Making Sense of Critical Pedagogy in Adult Literacy Education

Volume 2: Chapter Two
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In the field of adult education, there is much debate about how programs can best serve students. Some educators and researchers believe that adult education programs should reflect a critical pedagogy, providing services that are culturally relevant, participant driven, and socially empowering (Auerbach, 1989; Freire, 1993; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Quigley, 1997; Shor, 1992). Critical theorists (Bartolomé, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Shor, 1992) have criticized many adult education programs for applying a "one model fits all" approach-with a preset structure and curriculum that rarely take into account the specific background and needs of the individuals involved. These noncritical programs place a primacy on skills acquisition, reflecting some educators' belief that literacy and other academic skills alone will help to rectify the marginalized positions of the students who are enrolled. Noncritical programs are criticized for ignoring the political, social, and economic factors that have conspired to marginalize people in the first place (Macedo, 1994). Students in these programs are seen as passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge, with little sense of their own agency in transforming their lives (Shor, 1992).

Critical theorists believe that adult literacy programs should not be confined to teaching specific literacy skills but rather should contextualize instruction within a framework of social activism and societal transformation. Critical adult literacy programs should be designed around the backgrounds, needs, and interests of students and should encourage a "dialogic" (as defined by Freire, 1993) relationship between teachers and students.1 More important, programs should establish a democratic setting where students are able to use their developing literacy skills to analyze critically their place in society, understand how certain cultural assumptions and biases have put them and their families at risk, and ultimately learn how to challenge the status

quo. Critical adult education programs do not simply teach literacy and other basic skills; rather, they show students how they can use those skills to transform their lives and the society in which they live.

Critical pedagogy in literacy programs around the world, including Cuba's "Great Campaign" of the early 1960s, the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade of the early 1980s, and the work of the Highlander school in the southern United States during the civil rights movement, has been shown to have an important impact on adult students' literacy attainment and their social empowerment (Horton & Freire, 1990; Kozol, 1978; Miller, 1985). Students in these programs learned how to read and write and how to use reading and writing to challenge political structures and improve their lives. Some may argue (Facundo, 1984) that critical pedagogy worked well in these programs because they existed within the context of a repressive government and a larger revolutionary movement. Standing up to the government was a matter of crucial importance for students in these programs; they needed to transform their situation because their lives were literally at risk. Literacy attainment in the United States today, however, is not perceived as a matter of life and death, and personal and societal transformation are not seen as necessary goals of an adult education program. I would argue, however, that literacy attainment is a matter of life and death for many students in this country. Too many people are prevented from reaching their full potential because they do not have access to the adequate nutrition, housing, health care, and education that so many of us take for granted. Learning to read and write will not change this imbalance. Adult literacy programs that make an effort to reflect a critical pedagogy try to help students understand what forces have contributed to their positions in society and to see how literacy can help them influence these forces and transform their lives. These programs hold great promise for adult learners in this country; it behooves educators to learn more about them.

Critical theorists are eloquent and prolific in their criticisms of traditional, noncritical adult education programs. Unfortunately, their criticisms have resulted in an "us versus them" mentality that often puts noncritical programs on the defensive rather than open to the idea of change. Practitioners within adult education often view the ideas of critical theorists as too theoretical and impractical (Kanpol, 1998). Teachers often feel that implementation of critical pedagogy is impeded by too many barriers, such as the required use of specific curricula or assessments by government agencies that provide funding for programs, students who are resistant to critical pedagogy, and administrators who expect students to show improvement on standardized assessments.2

Dividing adult education programs into two categories is too simplistic and does not adequately represent the field. In reality, there may be

programs that reflect some critical and some noncritical elements. In addition, some programs may be noncritical but may also have the potential to evolve-that is, they may be making program changes that reflect a shift toward critical pedagogy. Rather than labeling programs as either critical or noncritical, it may be more useful and beneficial to the field to think about adult education programs as falling somewhere on a continuum between noncritical and critical. Dependence on government-sponsored funding may force some programs, for example, to use a specific curriculum or assessment tool. Teachers in the program may have to use that curriculum but may also attempt to make their instruction more reflective of critical pedagogy. Such teachers could be seen as attempting to shift their pedagogy from noncritical to critical. Such changes do not occur immediately, nor would we expect them to. As Freire (1998) himself argues, critical educational practice is not a specific methodology to be applied blindly but rather one that emerges when teachers can practice teaching from a critical perspective and have the time to reflect on their pedagogy. I believe this is a more constructive way of mending the division between critical and noncritical pedagogy in adult education; programs may have little incentive to change if they believe they must change everything at once. This chapter challenges the assumption that adult education programs must be defined as solely critical or noncritical and shows how a bridge between the two camps might be built.

The principal frame for this chapter is critical theory.3 Critical theory in literacy (also called critical literacy) looks at how one's identity is inscribed by literacy practices. A person's level of literacy, the nature of the printed material that this person reads and writes, and the role that literacy plays in his or her community all contribute to how that person is perceived by him- or herself and by society. Critical theorists believe that becoming literate involves not just learning how to read and write but also learning how to use literacy to examine critically one's position in life in terms of socioeconomic status, gender, educational background, and race (Auerbach, 1989; Freire, 1993; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Street, 1995). Within a critical literacy framework, there is not just one literacy but many (Street, 1993), and an individual may need to practice many kinds of literacy to fulfill his or her roles in society. The literacy needs of the home or the community may be entirely different from the kinds of literacy practices required at work or at school. According to Lankshear and McLaren (1993), these literacies "are socially constructed within political contexts: that is, within contexts where access to economic, cultural, political, and institutional power is structured unequally. Moreover, these same literacies evolve and are employed in daily life settings that are riven with conflicting and otherwise competing interests" (p. xviii).

The content of this chapter is also informed by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism, which takes the view that an individual's intellectual development results from social interactions within specific cultural contexts. More specifically, Vygotsky sees the community as playing an integral role in intellectual development, arguing that it is the people most central in our lives who influence the way we perceive the world, and therefore how and what we learn. From a social constructivist viewpoint, education should occur in meaningful contexts, and every effort should be made to connect school experiences with students' out-of-school experiences.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: EDUCATION IS POLITICAL

To understand how critical pedagogy can be applied to adult education, it is first important to have a general understanding of it. Of all the educators and theorists espousing a critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire is probably the best known among adult educators. His work in adult education, though carried out largely in developing countries, including his native Brazil, has been extremely influential among adult educators in the United States. Many others as well have contributed to our understanding of critical pedagogy.

