

## A Theoretical Analysis of How Critical Literacy May Support the Progressive Goals of the Korean National Curriculum

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Many Korean scholars have praised progressive initiatives in the current Korean National Curriculum (KNC) and Korean National English Curriculum (KNEC), although they also state that the actual teaching practices have changed little. With each new iteration of the KNC it is apparent that the Korean Ministry of Education (MOE) is encouraging a pedagogical agenda that reflects the necessities of situated learning and 'student-centered' approaches to teaching and learning. The MOE's inclusion of 'micro-teaching' in tertiary teacher training program reviews also illustrates its increasingly active measures to affect educational change in Korea. Concomitant with the recent MOE initiatives, there has been a growing interest in practices of critical literacy/pedagogy in English education over the past 15 years in Korea. The purpose of critical literacy is to educate students to be knowledgeable, creative, and active participants in a democracy for the purposes of increasing social justice and agency. Thus, it becomes possible, and desirable, to undertake a theoretical analysis of the language and intent between the KNC/ KNEC and theories of critical literacy. This paper analyzes the language and intent of the KNC and KNEC to determine the extent to which they reflect the theories and pedagogies of critical literacy. Results of this analysis indicate that that critical literacy supports the goals of the curricula and suggest that it should be included in tertiary teacher education programs.

**Key words:** Korean National Curriculum, Korean National English Curriculum, critical literacy, neoliberalism, social reproduction

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over my fifteen years of being a university educator of TESOL, English education, and general English in Korea, I have made it my practice to ask my students about their feelings and experiences regarding their English abilities, how they were taught, and the nature of the Korean educational system. When asking freshman if they were satisfied with their English education, the answers were invariably “No”. When further queried why they felt this way, their answers were always about their lack of ability to communicate verbally in English. Thus, it was not surprising that questions regarding the nature of their English education revealed that their English education was, for the most part, comprised of teacher-centered classrooms focusing on the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), and the stressful, all-consuming pressure of preparing for the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT). It is not surprising that students also claimed that in their teacher-centered classrooms they were rarely ever challenged to think about, or apply, the content knowledge they were acquiring through rote-learning. In addition, during my 10 years of teaching TESOL Master of Arts courses to practicing Korean public-school teachers, only a few teachers said that they had the latitude to do other than to ‘teach to the test’ by using the traditional methods of GTM and ALM. While this questioning practice with my students throughout my career does not amount to empirical research, as it was not rigorously prepared and documented, it nonetheless served to give me a greater understanding of my students, the practices of public school English education, the educational system of Korea, as well as raising questions that would inform my scholarly activities.

Of course, there is much academic literature that addresses the issues concerning the lack of the development of communicative abilities through the use of GTM and ALM (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Savignon, 2000), as well as the many negative aspects of standardized, or high-stakes testing (HST) both internationally and in Korea (Lipman, 2004; Piller & Choi, 2013). It is also well documented how the Korean government and the Ministry of Education (MOE) have tried to mitigate the power of the competition and meritocracy of the ‘hakbeol ideology’ that drives HST and the ‘shadow education’ of private language academies (hagwons) through various initiatives and revisions of the Korean National Curriculum (Jin, 2011; Shin, 2010). Other studies have drawn attention to the progressive nature of the 7th Korean National English Curriculum that attempts to shift the focus of curriculum and pedagogy to more communicative, student-centered, and creative practices (Chang, 2009). While these shifts in educational policy and scholarship are promising, many scholars have shown that the actual classroom practices in Korean public-school English education have changed little, are still driven by HST, and are essentially socially reproductive in nature (Byun & Kim, 2010; Jin, 2011; Shin, 2010).

Along with these progressive efforts to shift Korean education towards a more student-centered model have come works by Korean and foreign scholars advocating, or demonstrating, the feasibility and benefits of applying critical literacy (CL) to the Korean English classroom (Kim, 2015; Shin, & Crookes, 2005; Sung, 2002). It is worth noting that the Korean Association of Teachers of English (KATE) has a special interest group (SIG) working group focusing on critical pedagogy (KATE, 2019). CL is a compilation of theories and pedagogies that are generally attributed to have their genesis in the works of Paulo Freire (1970), but have been further developed and applied to many fields of studies such as English education (Apple, 2010; Beach & Myers, 2001; Lankshear, & Knobel, 2006), cultural studies (Giroux, 2005; Kincheloe, 1999), feminist studies (Burcar, 2012; Stromquist, 2006), critical media literacy (Beach, 2007), post-colonial studies (Lin & Luke, 2011; Shin, 2006), as well as English language teaching ELT (Morgan & Ramanathan, 2005; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2001). While the ongoing development of CL has given rise to a great variety of theoretical and pedagogical applications, all of these approaches share the goal of developing what Freire (1970) called a ‘critical consciousness’ through a pedagogy of situated dialogic inquiry for the purposes of educating citizens capable of participating in a democratic political system for the purposes of increased social justice and social agency (Luke, 2012).

