplined technician capable of implementing government policy (as opposed to the previously espoused model of the teacher as a broadly educated autonomous thinker – a model which was heavily influenced by the progressive education movement whose heyday had been the 1960s and early 1970s).

The consequences of this can be seen in the way in which the PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate of Education), which prepares teachers for the state school system in the UK, is currently structured.

Although avenues into teaching have been pluralised, the PGCE course remains the most popular route. Student teachers on the PGCE-MFL (Modern Foreign Languages), who are required to have a relevant first degree (e.g. in subjects such as French, Spanish, German, etc.), spend 120 days of the 150-day course in schools learning on the job, where they have access to a mentor (a teacher already employed in the school and vetted by the university as someone capable of providing help and advice). The remainder of their time is taken up with lectures on topics such as the nature and principles of language teaching and learning, the place of languages in the school curriculum, effective and inclusive learning, teaching skills, classroom management, lesson planning, and continuing professional development. Although such courses have many virtues, their narrow remit and the short amount of time dedicated to the academic part of the course, where trainees could explore their experience of practice in the light of theory, can be seen as limiting. German and Spanish nationals taking the PGCE-MFL in the UK were interviewed by David Block (Gray and Block, 2012; Block and Gray, 2016) and their comments serve to highlight some of these problems. David was not a tutor on the course and the informants were aware that by being interviewed they were participating in a research project. In the first extract below, a trainee teacher pseudonymously named Harald describes his frustration with the course. Transcription conventions are listed at the end of the chapter.

Extract 1

> … many of the issues on the course seem to be determined by the government / or by the government/ or by political or social services / and we're not allowed to talk about them (.5) which allows us to do what they want us to do (1) there seems to be one sort of model of teaching and how to do things / that's what the standards are / that's what we have to work towards /or we don't get the qualification (.5) there's not much diversity / no (.5) it's very much (.5) everything is done by objectives (.5) there's this one (.5) you identify targets / and you have this nice sheet with meetings and arrangements /and you have to identify targets every week (.5) in this week I'm working especially towards pronunciation / it's really silly / (Block and Gray, 2016: 481).

The extract draws attention to the ways in which the teacher education course exerts control over what can and cannot be said (largely I would suggest on account of the limited time available to the

teacher educators), the fact that only one way of doing things is seen as legitimate, and the way in which learning about teaching is framed within a highly instrumental discourse of standards, objectives and targets. The authors note similar constraints and lack of opportunity for discussion on the commercial CELTA (Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults) course offered globally by Cambridge Assessment (Block and Gray, 2016). The CELTA is also a practicum-led qualification – but with the entire course lasting only 120 hours, opportunities for talking about teaching and learning are necessarily very limited.

In addition to the kind of frustration mentioned by Harald, Elena – a Spanish national – speaking in Spanish and English, drew attention to the problematic nature of the highly technical and bureaucratic way in which her learning had to be documented for subsequent inspection by the teacher educators running the PGCE-MFL course (who themselves in turn were subject to government inspection). Her use of Spanish with David (a Spanish speaker) may be seen as indicative of the rapport between them and her openness in criticising the course.

Extract 2

Original in Spanish	**English translation**
yo me pasé un día entero la semana pasada escribiendo la *evidence* / que son cosas de siete frases de decir *today I realised this and* bla bla bla / pero como está *evidence based* / en realidad (.5) podría perfectamente no haber hecho estas cosas y escribirlo igual (.5) te están pidiendo que crees la evidencia de la nada (.5) pero es totalmente posible / porque es una lista tan brutal / y lo dije a mi mentor / y me dijo / *well, do*	I spent a whole day last week writing the *evidence* / which consists of seven sentences stating *I realised this and* bla bla bla/ But because it's *evidence based* / actually (.5) I could very well not have done these things and written it [that I had] anyway/ (.5) they're asking you to create the evidence out of nothing (.5) but it's completely possible / because it's such a long list / and I told my mentor that / and he said / *well do it / if you think by*

it / if you think by the end of the year you haven't produced evidence for everything / just fake it.	*the end of the year you haven't produced evidence for everything / just fake it.*

(Gray and Block, 2012: 130-131)