European social and political theorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have influenced Freire and other modern critical pedagogues. One such influence is Marx, who theorized that economics in large part dictates social and cultural relations (Klages, 1997; Wink, 1997). Marx also theorized that dominant ideologies work to justify a society's social and economic hierarchies. In a capitalist society, for example, Marx would say that all major institutions-educational, religious, government, business-promote ideologies that allow certain people to prosper while others remain marginalized. Another major influence in critical pedagogy is Gramsci, who used the term hegemony-the domination of one group over another-to describe how societal institutions maintain their power (Wink, 1997). The term critical theory and the ideas behind it can be traced to the Frankfurt school, a German institute of social research where Max Horkheimer, J¸rgen Habermas, Erich Fromm, Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, and other social thinkers developed influential sociological, political, and cultural theories based in part on Marx's theories (Greene, 1996).

In the United States, Dewey and Horton have had major influences on critical pedagogy. Dewey (1963) theorized that only students who were actively involved in their learning could become informed participants in a democracy. He believed that rote learning contributed to the passive acceptance of one's place in society, whereas learning through problem solving and practical application would lead students to take a more

active role in determining their experiences and positions within society. Horton, who opened the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee in 1932, believed that education must be tied to larger social movements. His work with adults reflected his belief that education must be grounded in the real-life problems and struggles of students and must help them understand how to master their fate (Heaney, 1996).4

This chapter, while acknowledging the important role that critical theorists and educators from the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries played in the formation of critical pedagogy, focuses on critical theorists and educators of the latter part of the twentieth century, particularly those who have influenced education in the United States. It is important to note that critical pedagogy is not tied exclusively to adult education. Freire, Horton, Shor, and Auerbach focus almost exclusively on adult students, but many of the writings on critical pedagogy concern education in general (Macedo, Giroux, McLaren, Lankshear, Street) or Kñ12 education (Bartolomé, Shannon). I have synthesized these different approaches in order to present a more cohesive portrait of critical pedagogy.

Perhaps the most important theme running through the literature is the belief that educational systems the world over are political (Freire, 1993; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1997; Shannon, 1992; Shor, 1992).5 Decisions about whom to hire, what curricula to follow, which books to buy, and what language to use are all political. Teachers who claim to be neutral are also, de facto, political. Horton contends that the idea of a neutral educational system and neutral educators is a false one (Horton & Freire, 1990). He believes that calling education "neutral" is actually a code for supporting the status quo. Neutrality means following the crowd, doing what is expected, and refraining from questioning the political decisions that are made daily in schools all over the world. According to Shannon (1992), all of the decisions that educators make regarding program and lesson goals, the materials to be used, and the nature of teacher interaction with students "are actually negotiations over whose values, interests, and beliefs will be validated at school" (p. 2). These decisions are indisputably political.

Critical theorists claim not only that education is political but that critical educators must be political if they are to see through curricula that promote mainstream beliefs, culture, politics, and goals (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Edelsky, 1996; Giroux, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Critical theorists challenge the popularly held belief that becoming literate will by itself effect dramatic change in the lives of marginalized people. They believe that educators should not only teach content but should also educate students about the political and social inequities that have prevented them from becoming academically

successful thus far.

Educators cannot help students understand these social and political inequities unless they understand them themselves. Some critical theorists (Bartolomé, 1996; Freire & Macedo, 1987) write about the need for teachers to develop political clarity, which Bartolomé (1996) defines as the "process by which individuals achieve a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to recreate them" (p. 235). To achieve political clarity, teachers need to understand that what happens in the larger society has significant impact on what happens in school. Schools are not isolated from larger sociocultural realities, and the academic achievement of subordinated students can be seen as a by-product of what is occurring at the societal level. Teachers with political clarity understand that the sociocultural reality within their classrooms and schools must be transformed so that class and school cultures do not mirror society's inequities.

The idea that education is political is certainly the central theme of critical pedagogy. Within that theme are several additional assumptions about education put forth by critical educators:

- Dominant ideologies and culture dictate educational practices.
- Students must be actively involved in their education.
- Language is ideological and serves to construct norms within classrooms.

Each of these ideas overlaps with the others, but I will discuss them separately to delineate the most important ideas of critical pedagogy.

Dominant Ideologies and Culture Dictate Educational Practices
Closely tied to the idea that education is political is the idea that the structure of schools, the way in which teachers are educated in teacher preparation programs, the official curricula, and the methodologies that teachers implement are all influenced by those who currently hold power, including government, religious, and private sector leaders. Critical theorists maintain that dominant ideologies have dictated what is taught and that the culture represented by these dominant ideologies is the most highly privileged (Giroux, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Macedo, 1994). This privileged culture has more of what critical theorists refer to as cultural capital, which means that its mainstream cultural practices are more highly valued than those of marginalized groups. The "English-only" movement (Tatalovich, 1995) and Hirsch's (1987) "cultural literacy" are both examples of how cultural capital can influence political and educational policies and thought, imposing mainstream language and culture on political and educational structures.6

Macedo (1994) believes that those who defend a "Western cultural heritage" fail to recognize that marginalized groups do not possess the same cultural capital as those in dominant groups; this failure contributes to unequal power relations in schools. Teachers tend to value students more highly who more closely represent the mainstream in their language, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, language, and life experiences than those of nonmainstream groups (Bartolomé, 1996). Taylor (1997) writes, "Race, gender, and socioeconomic status are all factors that critically affect whose ëliteracy' counts. There seems to be a limit to how much success there is to go around, and not all types of knowledge or ways of knowing are recognized" (p. 2).

Delgado-Gaitan (1996) believes that schools' failure to involve families in school activities and to engage parents in helping their children become academically successful is due to the fact that schools are influenced by competitive, capitalistic principles that do not attempt to comprehend the cultures and values of the communities they serve. Freire (1998) sees the problem as one of intolerance, which he defines as the tendency to believe that whatever is different from "us" is inferior. People tend to believe that the way they do things is correct and therefore superior to the ways others might do things. This kind of belief system has the most impact on marginalized groups because they lack the power to impose their ways on others. Freire (1998) goes so far as to say that the dominant class does not intend for there to be equality between the classes; rather, it wants to maintain the differences and distance between groups and to use political systems such as schools to identify and emphasize the inferiority of the dominated classes while at the same time confirming its own superiority. One major way in which school systems support this "mainstream is superior" attitude is through curriculum. The decisions about what to teach and how to teach it lie largely with white, mainstream administrators and educators who place the highest value on their own ways of knowing while ignoring other ways of knowing that are part of different social classes, values, and languages.