This paper is a theoretical analysis of the commonalities of language and intent between the theories and pedagogies of CL, the KNC, and the KNEC. As such, it is not intended to represent a rigorous comparative analysis of these issues, but rather to illustrate and explicate the possibilities for these commonalities. In addition, as curricula are constructed from specific educational theories, general theoretical analysis is reasonable (Ricento, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). It also needs to be stated that while any analysis of the KNC and KNEC would tend to be viewed as to fall within the field of educational/language policy and planning, this paper does not conform to this academic field as its purpose is to illustrate how CL may support the purposes of Korean educational policies. The reasoning behind why this paper analyzes both KNEC and KNC is that the KNEC is more demonstrable in terms of the overall goals of Korean Education, while CL is most widely practiced in English education, although it is applied to a variety of other fields of study as well. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explicate the purposes and practices of CL and to determine the extent to which they align with, and support, the goals and guidelines of the Korean National Curriculum (KNC) and the National English Curriculum (NEC), and to propose ways in which CL may facilitate their achievement.

## **2. THE KOREAN NATIONAL AND ENGLISH CURRICULUM**

Critiques of the KNC cover a wide range of perspectives that yield both positive and negative views of the historical development of the KNC. Some focus on the educational initiatives promulgated by specific political regimes such as the school diversification policy (Oh, 2011), the high school equalization policy (Kang, Yoon, Lee, & Kim, 2005; Lee 2004), and the local education autonomy system (Cha, 2016; Yoon, 2014). Other critiques focus on the outcomes of the standardized testing of the KSAT, its importance to college placement in terms of university ranking and future success (Byun, Schofer, & Kim, 2012; Choi, 2007; Lee, 2004), and how Korean students have received high ranking on the Programme for International School Achievement (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Chong & Kim, 2016; Oh, 2011; Park, 2008). Perhaps the most elegant and cogent means of viewing the history of the KNC is Chong and Kim's (2016) analysis of its stage of quantitative expansion (1945-1980's) that focused on reaching universal education, qualitative expansion (1980's-1990's) that focused on meritocracy and HST, and the post 1990's reforms that focus on globalization and market competitiveness. In addition, some critiques of the current KNC assert that its primary goals are that of educating people who have the character and creativity to become global leaders in their fields of study (Shin, 2017).

Regardless of the analytical approach utilized, it is clear that the various analyses of the KNC report both the benefits and progress of the educational changes to the KNC as seen through PISA and TIMSS data and the concomitant development of the Korean economy and the goal of creating cosmopolitan citizens of high moral character (Chong & Kim, 2016; Kwak & Standish, 2014; Shin, 2017). Thus, it may be seen that the continuing development of the KNC and KNEC is intended to foster progressive educational change for the enhancement of Korean and international society.

There is no doubt of the gradual progressive development towards student-centered pedagogies with a focus on communicative competence within the KNEC from the 1970's to the present. Chang (2009) relates the progression from a focus on the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the Audiolingual Method (ALM) were deemphasized in favor of communicative methodologies with the administration of the 6th KNEC in the 1970's. Chang also notes that while the 7th KNEC, beginning in 2009, also promoted student-centered classrooms, task based activities that promoted student discussion, creative thinking, as well as cultural learning for a globalized citizenry. Min (2008) mirrors many of Chang's (2009) assertions, but also relates that while the 7th KNEC supports a shift towards student-centered pedagogies and fluency over accuracy, nonetheless the proposed syllabi remains heavily grounded in grammar-oriented instruction and tasks. Thus, while the 7th KNEC may often be considered to reflect a student-centered and communicative curriculum, there remain questions as to how these seemingly disparate pedagogical imperatives are actually practiced in public school English classrooms. Finally,

Shin (2017) reports that the amended KNEC of 2015 (Ministry of Education, 2015) promotes education that nurtures student abilities to communicate in a globalized community in ways that promote Korean culture as well as developing deeper understandings of other cultures. In doing so it promotes the development of communicative, self-management, community, and knowledge and information competencies.