Here we see the mentor colluding with the trainee in recommending that the evidence of learning should be faked if necessary to comply with the requirements of the course. Such fakery allows the student teacher to demonstrate learning (however bogus), the mentor to be seen to be doing their job, and the teacher educators to satisfy the government inspectorate who require evidence-based demonstrations of learning. In such an environment, cynicism about education is inevitable, and no doubt partly responsible for the high dropout rate from teaching by young teachers – with almost a third of young teachers in the UK quitting within five years of qualifying (BBC, 2016). Studies of the reasons given by older teachers opting for early retirement noted that their sense of professional identity was perceived to be increasingly at odds with the new kind of effective practitioner identity valorised by the neoliberal state (Maclure, 1993). What we see in these examples is the opposite of what is generally understood by critical teacher education – to which I now turn. In the following sections we shall see that, despite its marginal status, critical teacher education offers a powerful alternative model of teacher preparation.

Critical language teacher education

In opposition to the neoliberal model of teacher education, critical (language) teacher education rests on a view of the teacher as a 'transformative intellectual', a theorising practitioner who

> exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice which attempt to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. […] [Such a teacher is someone] whose intellectual practices are necessarily grounded in forms of moral and ethical discourse exhibiting a preferential concern for the suffering and struggles of the disadvantaged and oppressed. […] Teachers who assume the role of transformative intellectuals treat students as critical agents, question how knowledge is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory (Giroux and McLaren, 1986: 215).

From this perspective, schools – as well as teacher education colleges and universities – are seen as potential sites of social transformation, rather than as domains of social reproduction or organs of the 'ideological state apparatus' (Althusser, 1971) whose role (certainly as far as the neoliberal project with regard to education is concerned) is to service the economy though the production of 'human capital' (Becker, 1964). Critical (language) teacher education can be seen as the confluence of a number of distinct but related intellectual tributaries - on the one hand it is indebted to neo-Marxist critical theory (Marcuse, 1964) and its critique of the cultural aspects of consumer capitalism, and what would later be called the manufacture of consent (Herman and Chomsky, 1988); on the other hand, there is Paulo Freire's (1972) literacy work with peasants in the developing world which had an avowedly social emancipatory agenda, and which also saw knowledge as co-constructed rather than transmitted from teacher to students. At the same time, there is the uniquely North American post-1929 crash phenomenon known as social reconstructionism (Groenke, 2009), which had the declared aim of promoting alternatives to capitalism through teacher education. Spearheaded by a group of educationalists in Teachers College New York, the social reconstructionists took the view that capitalism had failed and that teacher education and schools should be at the forefront in helping to bring about radical social change. In *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* George Counts (1932: 54), argued that teachers had to 'assume unprecedented social responsibilities' and abandon any pretence of neutrality with regard to the depredations of capitalism.

> There is the fallacy that the school should be impartial in its emphases, that no bias should be given instruction. […] My thesis is that complete impartiality is utterly impossible, that the school must shape attitudes, develop tastes, and even impose ideas (Counts, 1932: 19).

The charge of unwarranted imposition of ideas is one which would follow critical educational endeavours until the present (Gove, 2013) – however, the Freirean strand of what came to be known as 'critical pedagogy' (Giroux, 1983), and which predominates today (Auerbach, 1992; Cooke *et al*. 2018; Mallows, 2014; Shor, 1987), has consistently made a virtue of the absence of imposition in its approach, taking it as axiomatic that any kind of critical pedagogical intervention should revolve around dialogue and adopt as its starting point the interests, needs and concerns of those being taught. In his influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1972) argues against what he calls the banking model of teaching whereby the teacher's transmission of knowledge is seen in terms of metaphorical deposits which it is hoped will eventually be of use to the student. Such a model is seen as a negation of the necessarily dialogic nature of any genuine emancipatory educational

encounter:

> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. […] The *raison d'être* of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive toward reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students (Freire, 1972: 46).

In addition, to the centrality of dialogue in which speaking rights are shared by teacher and students, Freire also proposes a pedagogy of problem-posing in which codes (explained in what follows) play a significant role. Problem-posing refers to the practice of exploring an issue of concern or relevance to students which may be approached though the generation of a code, namely a picture or some kind of graphic representation of an issue which is then discussed (decodified) – a process in which the teacher and students attempt to clarify what is at stake, how it affects them and what solutions there may be. This can also be combined (as shall see below) with techniques involving the use of drama.