If it is as Freire says, then we are up against a school system that places subordinate students in the position of having to reject their own cultural knowledge and ways of knowing in order to fit in and be successful in school. Bartolomé (1996) goes further when she writes that schools dehumanize students by "robbing [them] of their culture, language, history, and values" (p. 233). She believes that attempting to address the academic failure of subordinated students is futile if schools do not address their own discriminatory practices.

Critical theorists believe that one of the most important things educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers can do is to learn about the culture, everyday experiences, language, and community that make up

the reality of subordinated students (Freire, 1993; 1998; Giroux, 1997; Shor, 1992). Giroux (1997) believes it is necessary to develop pedagogy that is "attentive to the histories, dreams, and experiences that such students bring to school" (p. 140). Only through being attentive to students' realities will critical educators develop teaching practices that accept and validate the different kinds of cultural capital that influence the way students make meaning of their learning.

If the knowledge that we gain about marginalized students does not significantly affect our curriculum or the way we teach, then that understanding is, from a critical perspective, useless. Similarly, multicultural education that amounts only to add-ons (such as Black History Month or the celebration of the Chinese New Year) and that is not evident in meaningful ways within the day-to-day curriculum will not affect the educational achievement of subordinated groups in any substantial way (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). According to Giroux (1997), a critical multiculturalism should not be exclusively focused on subordinate groups, because this tends to single them out and often highlights their deficits. Critical multiculturalism should instead examine racism from a historical and institutional perspective so that students are able to understand the factors that have helped to create an unequal society-one that has a political, socioeconomic, and educational impact on their lives every day.

Students Must Be Actively Involved in Their Education

Critical pedagogy does not end with the idea of using student experiences to frame curricula. Rather, it proposes that education should always go beyond that point by encouraging students to become active participants in their education (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Macedo, 1994; Shor, 1992). Students who are active participants are engaged with the teacher and the curriculum. They contribute their own ideas and learn to wrestle with ambiguities and challenge assumptions. Active participation also means that they cocreate curricula with the teacher to ensure that their needs and interests are given primary importance. Finally, it means taking action and transforming the world in order to eliminate disadvantage. Social transformation is the ultimate goal of critical education.

Students who are presented with a curriculum rooted in mainstream culture and ideology but cannot relate to that culture and ideology tend to become passive learners. Shor (1992) notes that all people begin life as motivated learners, but when students sit year after year in classrooms that are not tuned into their backgrounds and experiences and where their own ideas are not valued, they lose their natural curiosity and become passive or even nonparticipants.

Freire (1998) refers to the importance of dialogic communication

between teachers and learners as one means of actively involving students in their own education. In his opinion, dialogism is the cornerstone of critical education. To teach students in a meaningful, personal way, educators must open their minds to what learners have to say. Freire (1993) writes, "Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education" (p. 73). In traditional classrooms, the teacher is the holder of the knowledge, and the students, who are perceived as ignorant, are the receptacles for this knowledge. Freire refers to this as a "banking model" of education and criticizes it for its view of learners as objects of learning. Dialogic communication, on the other hand, views both teachers and learners as important contributors to the learning process.

Although marginalized students are often viewed-and view themselves-as knowing nothing of value, these learners come to realize through dialogic communication that they have learned many things in their relations with the world and with others. Freire (1993) believes in a more fluid relationship between teachers and students, so that learning goes both ways: teachers are learners and learners are teachers.

To prevent their classrooms from reflecting a "banking" sensibility, critical educators should consciously help their students to become active learners. A critical literacy, for example, is about much more than learning how to read words on a page. Freire and Macedo (1987) believe that marginalized learners must learn to "read the world" before they "read the word." In other words, students must come to an understanding of the cultural, political, and social practices that constitute their world and their reality before they can begin to make sense of the written words that describe that reality.

In his work with adult literacy students in Brazil, Freire (1993) developed what he called generative themes, which were used to help adults learn to "read the word" while simultaneously learning to "read the world." Based on his observations and discussions with community members and students, the generative themes were designed to bring up issues important to the particular students in his classes, perhaps representing conflict or social problems in their lives. Freire believes it is important to engage students in discussions of such issues to help them understand that even without the ability to read the word, they are capable of reading their world and therefore are active subjects in their learning.

Generative themes are instrumental in giving students a means to critically examine their lives and the society in which they live. Macedo (1994) explains that when marginalized people begin to realize that they

are capable of reading and naming their world, they start to question the culture that has been imposed on them and start seeing themselves as the makers of their own culture. They become politically literate and begin to see how reading and writing will benefit them as they begin to challenge the status quo.

In discussing issues that they find important, students realize that they already possess much knowledge and awareness about important matters. Freire makes clear, however, that students need to move beyond their initial naive consciousness of the world. He believes that students have "the right to know better what they already know" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 157). One of the most important roles of a critical educator is to help students get beyond common sense, to understand the reasons behind the facts. For example, it is not enough to know that the school in one's neighborhood is old and falling apart and that the students who attend that school generally do not achieve academically what students in the newer suburban schools achieve. As Freire (1993) writes, marginalized learners need to reflect on their concrete situations. They must discover why things are the way they are. What political, socioeconomic, racial, and cultural factors contribute to the deterioration of city schools, while suburban schools are more technologically advanced, more structurally sound, and much more amply provided with teachers and support staff? When students begin to understand the reasons behind their problems, they begin to understand their world and what they need to do to change it. When disadvantaged learners are able to reflect on their commonsense knowledge and get beyond it, they begin to understand that they can take action to transform their lives. Freire describes this shift as one from naive consciousness to critical consciousness.

Shor (1992) describes critical consciousness as the process of coming to understand the relationship between our own individual experiences and the social system. Shor writes that critical consciousness allows students to understand that "society and history are made by contending forces and interests, that human action makes society, and that society is unfinished and can be transformed" (p. 129).

Another important part of critical consciousness, according to Giroux (1997), is for students to understand the dominant forms of knowledge in order to be able to critique them. This is distinctly different from the banking model of education, in that students are acquiring this knowledge in order to understand it, critique it, and incorporate it into their ways of knowing so that they can challenge and transform it. Freire agrees that teachers are doing their students no favors if they never move them beyond their own lived experiences. He writes, "To acquire the selected knowledge contained in the dominant curriculum should be a

goal attained by subordinate students in the process of self and group empowerment. They can use the dominant knowledge effectively in their struggle to change the material and historical conditions that have enslaved them" (in Macedo, 1994, p. 121).