While much of the literature regarding the KNC and the KNEC reports their progressive language, intentions, and initiatives, it is clear that many Korean scholarly analyses also report a wide gap between the promise of the curricula and the actual outcomes such as the development of creativity, morality, and cosmopolitanism (Chong & Kim, 2016; Kwak & Standish, 2014; Shin, 2017). Many Korean scholars point out that the curricular and pedagogical goals of both the KNC and KNEC do not often match (Choi, 2007; Chung & Choi, 2016; Min, 2008; Shin, 2017) actual classroom practices for various reasons such as the socialization of teachers to teach as they were taught, center vs. periphery issues (Cha, 2016; Yoon, 2014), and issues of accountability in terms of HST regimes (Choi, 2008; Chong & Kim, 2016, Yoon, 2014). These criticisms also evoke the theory that students and teachers are socialized into specific forms of educational practices (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1997).

Much of the concern and criticism regarding the KNC and KNEC revolves around the market-based educational practices driven by the political ideology of Neoliberalism (Byun & Kim, 2010; Chong & Kim, 2016, Oh, 2011; Park, 2015; Yoon, 2014). Specifically, these critiques focus on the meritocracy (hakbeol ideology) that drives the need for the HST of the KSAT, which further fuels the social stratification of tertiary education which has a great impact on the future success of graduates (Choi, 2008, Chong & Kim, 2016; Shin, 2010; Shin, 2017). These common social practices also foster the maintenance of the 'shadow education' of private education academies and well as that practice of 'wild goose fathers' who send their wives and children to America for several years of their public-school education (Shin, 2010; Yoon, 2014). As such, many scholars state that despite the good intentions of the KNC and KNEC the actual outcomes reflect a growing social reproduction/horizontal stratification in Korean society due to the effects of the neoliberalism at the heart of Korean public-school education (Byun & Kim, 2010; Chong & Kim, 2016, Oh, 2011; Park, 2015; Yoon, 2014). Thus, the extent to which the uplifting language and goals contained within the KNC and KNEC have actually changed the educational practices within public schools remains questionable. This is not surprising as scholars in language policy and planning frequently relate that it takes much time (years) for the dictates of new policies to affect the practices of public school language education as it must first begin with tertiary teacher training programs to begin the reforms (Ricento, 2006; Spolsky, 2004).

### 3. CRITICAL LITERACY

#### 3.1. Overview

CL is a milieu of theories and pedagogical practices designed to critique and transform existing ideologies, social structures, and social practices for the purposes of social justice and social agency (Giroux, 1997). The genesis of CL is generally attributed to Paulo Freire's (1970) seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was grounded in the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism and phenomenology, that produced a dialogical theory of literacy that situated and critiqued the binary oppositions of oppressor and oppressed in a society in order to facilitate social change (Luke, 2013). Freire (1970) argued against the traditional, positivistic, 'banking' models of literacy that viewed the knowledge, experiences, values, cultures, and goals of students to be irrelevant to the process of the rote memorization of received knowledge (Luke, 2012). Freire (1970) theorized that traditional models of literacy, or 'reading the word', did not inform students of the dialectical relationship between relations of knowledge, culture, ideology, and power contained in texts and other forms of signification such as art and media representations. As such, this 'autonomous' conception of literacy did not, and could not, situate the knowledge learned within the discursive structures of a society in order to determine what groups of people would benefit from the knowledge and who it would marginalize (Street, 1995).

This critique of the social inadequacies of traditional forms of literacy enabled Freire to theorize that 'reading the word' necessitated a concomitant 'reading the world', or the situating of received knowledge within the discursive nature of a society in order to be truly literate (Freire & Macedo, 1987). CL also theorizes that both students and teachers are socialized into specific forms of educational practices that maintain social reproduction through education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1997). Thus, Freire's (1970) definition of literacy as 'reading the word and the world' was designed to create a pedagogical space in the classroom that required students to situate and critique language, texts, and discourses dialogically in order to represent and reform knowledge in ways that could enhance their social agency and transform the material conditions of their social worlds (Beach & Myers, 2001). In other words, it is necessary for students to engage in inquiry both individually and in group discussions.