In terms of teacher education, it can be a little difficult to establish what all this looks like in practice as it has been noted that there are few examples of data from critical language teacher education courses (Hawkins and Norton, 2009). However, one group of critical educators and researchers in the UK have been diligent in making the case for what they call 'participatory ESOL' and their publications provide a vivid blueprint for teachers who wish to educate themselves on how to go about implementing Freirean principles in the classroom (Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Cooke, Bryers and Winstanley, 2018). One member of the group, Dermot Bryers also runs a charity called *English for Action* which inducts teachers into the principles and practice of participatory ESOL. In the following section I look more closely at the work of this group of critical educators, and I begin by drawing on interview data with two of them.

English for Action

The following extracts are taken from an interview, recorded in 2014, in which members of this

group and I discussed their views on social class in ESOL. The extracts include contributions from Dermot Bryers (DB) and Becky Winstanley (BW). In the course of our discussion, it emerged that *English for Action*, as well as running English language classes taught along Freirean lines, also provided training for teachers. Here I (JG) ask them to tell me about the way in which they prepare their teachers.

Extract 3

> JG: how do you train the teachers for *English for Action* / I mean what / what do they need that a reg- / that a CELTA wouldn't give you / or I don't know whatever↓
> [some lines omitted]
> BW: different things / erm I do completely different things with *English for Action* than I would do here for example
> [some lines omitted]
> JG: Give me an example / I'm a complete outsider […] / I mean what might you do in / in something / in one of those sessions↑
> DB: what was our last training session↑
> BW: the last training session was about discussion (.) / and about using discussions / erm building up discussion skills with students / and using the forum of discussion to kind of talk about issues that were key to students / and how you do that in the classroom / how you set it up / what the pitfalls can be / you know what / what happens if something / a discussion arises where there's a bit of barney[1] or / you know those kind of / so looking at training from that kind of view [JG: hmm] / erm rather than more technical teaching techniques [JG: hmm] / (.) does that make sense↑

At the time of the interview Becky was also teaching on a PGCE in Literacy and ESOL in the institution in which the interview was taking place – hence her reference to 'here' in her first contribution. The point she is making is that the kind of input she provides 'here' is determined by

[1]Informal British term for an argument

the kind of externally determined constraints referred to earlier in this chapter in the discussion of the PGCE-MFL. It is significant that in her long turn on the *English for Action* training on how to manage discussions she contrasts this with 'more technical teaching techniques' which are eschewed – indirectly indexing the kind of teacher preparation associated with the PGCE model. That discussions should be focused on issues which are 'key to students' is in line with Freire's (1972: 68) view that

> We […] must never provide the people with programmes which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears […]. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world.

This principle emerges more explicitly when Dermot explains how drama is also used as a way of putting the students' experiences at the centre of a lesson. ESOL classrooms tend to be composed of migrants and asylum seekers, but as James Simpson (2015: 210) states the UK is a 'reluctant host state', where 'immigrants are needed', but paradoxically it is one in which they are 'not welcomed'. It is therefore not unexpected that discrimination reflects students' 'situation in the world' and that it should be used as an example of a theme for exploration. This extract is slightly longer than previous examples, but provides a rationale for the use of forum theatre and a clear indication of how it should be used in the classroom.

Extract 4

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DB: next session / next session's on using forum theatre
techniques in ESOL classrooms to build language
JG: hmm / what is that exactly↑
DB: so forum theatre is when you / it's / it's very similar
to using role play / so you'd ask people to think about
difficult situations where they've been in / where they felt
erm / the / the original language was oppressed / which is
from the theatre of the oppressed which was erm / Boal wrote
/ he was a contemporary of Freire in Brazil in the 70s and
80s
[some lines missing]
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DB: yeah / but we don't really talk about oppressed / it just sounds / just sounds really dark in English / I think more than it does in Portuguese or Spanish or [J: hmm] / other languages / but anyway it's situations where you're / we say unfair (.) / erm I've used it before / where you've felt kind of / people treated you unfairly / and then people talk about being at the doctor / being disrespected by the receptionist / or doctors or / or their health professionals / or it could be anything / it could be the bus driver on a bus / and then people work in groups of threes and fours to kind of dramatise that / make it into a role play / a three to five minute role play / perform it / the audience watch the role play / and then the teacher leads the / like problem posing / leads the erm group through an analysis of the situation / is it familiar to you↑ / have you felt like this↑ / who was the erm the / who was the victim in inverted commas↑ / who was the person acting in an unfair way↑ / why did it happen↑ / you know / what systemic reasons are there for this↑ / erm and then finally what can we do about it↑ / and when people start putting ideas towards what you could do / then they might say things like / she could say this / and you say no / don't tell me show me / and then you rewind the / the play to the beginning / you replace the protagonist who is the victim / sits down in the audience / and the audience member replaces the protagonist / and then re-acts the situation with a more effective intervention