Critical theorists (Edelsky, 1996; Giroux, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Macedo, 1994; Quigley, 1997) believe that critical education should guide students toward becoming political. Different theorists have different names for this process-emancipatory education, liberatory education, democratic education, transformative education-but it all boils down to the importance of moving students beyond learning content and toward taking political action. To achieve this, educators should teach in opposition to the inequalities that exist in their students' lives-racial inequalities, gender inequalities, and socioeconomic inequalities (Edelsky, 1996). Marginalized students need to understand the role that systemic factors play in placing them at a disadvantage. Their economic or educational limitations may have less to do with their lack of ability than with the damaging effects of the structure of the mainstream culture (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Educators should help their students understand that trying to work within the institutions that keep them marginalized will not be enough; they may need to change the wider conditions that conspire to prevent their academic and socioeconomic success.

As students develop a critical consciousness, they begin to understand that society as they know it and the history that informs it are not set in stone but have been formed by different interests and powers, that human action has created society as they know it, and that their own human action can transform it (Shor, 1992). Once marginalized people recognize that society is changeable and that they have the power to transform the structures that put them at a disadvantage,7 they develop what is often called agency. Agency, according to Shor (1992), means learning about the social, political, and economic structures in society that maintain the status quo and then using that knowledge to transform lives, individually and collectively.

Language Is Ideological

The issue of language is of crucial importance in critical pedagogy. According to Macedo (1994), language should never be seen as merely a tool for communication. Indeed, language can be seen as ideological in that it is able to impose specific norms within classrooms (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Giroux, 1997). The ability of marginalized people to reflect on their lives, discover the root causes of their disadvantaged situation, and take action to transform that situation depends on their ability to discover their own voices in the process. Too often teachers who place great importance on learning to speak, read, and write in the standard

language representing the mainstream delegitimize the language experiences that students bring with them to the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Macedo, 1994). When the dominant language is most highly valued in the learning process, minority language speakers (including those who speak nonstandard English) are automatically devalued, and their words and ideas are seen as less important-if they are heard at all. These students are often forced to become passive objects of the educational process. Unless and until they are able to learn the language of the mainstream, they have no voice with which they can read and write their worlds.

Language plays an important part in critical pedagogy in two distinct ways: (1) if students are to become active participants in their learning, teachers must legitimize their language needs and the curriculum should be grounded in their language; (2) students need to develop a voice or form of discourse that helps them to read their world as well as participate in its transformation.

First, students must be able to speak their own language in their classrooms because it is through that language that they make sense of their reality and their own experiences in the world (Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Macedo, 1994). A critical pedagogy that provides students with the tools for transforming their own reality needs to recognize the plurality of students' voices and engage them in learning that democratically accepts all languages. Through their own language, students can begin to develop the means to name their world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Schools have the power to privilege certain languages over others, thus granting higher status to those groups able to speak the dominant language. When language-minority learners are forced to read their world using a language in which they lack proficiency, they are unable to develop a voice that goes beyond the surface level of understanding. They may learn the appropriate labels for things, such as "food," "money," or "job," but they will not be able to go beyond that level of understanding to reflect on and interpret their reality. The transformation of their reality, which depends on their ability to read and reflect on their world with much greater depth of understanding, will be impossible.

Critical educators should use students' own languages as a starting point for educational development (Freire, 1998). Educators should become familiar with the communicative practices associated with the written and oral forms of their students' languages. Every effort should be made to learn about the grammar and syntax of students' languages and to understand how different cultural practices may influence language usage-for example, with regard to how students address or interact with others or how students may tell a story. Even when all students in a class speak the same language, there may be differences in the ways they use

that language. Teachers should understand this and must be careful not to favor one kind of interaction over another. Gee (1993) discusses how students from different backgrounds tell stories differently. Mainstream students tend to have storytelling styles that mimic the structure of storybooks, beginning with "Once upon a time" and incorporating a problem and solution into the story. African American students may have a storytelling style that is more like a performance, with rhythmic language and repetition. Gee explains that the first kind of storytelling is valued more highly in schools because it more closely mirrors the kind of bookish language associated with school learning. Critical educators must be careful not to discount certain kinds of communication by students solely because it does not match their expectations for school language use. Teachers must acknowledge that student self-expression is about more than the student's language; it is reflective of cultural, class, and racial backgrounds as well as gender.

When students perceive that the teacher accepts and values their language, they begin to see that their ideas are important and do matter to the teacher and their classmates. At the same time, teachers should not restrict students to their own language. Shor believes that nonstandard student speech must be recognized as the legitimate and rule-governed dialect that it is and that it should be used and studied in tandem with standard English, which students need to learn. Educators might consider engaging in critical discussions about language so that students can confront the power structures that make certain languages and forms of language dominant (Shor, 1992). Students need to understand that to work toward changing their worlds, they may often need to appropriate certain aspects of the dominant language (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Another way that language can serve to empower or oppress marginalized students is in the type of discourse that takes place in the classroom. Educators are in a position of power and so can decide whose voices will be heard in the classroom and whose will be submerged (Giroux, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). In traditional classrooms, the teacher is an authoritarian figure whose voice dominates the class, controlling what is taught, how it is taught, and how students interact with texts and other learning materials. By providing students with knowledge and the means for self-understanding, teachers can guide students toward critical consciousness. However, even the best-intentioned teachers can use their voices to impose their own points of view or to silence their students' voices.

Freire's vision of dialogical education has much to do with the concept of voice. In a dialogical classroom, the teacher can be seen as a problem poser-encouraging students to question existing knowledge rather than presenting subject matter as immutable and universal (Freire, 1993;

Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). It is this process of mutual inquiry that leads students to discover their own voices. Macedo (1994) notes that it is not possible for teachers to give students their voices. Finding one's voice requires struggling with preconceived notions about whose knowledge counts and learning to analyze and critique that knowledge that has heretofore been considered fact. Nonetheless, critical educators have the responsibility to create a classroom environment that allows for these silenced voices to emerge. Macedo calls voice "a human right" and a "democratic right" (p. 4).

Dialogue is a democratic and critical form of discourse that does not occur in traditional classrooms. Shor (1992) sees dialogue as a means for changing the nature of communication between students and teachers, which has typically been characterized by the authoritarian position of the teacher. He believes dialogue is a discourse created jointly by students and teachers, one that questions existing knowledge and also calls into question the traditional power relations in schools and society that have kept certain groups marginalized.