This form of pedagogy, therefore, emphasizes the need for communication between students and the instructor. In doing so, students engage in a process of 'conscientization' that develops a 'critical consciousness' regarding the nature of their society and their social positioning within it (Freire & Macedo, 1987). CL's emphasis on politics, or the relations of power embedded in ideologies, has led to the ongoing political project of 'critical

pedagogy', or the wider application of CL practices for the purposes of social justice and agency for the marginalized social groups of the world (Giroux, 1997; Luke, 2012; McLaren, 2006). As such, the actual goal of CL is to create citizens capable and willing to participate in a democratic state (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2006). As they have both evolved from the same theoretical foundations, the terms critical literacy and critical pedagogy are often conflated so that they share the same meaning in terms of literacy and education and are often elided in terms of actual practice. For the purposes of clarity, this paper will use the term CL for both terms. Regardless, such initiatives are well documented in a wide body of literature that shows that critical literacy programs have been applied internationally in such countries as Australia (Stirling & McGloin, 2015), India (Mehta & Pandya, 2015), Hong Kong, (Lin & Luk, 2002), Singapore, (Kramer-Dahl 2001), Korea (Kim, 2015; Sung, 2002), and many other nations.

As CL is practiced in diverse ways in a diversity of fields of study, it is useful to more firmly explicate how CL may be of use in ELT classrooms. Perhaps the most concise view of critical literacy in ELT is Canagarajah's (1999) six-point schematization of learning and knowledge as:

- Learning as a detached cognitive activity vs. learning as personal
- Learning as transcendental vs. learning as situated
- Learning processes as universal vs. learning as cultural
- Knowledge as value-free vs. knowledge as ideological
- Knowledge as preconstructed vs knowledge as negotiated
- Learning as instrumental vs. learning as political (pp. 15-16)

Here, Canagarajah theorizes that learning may not simply be a rote cognitive process as the discursive construction of individual subjectivity must affect how one views new content knowledge. The second point acknowledges that the social positioning of the student, and the forces of culture and power which construct education are products of socio-political realities, and as such, are not neutral. Point 3 argues that knowledge is not universal or static, as it is viewed in traditional, positivistic views of knowledge, but is socially constructed and, hence, is subjective in nature. Point 4 simply states that all forms of knowledge are ideological in nature; that knowledge favors some social groups over others. Point 5 adds the necessity of dialogism to the previous points so that knowledge may be negotiated and transformed in the classroom. Point 6 summarizes all his previous points by stating that knowledge and power (politics) are related, mirroring an aspect Foucault's (1984) theory that knowledge plus power equals truth. While the traditional methods of GTM and ALM continue to dominate ELT curricula in most countries, CL may nevertheless be applied to the final stage in the general ELT teaching and learning

sequence of teacher-led practice to guided practice to autonomous practice (Ur, 2013), as autonomous practice generally involves group projects that may be organized as a situated dialogic practice of inquiry and publishing. Regardless of the differing approaches to critical literacy in ELT, it is clear that CL continues to gain influence and acceptance in the field as is seen in the critical pedagogy SIG in KATE in Korea (KATE, 2019).

### 3.2. Implications of Critical Literacy to Education and Society

The primary implication of CL is its orientation towards knowledge, or epistemology. Simply put, critical literacy theorizes that knowledge, in all its various forms of signification, such as textuality and multi-media representations, must be questioned and situated within social contexts as opposed to positivism and structuralism where knowledge is received as truth, or ‘banking’ as Freire (1970) conceived it (Kincheloe, 1999). This epistemological divide in forms of literacy or education has many and various pedagogical implications to education. First, it is necessary to understand where pedagogy comes from: a progression that begins with epistemology and leads through research to theorizing to the application of theory (pedagogy) to evaluation, with each aspect constructing the following one. This means that changing one aspect of the progression necessarily affects every stage in the chain (Popkewitz, 1984). Thus, if a teacher utilizes a student centered, or social constructivist, approach in the classroom, she is drawing on an epistemology that is necessarily founded on specific research techniques, the theories that are derived from the data, and that the pedagogy she is employing must then be evaluated according to the nature of the pedagogy employed. As such, pedagogies whose foundations are based on positivism or structuralism, that view knowledge as truth, may only be evaluated through objective testing procedures such as standardized testing (ST) (Haertel & Herman, 2005; Spolsky, 2004), as opposed to the more subjective and holistic forms of evaluation practiced in CL or other social-constructivist pedagogies (Graves, 2002).