[some lines missing]

DB: and then you can challenge three or four audience members to get it better and better and better / until you then bring the original protagonist back in / and say now try it / and it really helps challenge like erm (.) / both sort of systemic unfairness and linguistic strategies to help deal with it

Here we see the problem-posing arising out of an initial dramatisation of a situation in which

something perceived to be unfair took place. Overall the pedagogic cycle as outlined by Dermot (selection of a situation based on students' lived experience → dramatisation of what happened → problem-posing analysis of dramatisation in terms of feelings, characters, causes → re-enactments of the situation in which the unfairness is effectively challenged) can be seen as an example of what Freire calls *praxis*, namely the combination of reflection and action designed to challenge systemic unfairness. At the mention of this term, the following exchange takes place, which is a powerful reminder that critical language teacher education of this kind is a conscious political intervention, aimed not simply at producing teachers who can facilitate the building of language – but doing so in such a way that the language which is built can be used to resist and challenge the injustices faced by the students:

Extract 5

> JG: what do you guys understand by systemic unfairness↑
> DB: erm (.) well I suppose the *English for Action* analysis would be that erm London is an unequal city / with unacceptable levels of poverty and inequality / and that migrants are disproportionately affected by this / particularly migrants with English as a foreign language / so those three kind of steps mean that it's almost impossible to teach language in a vacuum without being aware of those two factors / and therefore it would be weird and unnatural not to have a level on which / if you've got twelve people in a room / that they they're not going to talk about these kinds of things

At the same time, the work of this group shows that issues affecting students do not only come from the host society, but can come from within the migrant communities themselves. In making this point, they highlight the importance of teachers listening to their students. In *Whose Integration?* (Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke, 2013), an account of a research project designed to explore the trope of migrants failing to integrate in UK, they describe how a group of mainly Bangladeshi women in a class taught by all three of them introduced the topic of women riding bicycles and the (male) Bangladeshi community assessment of such women as having 'gone modern'. Their account of problem-posing from a code started with the introduction of the topic as one of concern to the students themselves. A code, which consisted of a simple line drawing of a woman with a headscarf

riding a bicycle while being pointed at by male members of the community, was then introduced. The questions/instructions used for the problem-posing were as follows: 1. Describe the content – what do you see? 2. Define the problem. 3. Personalize the problem. 4. Discuss the problem. 5. Discuss the alternatives to the problem.

In their discussion of the wide-ranging discussion which followed this, Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke argue that the topic of gender created a sense of solidarity among all the women in the group, including the female teachers. Men in the group were challenged by the women and Dermot was questioned about the extent of his involvement in domestic chores in his own household. In their overall assessment of the activity they conclude:

> The discussion showed that the participatory ESOL class can be regarded as an important 'site' of integration, especially if integration means deeper understanding of 'the other' and an acceptance that the concept of 'the other' is fluid, not static. Discussions such as the one we describe here suggest that focusing primarily on identities other than the ethnic, national or religious can foster alliances based on categories such as gender, family and class, which may at times be more relevant. We came to see integration in this session, not as a state a person has reached or failed to reach, but as a *process* of fleeting and constantly shifting alliances, which we were involved in as much as the students (Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke, 2013: 20).

In concluding thus they make an important point about critical pedagogy in general. Not only is a classroom a real setting in the real world and not some kind of rehearsal space (although it can be that too), it is also a crucially a site of potential transformation for all concerned – teachers and students alike. Indeed a consistent feature of Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke's work is the extent to which they show themselves to be educated by their students – an important Freirean lesson for the teachers who turn to their work for a theorisation of critical language teaching and practical ideals on how to implement it.