A dialogic classroom is not simply about having discussions in class where everyone is allowed to share their opinion (Macedo, 1994). Rather, dialogical education expects teachers to listen to their students to learn about the issues and problems that are important within their communities and ask questions that will enable students to understand those problems from a societal perspective and then figure out ways to take political action to solve them (Shor, 1992). Teachers must not be afraid to share their own expertise in these situations. Although the nature of dialogical education requires a fluid relationship between teacher and student, teachers have knowledge that will enable students to broaden their understanding of issues of importance. Allowing students to share what they know does not mean that teachers should submerge their own competency (Shor & Freire, 1987). A teacher is obliged to be an authority on his or her subject matter but should also be open to relearning what he or she knows through interaction with students (Horton & Freire, 1990). According to Bartolomé (1996), creating a dialogic learning environment for ethnic minority and low-socioeconomic-status students "requires that teachers . . . genuinely value and utilize students' existing knowledge bases in their teaching. In order to do so, teachers should confront and challenge their own social biases so as to begin to perceive their students as capable learners. Furthermore, they should remain open to the fact that they will also learn from their students. Learning is not a one-way undertaking" (pp. 239ñ240).

Dialogue should not be characterized by teacher-dominated exchanges. Dialogue, from a critical perspective, must balance teacher authority with student input (Shor, 1992). There is no room for authoritarianism in such

a setting. Student participation in decision making is an important part of the dialogical classroom. Students should be able to contribute to curricular decisions. They should be asked to propose areas of study and to choose the associated reading materials.

At the same time, teachers need to recognize that not all students may be able to or want to speak up. Students have the right to be silent (Shor & Freire, 1987). Because they have traditionally been encouraged, through authoritarian classrooms, to devalue their own voices, they may be resistant to sharing the power within a classroom or school setting (Shor, 1992). It may be hard for them to let go of the long-perpetuated notion that certain kinds of knowledge or ways of knowing are more highly valued. In fact, they may firmly believe that their own ways of knowing do not count. It takes time and patience on the part of critical educators to help students understand that their voices do count and that the canons of knowledge are merely social constructs that can be questioned and held up for examination.

When students begin to recognize their ability to use their own voices to name their world, and to critique and analyze their own situations, they will begin to understand that they possess the power to change their world. This ultimate goal of critical pedagogy is achieved when educators recognize the political nature of education.

A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

This section looks at how the central ideas of critical pedagogy could be applied in an adult education program.

Philosophy, Presuppositions, and Goals

The idea that education is political is central to the basic philosophy behind a critical adult education program. All other features of the program likely stem from this basic belief. A critical program would acknowledge that literacy learning alone is not the answer to the problems of marginalized adults (Street, 1993). Rather, the mastery of literacy and other basic skills would be seen as one means for students to negotiate society's realities, as one of the tools they need to analyze critically and transform their position in society (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). The mission of such a program would be to help students "read their world" in order to understand better their own power to change it and use literacy to help them to do so (Freire & Macedo, 1987). A critical program would never impose dominant literacy practices and discourse styles on the students in the program. Rather, it would show how the use of academic skills can help students negotiate the world that has traditionally put them at a disadvantage, and it would do so without

asking them to give up forms of discourse and literacy that are important to their own cultures (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Shor, 1992).

Program Structure

A critical adult education program would be built from the bottom up, not the top down. A program would never just "open up" in a community without consulting members of that community (Freire, 1993). Planning the program would be a grassroots affair (Macedo, 1994). If starting the program were not the community members' idea in the first place, then certainly the planning process would include the opinions and ideas of potential students, staff members, community members, and teachers (Giroux, 1997). Such decisions as where the program would be housed, what kinds of classes would be offered, when those classes would meet, who would teach them, and who would oversee the day-to-day running of the program would be made jointly. All final decisions would be up for approval by the community, so that the program would embody the democratic principles so crucial to critical education (Shor, 1992).

Curriculum and Materials

First and foremost, the curriculum for a critical adult education program would be based on the premise that no one methodology works for all populations. A set curriculum would never be imposed on a program (Bartolomé, 1996). All curricular decisions would be based on the needs and interests of the students involved, and choices as to what would be studied, and how, would be made jointly by teachers and students (Giroux, 1997; Shor, 1992). Furthermore, the curriculum would always be linked as closely as possible to the immediate realities of the learners (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Teachers would understand, respect, and legitimize the cultures and languages of their students, and every effort would be made to root the program in these different cultures and languages (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). Teachers and administrators would spend time meeting with students and other community members, both formally and informally, to learn about the most important issues in learners' lives. Class activities and materials would initially be centered on those issues, perhaps, but not necessarily, in the form of generative themes (Freire, 1993; Shor, 1992). Gradually, as students became confident readers of their own world, curricular activities and materials would become more conceptual and academic.

The reading that students engage in, no matter what their literacy level, would have relevance to their own lives. Discrete skill work, including work with phonics, spelling, and vocabulary, would be done only when a context had been created for it (Street, 1995). Materials would never be simplistic or patronizing because the program would trust in the ability of its students to read their own world and to examine critically their own

social situations (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Whether students were able to read the word, they would be assumed able to read the world, and the materials used in class would acknowledge this.

Possible learning activities to support the critical adult education program might include, but would not be limited to, self-reflective journal keeping, cooperative group work, the reading of texts for class discussion (not just reading practice), extended peer discussion of problems posed in class, and long-term, active research projects (Shor, 1992). Texts would be developed from students' own writing, based on their reading of the world.

In reading texts, emphasis would be placed not only on the comprehension of those texts but also on students' critique of those texts (Giroux, 1997). Students would be encouraged to reflect on and be critical of what they read. They would learn to look below surface-level meaning to understand the ideas that inform that meaning. Finally, they would be encouraged to read to transform, using reading materials as a springboard for discussion that would help them consider actions they might take to improve their lives.

The curriculum would be transformative in that it would promote students' acquisition of the necessary strategies and skills to help them become social critics capable of making decisions that would affect their social, political, and economic realities (Giroux & McLaren, 1992). This would ultimately involve learning skills reflecting the dominant culture, but in learning these skills, students would understand why they should learn them (Freire & Macedo, 1987). For example, in learning to write a business letter, students would never be taught that this is simply another practical skill. Instead, letter writing would be seen as a mainstream writing skill that is important to master in order to negotiate with people or institutions using a discourse that they understand. Teachers would encourage students to write letters to people or agencies to try to address problems in their personal lives or their community.

Teacher Development

Teachers are an integral part of any critical adult literacy program. Because they are the ones who spend the most time with learners, they have the greatest potential influence on the program itself, on the adults who participate in it, and on how learning takes place in the classroom.