Much literature on educational testing has shown that this emphasis on testing creates a competition form of education based on meritocracy, and as such, often leads to HST (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Moreover, this ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970) form of education leads to social reproduction through education which marginalizes the middle and lower classes in a society through a hidden curriculum dominated by economic forces (Apple, 2004). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorized that social reproduction through education functioned to reproduce the existing socio-economic hierarchies and social and educational practices in a society. Thus, literacy and education are not equal throughout a society dominated by positivistic/structural epistemologies (Luke, 2012).

The epistemologies that underly the literacies used in education are of great importance as they are one of the three major factors that shape the beliefs and values of a citizen. The



ideologies of a citizen are constructed through the processes of education, social interaction, and media representations (Beach, 2007; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Foucault, 1984). Here, the question arises as to what kind of citizen does education seek to construct? While the public discourse of a nation generally espouses that education is for the purposes of producing citizens capable of participating in a democracy, it is clear that 'banking' forms of education do not adequately prepare the young for this role in society (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2006). As democracy is founded on the rough and tumble debates between discourses in a society, where truth and the proper political course are a matter of social positioning, it is clear that only an education that promotes the questioning and situating of knowledge within a dialogic context has the possibility of creating a truly democratic citizenship (Luke, 2013).

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the internationally growing culture of ST and HST as educational paradigms. Many Korean scholars have commented on the disconnect between the progressive initiatives of the KNC and the actual pedagogical practices in public school classrooms (Choi, 2007; Min, 2008). While many decry the meritocracy and HST engendered by the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT), the educational system is slow to change for reasons of teacher education and the self-interest of the privileged (Shin, 2010). Considering the ongoing difficulties of applying the revised KNC, advocating CL may seem an absurd notion. However, there is another way in which critical literacy may be viewed within the Korean educational system. While Freire' (1970) definition of literacy as 'reading the word and the world' was originally theorized as being part of the same process designed to foster social justice and social agency, 'reading the word' may also be viewed as the learning of specific content knowledge. That is, the knowledge embodied in the KSAT is a form of content knowledge that serves as a 'gate-keeping' function that gives or denies individuals entry into specific discourses. Gee (1989) refers to this as 'dominant literacy', and thus views literacy and education as the acquisition of secondary discourses. As such, the ST of the KSAT must be deemed required knowledge necessary for success in Korean society. Thus, it is necessary to teach in a 'banking' manner for the purposes of the social agency of students. However, it is clear that students also need to 'read the world' and apply/situate what they are learning in order to satisfy the guidelines of the current KNC and KNEC the needs of an increasingly globalized world community. Thus, CL practices should be added to teacher education and be gradually included to the traditional 'banking' forms of literacy in Korean public-school education.

Educational systems that are controlled by ST and/or HST are by the nature of their pedagogy teacher-centered that create primarily passive students and allow only for 'correct' answers on examinations (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). The obvious assumption of these positivistic forms of pedagogy is that they construct citizens who are passive workers,

do not overtly question the socio-political questions of import rigorously, and that, therefore, tend to be less active in a democracy. Thus, the negative aspects of ST and HST in society should also be of crucial concern to the policies of an educational system. Many scholars have concluded that these forms of evaluation on a national scale lead to a lack of adequate sleep, stress, low self-esteem, high rates of suicide, and the reproduction of social class in a society (Choi, 2007; Lin, 1999; Min, 2008). Moreover, the growth of 'shadow education' (Jin, 2011; Shin, 2010) and its link to the economics of what individual families can afford, as well as the practice of sending children to Western nations, particularly America, for much of their education is another factor supporting the inequality of the Korean educational system. All these arguments raise the question of whose interest does meritocratic/competition education serve?

