
Book Review

Wink, J. (2011). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world (4th ed)*. United States of America: Longman. 224 pp., ISBN: 978-0137028733 (paperback). \$67.81

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Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World by Joan Wink (2011) provided an in-depth look into the world of critical pedagogy through careful analysis. The book read like a journal entry by the author expressing a personal perspective on critical pedagogy. In the introduction, Wink discussed her past, pitfalls and family life, and how it related to her researching and reflecting on critical pedagogy. She questioned the reader to keep an open mind and search for answers as she searched for the elusive answers as well.

In chapter 1, Wink directly asked “Why does critical pedagogy matter?” Just as directly, she answered “kids matter.” Wink began the chapter by discussing one of her students and the student’s representation of the three perspectives of pedagogy; transmission, generative, and transformative. Wink defined transmission as the teacher standing in front of the class and lecturing. She shifted to defining generative as a more hands-on approach, information flowing between the student and teacher. The last perspective of pedagogy was transformative. Wink defined perspective as students transferring into the real world, participating in real life activities. Also, there was numerous communications between the teacher and student and student and student. Friere (1970) discussed educators and students having equal dialogue. Teachers needed to speak with students, not to them. Teachers must also listen. Wink suggested that practicing teachers needed to learn, relearn, and unlearn when understanding critical pedagogy.

In chapter 2, Wink stressed that there was not just one definition for critical pedagogy and the readers needed to create their own definition due to what was important to them. Overall, Wink (2011) stated that “Critical pedagogy was a process that enabled teachers and learners to join together in asking fundamental questions about knowledge, justice, and equity in their own classroom, school, family, and community” (p. 89). Understanding language was important in critical pedagogy. Wink discussed critical pedagogy and how it forced educators to relook at the basic problems of authority and its association to bigger social forces that affected schools. Wink questioned her past, present, and future of teaching and what could change. Creative dialog was very important. Wink described four phases of creative dialog; descriptive, interpretive, critical/multicultural/antibias/ and creative/transformative. Creative dialog took the “passivity out of reading and transformed it into engagement and inquiry” (p. 65).

In chapter 3, Wink discussed the history of critical pedagogy. She focused on three teachers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Wink stated that Socrates’ legacy was the Socratic

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dialogue. She compared the Socratic dialog to peeling layers off an onion and the center of the onion was “filled with the complete meaning of truth, or love, or justice” (p. 94). Wink argued that Socratic dialog cost nothing, and it could not be bought. Socratic dialog required an expert teacher. The next teacher that influenced critical pedagogy was Plato. Plato contributed through his longing for democracy infusion in public schools. Aristotle was the third teacher to be mentioned by Wink. Aristotle believed that living forms were always seeking improvement and even perfection through his study of nature. Wink also reviewed Vygotsky in which he “served as a bridge to extend critical teaching and learning through dialogue to Dewey and the modern world of today” (p. 99). Vygotsky used information from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to configure scaffolding, collaborative groups, and writing to make meaning. In this chapter, Wink also examined her influence, Paulo Freire. She included an excerpt from a speech Freire gave in 1993. One part of the speech (p. 103) discussed progressive teachers and how they needed to be humble. Students needed a teacher who did not make them sit and listen patiently. They needed a teacher who understood his or her presence in the world and “whose dreams were dreams of changing the reality to create a less ugly society” (p. 103).

In chapter 4, Wink explained how to formulate critical pedagogy with students. Students needed to take risks and have classrooms and teachers who were conducive to risk. These classrooms needed to be inquiry based that led to the inquiry of meaning. Wink suggested that educators teach critical pedagogy through problem posing. She stated that there were principles of problem posing for teachers and learners. These principles were

- Trust each other,
- Believe that their involvement will matter,
- Understand resistance and institutional barriers to change, and
- Are aware of their own power and knowledge (p. 149).

“Problem posing took place when people began with a spirit of inquiry and questioning of situations that directly affected their own lives” (p. 153). Wink discussed in problem posing, teachers named, reflected critically, and acted. When teachers named, they formed small groups and named problems in their school. Then, the group decided on which problem to name. Next, the groups reflected critically and searched for approaches to improve the problem. Last, the group recommended needed action.

In chapter 5, Wink explained the future of critical pedagogy. She gave a few educated guesses on how critical pedagogy would progress. She believed critical pedagogy would branch off into many directions and educators would be more connected with each other than previously. Technology was the reason and the archaic way of teaching in the past would cease. Finally, Wink encouraged each reader to name, reflect critically, and act.

Throughout this book I kept asking myself What is critical pedagogy? Why should I care as an educator? Peckover (2012) mentioned in his book review that it was like having a conversation with Wink and she was well versed and knew how to guide the conversation. Wink made the difficult concept of critical pedagogy easy to understand and she used specific examples from teaching as evidence for each concept. I felt myself wanting more after every chapter, trying to understand and place all the pieces of critical pedagogy together. I believed the structure and tone of the book helped me visualize using critical pedagogy in my own classroom.

McCormack (1996) and Romanowski (2001) criticized earlier versions of this book for not being thorough enough with critical pedagogy. I agreed with Peckover (2012) that the book was intended as an initial discussion for people who were new to critical pedagogy. I agreed with Wink's argument for critical pedagogy. However, her explanation of critical pedagogy reminded me of previously researched pedagogy. Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun, (2015) reviewed a similar model called the Inquiry Training Model. In the beginning of the inquiry training model, students were presented with a puzzling event. The main idea was to have students encounter the creation of new information, the conflict should be based on ideas that could be discovered (Halpern, 2017; Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015). While not exactly like critical pedagogy described by Wink, I believe it was a type of critical pedagogy. I believed this because the Inquiry Training Model was complex, and it made students think about a real-world problem to work through. It required dialog and the social interaction between students and teacher.

The most valuable information I learned from this book was the different thinking processes. The teacher needed to reflect on their teaching and learn, relearn, and unlearn (Andrews, 2017). Learning about students and curriculum was important and it also led to relearning. Teachers needed to shift their methodology. It was what teachers could learn from previous students or new ones which attended the first day of school. Teaching methods or discipline could change depending on students. Teachers needed to relearn new strategies and information to make the best decisions about teaching. Unlearning involved dispositions or beliefs, assumptions, or philosophies. This involved unlearning the known and comfortable. Wink wanted readers to assess teaching and unlearn previous teaching educators were accustomed for the past 30 years. Zygmantas (2009) discussed "in our relation with the world, we constantly create and re-create our knowledge, as we do not possess absolute knowledge" (p. 73). Wink's book challenged all that I have learned throughout undergraduate and graduate school. My dispositions changed about teaching and how to approach students. This book challenged my beliefs about public education and future for educators.

Overall, this was an excellent book for an introductory college course explaining pedagogy. I believed this text was essential for future teachers and classrooms. There needed to be a shift in education and problem posing in critical pedagogy in schools. If not using the problem posing method, educators could use the book to open their mind by reflecting on their own practice to better the instruction and education of their students. I recommend this book for any person who questions teaching or how they approach teaching in a classroom. This would be a great read for novice teachers. Why read about critical pedagogy? Because, kids matter.

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