In a critical adult literacy program, teachers would be immersed in the community in which they are to teach before they begin teaching (Giroux, 1997; Macedo, 1994; Shor, 1992). They would learn about the community-its hopes, its dreams, and its most pressing issues. They would visit the institutions that play important roles in the community,

and they would talk to community leaders such as clergy, doctors, social workers, businesspeople, educators, and local politicians. Beyond that, teachers would develop an understanding of the role that literacy plays in the community. How do community members use literacy in their day-to-day lives? What purpose do reading and writing serve?

Even more ideal would be for teachers to live in and have a firsthand understanding of the community. Learners would not perceive their teachers as outsiders but as community members who understand its social structure, its advantages and disadvantages. Learners graduating from the program would be highly valued as tutors and, ideally, with additional training, would be employed as teachers. New learners would see these former learner-teachers as role models and could be confident of their unique understanding of learners' backgrounds, needs, and interests.

To ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about the factors that contribute to social inequalities, their preservice education would include the study of critical theory, educational theory, linguistic theory, literacy theory, and social theory (Street, 1995). Teachers would try to make explicit their assumptions about cultural relations and cultural identity to understand better the prejudices they may bring to teaching certain groups of people (Bartolomé, 1996; Macedo, 1994). Moreover, teachers would receive training that would help them to understand how to set up a class that reflects critical pedagogy: how best to elicit student opinions about program structure and curriculum, how to set up a classroom that is most conducive to dialogic interaction, how to trouble-shoot when class discussions get bogged down. This aspect of training is crucial. It is not enough to believe in critical pedagogy; without the tools and the knowledge to understand how to put critical pedagogy into practice, teachers could very easily get frustrated.

Once teachers begin teaching, they would be carefully tuned in to their students' specific needs for literacy and would not paternalistically impose their own narrow view of literacy on students (Freire & Macedo, 1987). They would keep their doors open to student and community input, so that when students or community members feel uncomfortable with the class agenda, or when they believe the class should offer more or be doing things differently, they would have open access to the teacher and a means for addressing the perceived need for change. Teachers would engage in "praxis"-understanding how educational theory translates into their own everyday practice and being ever mindful of the specific population they are serving (Bartolomé, 1996; Freire, 1998).8 Teachers would constantly seek political clarity and always consider the ways their instruction is linked to wider social movements, making those connections explicitly clear to their students (Bartolomé, 1996; Freire &

Macedo, 1987). To that end, it is important that teachers be given autonomy within their classrooms. Methodologies or curricula cannot be imposed on teachers if they are to connect instruction to the lives of their students (Bartolomé, 1996; Giroux, 1997).

Teacher-Student Relationship

If social transformation is the ultimate goal of critical pedagogy, then the relationship between students and teachers is central to creating an environment in which such social change becomes possible (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). A dialogical relationship between students and teachers would be essential (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1992). Teachers and students would together negotiate the structure and curriculum of the class. Understanding that students need to see themselves as sharing power with the teacher, teachers would create a safe environment where students would feel free to express themselves. Teachers would not be authoritarian but rather willing to learn from their students, respecting their dreams and expectations (Freire, 1998). At the same time, teachers would not be permissive. Dialogue between teacher and students is not a "feel good" sort of thing but requires political analysis. The sharing of experiences would be framed within a social praxis that includes reflection and action (Macedo, 1994).

Teachers might see their role as problem poser, asking questions that would help students think more analytically about aspects of their lives that they may assume cannot be changed (Freire, 1993; Shor, 1992). The teacher would never impose his or her own notions about how to deal with such problems but would listen to what different students have to say, acknowledge what students perceive to be the main issues, and pose questions designed to help students think critically about the situation and make decisions about what action to take.

In a class on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), for example, concerns about inadequate or poor service at health clinics might emerge. If the issue was that students were unable to use health clinic forms to explain their symptoms or illnesses effectively because the forms were written in English, the teacher might ask students to consider what it means on a societal level that no attempt has been made to translate the forms into Spanish (or any other minority language) or to have interpreters available. The teacher might ask: "Whose language is being used? What group of people is more likely to have its medical needs met adequately and efficiently? Why is English more highly valued? What reasons might there be for not creating Spanish translations of medical forms?" Once students reflect on these questions, they may begin to realize that they should not feel ashamed or inadequate because they are unable to obtain sufficient medical care simply because they do not yet have sufficient proficiency in English. Rather, they may begin to

see that government agencies and society are often structured in ways that contribute to the marginalization of certain groups. This may lead students to discuss the ways in which they could overcome this problem-perhaps by approaching clinic administrators to suggest translating important medical forms into languages that patients understand. Students might even volunteer to help with the translations or find a willing member of their community. Through dialogue, problem posing, and reflection (a form of praxis), students can come to a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to their marginalization and the steps they might take to eliminate them.

Evaluation

An ongoing evaluation of both student and program progress is an essential part of a critical adult education program (Freire, 1998). Students would be asked to set goals for themselves that might include work on their literacy skills, their ability to help their children with their schoolwork, or their ability to communicate effectively with schools and other institutions and advocate on behalf of their children or themselves. Goals would reflect actual literacy needs rather than the development of decontextualized skills. While teachers may suggest long-term goals for students, they would never impose their own notions on students' goals. On a regular basis, teacher and students would discuss these goals and the progress made toward attaining them (Shor, 1992). Evaluation would likely be narrative and not based on standardized test scores (unless students' goals have to do with acquiring a certificate of general educational development or other such academic goals). Students would evaluate their own progress and, together with the teacher, would decide when and if their goals have been achieved.

As with student evaluation, program evaluation would take place on a regular basis, not only at the end of the semester. Teachers and administrators would get feedback from adult learners at the individual and group levels. This feedback would be used to refine the program structure and the class instruction continually (Freire, 1998). As students' needs change, so would the program. Students would be able to see how their input affects the program and would thus see themselves as active participants. Programs might also develop formal structures, such as a student board, so that students would have an organization in which to work hand-in-hand with administrators to create a program that accurately reflects student and community needs.

DEFINING A MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN NONCRITICAL AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

This framework for critical pedagogy in adult education is an ideal one. In reality, very few programs have the freedom or resources to be critical

in every area of endeavor. Many programs must use noncritical, standardized assessments to remain eligible for funding from government agencies and private foundations. Some programs may lack the necessary resources to update curricula or materials to better match learners' needs, interests, and experiences. Others may have a structure that cannot be changed to meet students' needs because of access to community centers or associations with community colleges that regulate class times and meeting places. Although it may be possible for programs to reflect critical pedagogy in all areas, many programs have some areas that are critical and others that are not.