The recent revisions of the Korean National Curriculum use globalization, or the ability to participate in a global community as a 'cosmopolitan' citizen, as the rationale for public education in Korea. This rationale speaks to the development of intercultural competency, student-centered classrooms, and the development of creativity in students. The curriculum and pedagogies that support ST and HST are not only not designed to develop such abilities but are arguably incapable of doing so. CL, on the other hand, is uniquely designed to foster these capabilities. The dialogism necessary in a classroom practicing critical literacy necessitates dialog between teachers and students, and the students themselves. Moreover, the process of inquiry creates a space where content knowledge may be situated into multiple social contexts (ideally including those of other cultures) that allows for a better understanding of knowledge and becomes a form of critique that can enable social transformation as well as a better understanding of, and relationships with, other cultures (Beach & Myers, 2001). As such, critical literacy is well suited to the development of the intercultural competency of students and their ability to succeed in a globalized world. Moreover, CL's theoretical affiliation with the movement towards the multiliteracies in pedagogy movement (New London Group, 2000), not only demonstrates how CL has the flexibility to encompass all forms of signification, but also shows how CL is pedagogically open to the ever-developing multi-modal technologies being adapted to education (Beach, 2007). Finally, the necessity of publishing, or creating projects that may be uploaded to various media platforms which allows the students to become actively involved in the social transformation of their society and its democratic processes (Beach & Meyers, 2001).

#### **4. CRITICAL LITERACY AND THE GENERAL KOREAN NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

Given that the purpose of the KNC is to provide general guidelines across the academic disciplines offered in public schools, it is reasonable to assume that the KNC carries greater weight in Korean education than the KNEC. While analysis of the KNC's various guidelines show many similarities to the theories and practices of CL, for the purposes of brevity only the most significant guidelines will be discussed here. In addition, it is clear that the KNC's guidelines are more in accord with CL than those of the KNEC. The KNC's (Ministry of Education, 2015) guidelines on teaching and learning include four points within its eight-point schema that clearly coincide with the practices of CL.

- 1) Help students to attain authentic understandings of big ideas and key concepts in subject areas, avoiding rote memorization of discrete knowledge.
- 3) Help students develop integrative thinking skills by considering the connection of content knowledge within and across subject areas.
- 4) Provide sufficient first-hand experiences such as experiments, observations, investigations, surveys, data collections, work-oriented activities, field works, and so forth.
- 5) Provide ample opportunities for students to solve problems collaboratively in small groups in addition to individual learning. (p. 52)

Guideline 1 is clearly epistemological in nature in that it advocates that education should not be wholly positivistic in nature. While this guideline is somewhat paradoxical in nature, as it advocates social-constructivist practices over rote learning while "authentic understandings" of specific bodies of knowledge could refer to the 'truth' of positivism or the application of knowledge to real world contexts. Nonetheless, its advocacy of social-constructivist approaches to knowledge requires the situating, or questioning, of knowledge within differing social contexts, which is consistent with the practices of CL (Kincheloe, 1999; Luke, 2013). Similarly, guideline 3 stresses the importance of considering the nature and meanings of knowledge across fields of study which, implies the situating of knowledge in differing perspectives, as CL does with the variety of fields of studies that contribute to its foundational theories and practices (Apple, 2010). Guideline 4 clearly resonates with CL practices as it advocates diverse forms of inquiry in order to better understand and be able to apply content knowledge to the real world (Apple, 2004; Luke, 2103). Guideline 5 serves to combine all of these aspects in a form of dialogism that requires the sharing of the findings of situated inquiry, and the differing perspectives that have emerged from this process, with other students. As a whole, these guidelines mirror

the practices of inquiry in CL that are designed to ‘create a space’ in classrooms where new forms of knowledge and culture may emerge from the culturally and epistemologically bound ‘truths’ that are gained through the rote learning of standardized curricula for the purposes of HST (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2006).

The greater goals of CL of creating citizens who are willing and able to actively participate in democratic practices on a national and global level and the development of a ‘critical consciousness’ are perhaps best demonstrated in section C of the KNC’s (Ministry of Education, 2015) Educational Goals for High School where the introduction states the importance of “...fostering of the qualities of a democratic citizen connected with the world” (p. 6). This emphasis on democracy and global understanding and cooperation, and how that may be achieved, are more explicitly detailed in guidelines 3 and 4 of this section which state:

- 3) Develop qualities and attitudes for being capable of contributing to the creation of new cultures based on literacies in the humanities, society, science and technology, and an understanding of diverse cultures.
- 4) Develop qualities and attitudes of a democratic citizen connected to the global society and fulfill the ethics of caring and sharing based upon a sense of responsibility to the national community. (p. 6)

Guideline 3 presents a complex schema for student development as it focuses on multi-literacies as a means of creating new cultures as well as understanding a diversity of other cultures. In CL, the concept of multiple literacies is essentially assumed as one of many foundational aspects of CL including post-structuralism/modernism, feminist theory, critical media literacy, and many others (Burcar, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2004). In addition, this guideline suggests a multiliteracies approach to pedagogy (Andrei, 2014; New London Group, 2000). The means to accomplish these ‘qualities and attitudes’ coincides with the inquiry practices of situated dialogism that is seen in many of the KNC guidelines and is the fundamental process of conscientization in CL (Freire & Macedo, 1987). As a result, Guideline 4 clearly states the anticipated outcome of such literacy practices by not only stating the necessary attitudes of an active democratic citizen, but also her practices: caring for and sharing with both a national and global community. CL not only openly states the creation of democratic citizens as a primary goal, it is also firmly rooted in the democratic ethics of fostering socially just societies that care for each other and share appropriately (Luke, 2012).

