

# Critical Pedagogy: (ironically) in a nut shell

## Where its come from

The roots of critical pedagogy can be traced back to critical theory and the Frankfurt School, or the Institute of Social Inquiry, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this socio-political zeitgeist - with the rise of Stalinism, the failure of the working class to contest the rising capitalism in the Western world and the impending genocide of the second world war - increasing oppression of minority groups were being recognised and critiqued by a group of scholars at the school (Giroux, 2009).

Paulo Freire's ideas are linked to his experiences working with urban poor and rural peasants within his home country of Brazil in the mid 20th century. He continued to work with the least privileged members of society when he was exiled to Chile. As such, both critical theory and critical pedagogy have foundations with oppressed populations in harsh social conditions and contexts (Roberts, 2015).

In these social times, whereby dominant (often colonial) structures reproduce a social system that is oppressive to the majority, critical pedagogy is a way of learning that helps to liberate people from oppression.



The best teachers are  
those who show you  
where to look, but  
don't tell you  
what to see.

Alexandra K. Trenfor

“The idea of posing problems rather than giving answers, with dialogue as the basis for educational communication and the development of critical consciousness (conscientization) as a key goal” (Roberts, 2015, P. 380)

*Critical pedagogy is premised on the posing of problems whereby students and teachers collectively co-investigate in an attempt to challenge dominant oppressive structures and ideologies.*



## The key features...

- Traditional (banking) pedagogy is oppressive, alienating, dehumanizing and lacks creativity or thought
  - Aims to emancipation of the oppressed
  - Problem-posing within the social world
- Raising awareness (consciousness) of oppression and its causes
- Promotes transformative action towards a utopic society
  - Culturally and contextually located and concrete
  - “The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 2009, P. 57).
  - “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information” (Freire, 2009, P.56).

## Three-stage model: Critical Pedagogy in Action

1. Listening and Naming
2. Dialogue and Reflection
3. Promoting transformative social action

### Listening and Naming:

Here, the learners share knowledge of their experiences and cultural understandings or problems. For example, asking students to explain their journeys to university may give an understanding of the social problems and injustices they have experienced. This could be done verbally but also through photo novels

### Dialogue and Reflection

This stage requires the consideration and discussion of the potential influences of oppression on the narratives. One method is through the SHOWED questions

- What do we See here;
- What is really Happening;
- How does the story relate to Our lives;
- Why did the person acquire the problem;
- How is it possible for the person to become Empowered;
- What can we Do about it.

This allows the students and teachers to unpick the oppression and explore ways to transform the situation.

### Promoting transformative social action

In Freire's words, praxis, is where you mobilize the newly found understandings or consciousness and transform the social worlds around you. This is where the learners (including teacher) act upon the oppressions to make a more utopic society. This could be through, but not limited to, changes in practices (such as teaching methods), shifting values (towards things such as capitalism) or through political activism (campaigning, media or charity work).

Matthews (2014)

Adam White

Department of Sport and Exercise | [Adam.White@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:Adam.White@winchester.ac.uk)

[Adam-White.org](http://Adam-White.org)