Rather than labeling programs as either critical or noncritical, it may be more useful to look at programs in terms of the degree to which they reflect critical pedagogy. For example, a program's curriculum may not be entirely critical or noncritical. It may instead be somewhat noncritical, meaning it tends to reflect noncritical pedagogy for the most part but may also have some critical elements that differentiate it from highly noncritical programs. Whereas a highly noncritical curriculum would be fixed and unchanging, a somewhat noncritical program might be preestablished but subject to modification based on student interests and experiences. Table 2.1 shows how the six program areas might look given varying degrees of critical pedagogy, from highly and somewhat critical to highly and somewhat noncritical.

It seems entirely possible for a program to have critical features and still be considered a noncritical program. Consider, for example, a program that provides teachers with in-depth training on multiple literacies and multicultural awareness and involves its students in collaborations on assessment and program structure. Despite having these critical elements, the program espouses the philosophy that learning basic literacy skills is the only key needed to changing the lives of learners. It employs a curriculum that is not at all related to the lives of students but, rather, covers skills sequentially and uses decontextualized workbooks and texts. This kind of program could not be characterized as critical. Its philosophy, curriculum, and materials anchor it at the noncritical end of the continuum.

The key to differentiating noncritical programs from those with the potential to become critical may lie in program philosophy. A large part of critical pedagogy involves the belief that education is political and that structures in the educational system privilege the dominant culture while placing minority cultures at a disadvantage. A program with a highly noncritical philosophy is not likely to evolve from noncritical to critical even if it has some features that are somewhat or highly critical. Programs with philosophies that implicitly blame students for their academic failures or view literacy acquisition as a panacea cannot be

considered critical even if some of their endeavors can be considered critical. Programs that focus singularly on teaching mainstream literacy skills, with no consideration of learners' backgrounds, needs, and interests, and that neglect to engage students in efforts to understand the societal structures that marginalize certain groups cannot be considered critical.

On the other hand, programs that have one or more noncritical features but also a somewhat or highly critical philosophy may be seen as having the potential to become critical. Consider a hypothetical program that espouses the beliefs that meaning making is the main goal of basic literacy and skills instruction and that learning takes place in a variety of social contexts. One of the program's goals is to promote students' personal growth, apart from their educational growth. This program also has a somewhat critical curriculum, designed around the students' backgrounds and experiences and allowing for student input. Evaluation methods are somewhat critical, based largely on whether students meet the goals they have set for themselves. The structure of this program, however, is highly uncritical, with students involved in neither its inception nor ongoing planning for class meetings and locations. Although the structure reflects noncritical pedagogy, the program has more critical than noncritical features, and because of its critical philosophy, it may at the very least represent a program that has the potential to become more highly critical.

The journey from noncritical to critical pedagogy should be seen as just that: a journey. It is not a quick fix, and it is not a pedagogy that can be learned during a two-hour in-service workshop or even over the course of a year. A pedagogical shift from noncritical to critical may take many years, if not a lifetime. In truth, all programs have the potential to change, but it is unlikely that any program could change all of its features at once. Certain programs are probably more likely to change than others. For example, a teacher who purports to have a critical philosophy will be more likely to develop a more highly critical pedagogy than a teacher who does not. A teacher who is aware of the belief system inherent in a critical pedagogy will be more likely to identify program features that are not informed by that philosophy than one who is not.

Cowper (1998) gives an example of her own evolution as an ESOL practitioner. Her classroom philosophy had included the somewhat critical idea that her class should be learner centered, in that she felt it was important to collaborate with students in creating curriculum and learning objectives that focused on their real-life needs. However, when given the chance to meet with other practitioners during a series of retreats and reflect on what such a philosophy really meant, she realized that her classroom practice did not reflect her philosophy. Although she

had given her students choices in completing teacher-assigned activities, she had never taken the time to learn about how and what they wanted to learn. She did not know about their interests, needs, or learning styles, and she had never included them in decisions regarding which materials and activities to use. She came to understand that it was not enough to say she held a certain philosophy; that philosophy needed to be demonstrated in all aspects of her practice. If she had not had the philosophy in the first place, it is less likely that she would have seen any problems with her classroom practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

The most important concept in critical pedagogy concerns the belief that education is political. Every idea that critical educators and theorists espouse about schooling, teachers, language, curriculum, marginalized students, and so on derives from the political nature of education. Education is not seen as neutral, and it is thought that those educators who want to make a difference in the lives of their nonmainstream students must resist the status quo that privileges mainstream students' cultural practices, language, and experiences in every aspect of the educational system. For adult educators, this would mean refusing to place primary importance on reading and writing activities that reflect mainstream literacy practices. It would also mean acknowledging that the acquisition of literacy and other basic academic and language skills is not a panacea. No matter what the driving philosophy is, education is not a quick fix, and even if every undereducated person in the country were to become literate, there would likely still be poverty, violence, and academic underachievement. Literacy and language using this pedagogy would be viewed as tools, and only two of many that provide adult education students with the means for questioning the status quo and for effecting change. Learning activities would be taught in the context of issues that really matter to students.

Given the several complex components of adult education programs-philosophy, structure, curriculum, teacher development, teacher-student relationship, and evaluation-it would be very hard for any program to reflect critical pedagogy to the highest degree in all of them. For the most part, adult education programs must work within a system that does not support or even understand critical pedagogy. It is unrealistic to expect programs to become entirely critical. Instead, if a program were interested in becoming more critical, it would be more helpful for program staff to begin to think of critical pedagogy as something they can work toward over time, in different aspects of their program. Some programs that have both critical and noncritical features may in fact be in the process of evolving from noncritical to critical. Certainly those programs with philosophies that reflect an understanding of the political

nature of education, even when some program features do not manifest that philosophy, may be seen as having the potential to evolve.

The likelihood that many adult education programs are neither entirely critical nor entirely noncritical but somewhere in between suggests the need for more research on classroom practice and pedagogy within adult education programs. The field would benefit greatly from a better understanding of what exactly is taking place in classrooms. In-depth surveys designed to capture the degree to which different aspects of classroom and program practice reflect critical pedagogy, sent to a wide variety of programs across the country, could help broaden our understanding of the prevalence of critical practice. In addition, it would be quite valuable to conduct in-depth research on programs that are attempting to modify their services to reflect critical pedagogy as well as those that already reflect critical pedagogy in many respects. Observing classes, interviewing students and teachers, and seeing the different materials that are used in class and for evaluation would provide a deeper understanding of the everyday practices of programs that purport to be influenced by critical pedagogy.