Conclusion

What conclusions then can be drawn from this account of critical language teacher education and the forces arrayed against it? I began this chapter with a quotation from the sociologist Didier Eribon and his damning indictment of the influence on education of the 'irresistible forces' of the contemporary social order. While these are forces are considerable, I want to suggest that they are

resistible – and indeed, as the work of groups such as *English for Action* demonstrate, they are being actively resisted. But in more mainstream settings, resistance *is* certainly difficult. The Freirean approach to teaching and teacher education does not sit easily with current neoliberal pedagogic regimes of pre-determined learning outcomes, cyclical testing, repeated government inspections and the generation of league tables. Its aims and its approach to achieving these aims are altogether different. As Freire (1972: 95) states

> The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for men to come to feel like the masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own programme but must search for this programme dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the development of which the oppressed must participate.

Such a view of education recognises the specific social, cultural and economic situatedness of the classroom, the unpredictability of teaching and the necessarily dialogic nature of a pedagogy which seeks to do more than provide students with the skills deemed necessary to service the needs of the economy. However, those of us who subscribe to the idea of critical language teacher education need to recall that *is* also being attempted in mainstream language teacher education courses as well. J. Amos Hatch and Susan Groenke (2009) provide some empirical evidence of what is being attempted by self-identifying critical teacher educators in the US. Using an online questionnaire sent to educationalists whose work espoused the values of critical pedagogy they received 65 responses to a number of prompts. These included:

1. The major issues I confront as I 'do' critical pedagogy in institution are …
2. Some ways I deal with these issues are ... (Hatch and Groenke, 2009: 63).

The responses make for interesting reading, with major issues being identified as student resistance, a lack of sympathy from colleagues, and institutional barriers. With regard to the first of these, the following comment gives an indication of the nature of this:

> When it comes to working with students, the major issues are getting them to acknowledge their own privilege. [They] are convinced of the existence of individual and institutional racisms but are mostly sceptical of a systemic racism. All view issues of class from a lens

> that accepts capitalism as a natural political economy without alternatives. All readily agree that a student-centered pedagogy is important, but very few show enthusiasm for the radical edge that comes from Freire's problem-posing (Hatch and Groenke, 2009: 65).

Such views might be said to reflect the way in which the neoliberal worldview has succeeded (at least in some quarters) in eroding the concept of class and denying the reality of systemic disadvantage. That said, the data also suggest that graduate students with actual experience of teaching were more sympathetic to the notion of critical pedagogy than pre-service novices, who tended to think about teaching solely in terms of learning discrete classroom behaviours. As far as colleagues were concerned, the data suggest that many took the view that beginning teachers were either developmentally unready for critical pedagogy, or (like some students) that its social critique challenged their own privilege. And finally there was the obstacle of institutional barriers. For some informants, the neoliberal climate meant that the educational values they held were clearly at odds with the kind of teacher professionalism they were supposed to develop in their students. Others, mainly tenure-seeking informants, felt that they needed to be careful about the extent to which they openly espoused the values associated with critical language teacher education in their institutions as these might impact negatively on their own careers. This led in some cases to a somewhat softly-softly approach:

> I quietly (sometimes) subvert the dominant discourse.
>
> I use my imagination to see where I can fit critical pedagogy into my work while flying under the radar.
>
> I just keep going ahead and not "advertising" what I do (Hatch and Groenke, 2009: 76).

There is therefore, I would suggest, some cautious grounds for optimism. In addition to continuing to work on the margins to keep counter narratives alive, those teacher educators committed to critical pedagogy might also consider making the links in their teaching between Freirean dialogism and other approaches such as sociocultural theory in which learning is also seen as co-constructed, and communicative and task-based approaches in which student talk is seen as central to learning. Ultimately however, significant structural change will only come about when neoliberalism itself is brought to an end. For that to happen, teachers and teacher educators must recognise that 'teaching and teacher education are inherently and unavoidably political' (Cochran-Smith, 2005: 3), and that they have no option but to become politically more active, forging links - as has been suggested elsewhere (Block and Gray, 2016) - with professionals and workers in other sectors of the economy in challenging the hegemony of this profoundly oppressive and anti-educational ideology and the

system it supports.

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TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

(.)	very short silence (less than 0.5 seconds)
(.8)	duration of silence in seconds
wo-	cut-off
[ ]	overlapping talk
↑↓	significant rise or fall in pitch
/	chunk of talk

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