It is also important to initiate research that compares the impact of critical versus noncritical programs on learners-that is, it is necessary to understand what differentiates critical from noncritical programs in terms of outcomes and to answer questions such as these: Do learners in critical programs have a more positive attitude toward their experiences? Do they perceive greater gains being made in both their literacy achievement and their dealings with different institutions, such as schools, employers, and government agencies? In which type of class do learners feel more empowered? How do teachers perceive the progress of their students? Is student progress borne out by assessments? Are learners in one type of program more likely to have better attendance or retention than those in another? Until we can answer these questions, educators and administrators may lack the information they need to decide whether critical pedagogy in adult education is a worthwhile undertaking.

The ideas of critical educators and theorists can be off-putting to literacy practitioners because they seem abstract and difficult to put into practice in the real world of the classroom. A thorough investigation of and report on critical and potentially critical programs would be of practical use to adult education providers if it could reveal how teachers have been able to embody critical pedagogy principles in their daily work with adult students. Such an investigation could also address the difficulties and benefits teachers experience as a result of having embarked on this course. By describing programs that are in different stages of evolution from noncritical to critical, such research would also reveal possible modifications that programs have made over time so that practitioners

deciding to take a more critical approach would not feel overwhelmed by the idea that they must change everything at once. If critical adult education programs hold as much promise for marginalized students as critical educators believe they do, then research that can clarify how and why they work is essential.

A better understanding of critical pedagogy in adult education also has the potential to influence educational policy. Current policy concerning adult education-which reflects the trend toward national standards-based education and standardized assessments (Stites, 1999)-is often perceived as conflicting with the philosophy of a highly critical pedagogy because it does not take into account the specific backgrounds, needs, and interests of individual students. Imposing the same standards and the same measures of success on all students, no matter where they live or what their current social or economic situation, is extremely problematic to critical educators. However, programs that want to be more critical in their classroom practices may be discouraged by their need to be accountable for the test scores of their students. Research that looks at the individual successes of students in highly critical and somewhat or "evolving toward" critical programs-not on the basis of standardized tests but in terms of how they use literacy and other skills to negotiate successfully with institutions such as welfare offices, employers, schools, and housing authorities-may provide policymakers with examples of the utility of nonstandardized measures of success. Such a shift in sentiment may ultimately give programs greater freedom to initiate changes that will bring to bear a more critical pedagogy.9

Notes

1. Dialogue, according to Freire (1993), "is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (p. 69). A dialogic relationship between teacher and students is believed to create students who actively participate in their own learning rather than just passively accepting what the teacher says. This concept is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
2. This observation is based on feedback I received from adult educators during my work on an ongoing study at Harvard University about the literacy practices of adult learners. The study, headed by Victoria Purcell-Gates at Michigan State University, looked at two particular features of critical pedagogy: (1) the degree to which class materials and activities were culturally and experientially relevant to the lives of the learners and (2) the degree to which relationships between learners and teachers were considered dialogic, or collaborative. Our research involved determining how those two features of the classroom experience

can bring about changes in out-of-school literacy practices. After explaining the critical framework to study participants, I heard from many teachers that while they may have read Freire and other critical theorists, and may even believe in and value the concept of critical pedagogy, they simply did not have the time, the curricular freedom, or the theoretical understanding to bring those ideas into their classrooms. Critical pedagogy, quite simply, was seen as theory-not as something that could easily be translated into their own adult education practice. In addition, some teachers noted that they had tried initiating a more dialogic relationship with their students but met with resistance because students were more comfortable taking a passive role in the classroom.

3. The terms critical theory, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy are used in this chapter. They are similar in meaning but not interchangeable. Critical theory refers to a school of thought that came out of the Frankfurt school in Germany and has its roots in Marxist theory. Critical theory, in brief, considers how different societal institutions serve to promote the interests of some individuals and groups while placing others in a marginalized position that prevents their needs and interests from being met. Critical literacy acknowledges that reading and writing are not isolated activities; rather, they take place within a historical, cultural, social, and political context. Critical literacy encourages people to use reading and writing to understand their positions in society better and subsequently to change societal inequalities. Critical pedagogy, the main focus of this chapter, refers to educational practices based on the ideas of critical theory and critical literacy.
4. These are some of the major historical influences on critical pedagogy, but they are not the only ones. Wink (1997) well summarizes the history of critical pedagogy in lay terms. For a more thorough discussion of the history of critical pedagogy within adult education in the United States, refer to Heaney (1996).
5. Being "political" in this case does not mean the educator supports a Democratic or Republican platform or identifies with the left or the right. Rather, it means that the educator comprehends all of the different forces-racism, classism, sexism, ethnocentrism-that contribute to the disadvantaged position many adult students find themselves in and can thereby help students to understand those forces.
6. English Only has been an attempt on the part of U.S. politicians as well as two organizations called English First and U.S. English to put forth legislation that would proclaim English as the official language of the United States. In brief, this kind of legislation would either eliminate bilingual instruction altogether or put a cap

on the amount of time that students with limited proficiency in English could spend in bilingual classrooms. It would also require that all government business be conducted in English and that public documents be printed in English. Although some states have passed this legislation, there is, as of now, no federal legislation mandating English Only. Cultural literacy is the brainchild of Hirsch (1987), who has published a set of books-the Core Knowledge Series-that specifies what children at each grade level need to know to be considered literate. The series has been criticized for plainly stating which kinds of knowledge are important and which kinds are unimportant. It has also been criticized for valuing knowledge from the dominant culture while ignoring the knowledge of marginalized groups. (See Macedo, 1994, for an in-depth critique of Hirsch's cultural literacy.)

7. Most critical literacy histories use the term oppressed rather than disadvantaged. This substitution was made for clarity given that the intended audience of this book may be unfamiliar with the vocabulary of critical theory.
8. Praxis is a process of critical reflection that requires an individual or group to plan an action based on their understanding of a situation and then reflect on that action to change their understanding. They then plan and act again, but reflect again and change their understanding. This is a continuous process that deepens their understanding of the situation they are dealing with, improves their plans, and makes their actions more effective.
9. The Equipped for the Future initiative (EFF) is a program, developed by the National Institute for Literacy in partnership with the National Education Goals Panel, that has created performance-based standards for adult learners, based on feedback from teachers, policymakers, and adult learners (Stein, 1999). To the extent that performance-based assessments can be designed to correspond with EFF standards, there is hope that adult educators can get away from the "teach to the test" mentality that pervades classes where student performance is judged solely on their CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) or TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) scores. See Stites (1999) for a thorough discussion of the pros and cons of standards-based assessments in adult education.

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Chapter 3