Finally, perhaps the most concise and revealing Part of the KNC that aligns well with CL is found in Section 1. Vision of an Educated Person of the KNC (Ministry of Education,

2015) and its attending guidelines on achieving this vision. Its Vision of an Educated person is:

Education in Korea, based on the ideal of Hongik Ingan\* aims to enable every citizen to lead a life worthy of human dignity, contribute to the development of a democratic state, and support the realization of an ideal of shared human prosperity, by ensuring cultivation of character, development of abilities for independent life and necessary qualities as a democratic citizen under the humanitarian ideal. \* The founding spirit of the first kingdom in Korea, which has the meaning of “contributing to the overall benefit of humankind.” (p. 1)

The democratic ideals of this statement are clearly in line with the democratic purposes that are one of the primary purposes of CL (Luke, 2013; McLaren, 2006). The ideals of ‘shared human prosperity’ and a ‘humanitarian ideal’ are also fundamental aspects of CL that are generally referred to in terms of the enhancing or development of social justice and social agency within societies (Giroux, 1997). Current understandings of these key goals of CL are often articulated in the humanistic terms of social equality in the socio-economic conditions of differences in race, social class, gender, and sexual orientation (Apple, 2010). In CL it is the process of developing a ‘critical consciousness’ that makes these ideals educationally and socially feasible.

The guidelines that support this vision in the KNC (Ministry of Education, 2015) more specifically describe the process through which an ‘Educated Person’ may be fostered:

- A. A self-directed person who builds a self-identity and explores a career and life on the basis of holistic growth.
- B. A creative person who discovers something novel by means of diverse challenges and ideas based upon basic abilities.
- C. A cultivated person who appreciates and promotes the culture of humankind on the basis of cultural literacies and understanding of diverse values.
- D. A person who lives in harmony with others, fulfilling the ethics of caring and sharing, as a democratic citizen with a sense of community and connection to the world. (p.1)

On the surface, Guideline A appears contradictory as ‘self-directed’ seems more in keeping with rote-learning or autonomous literacy practices (Street, 1995). However, the use of the term ‘holistic’ is social constructivist in nature as it means the ability to view and understand various parts of a system and may only truly be understood as dialectical aspects of an entire system (Lipman, 2004; Spolsky, 2004). As such, this guideline may be

interpreted as the construction of identity through the means of situating diverse forms of literacy throughout academic disciplines coupled with the social constructivism of social interactions and other forms of signification (Gee, 2004; Norton, 2006). Guideline B adds to this reasoning by adding that creativity is fostered by Guideline A, but achieved through the application, or situating of knowledge in the real world. It is worth noting that CL is intended to foster creativity through its process of inquiry and publishing, while positivistic, teacher-centered forms of literacy are generally believed to hinder creativity in most educational literature (Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2006). Guideline C mirrors the full meaning of having a ‘critical consciousness’ in terms of how ‘cultural’, or multi-literacies enhance the understanding of humankind and promote the critiquing and transformation of values and beliefs according to their social justice and agency in society (Luke, 2013). Guideline D relates to the implications of gaining a ‘critical consciousness’ in that such an understanding requires the individual to not only care about the socio-economic inequalities in a national or global society, but to be involved in a democratic political process of harmonizing these inequalities to produce more socially just social systems (Apple, 2010; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Thus, it may be seen that both the NEC and KNC have much in common with the theories and practices of CL as they advocate student-centered classrooms where situated, dialogic forms of inquiry may create spaces where content knowledge does not remain static and sterile, but may be transformed in ways that are more appropriate for the development of more socially just, democratic societies. Nonetheless, the current pedagogical practices in the public schools remain primarily focused on the competition of ‘hakbeol’ ideology and the concomitant assessment practices of HST (Jin, 2011; Shin, 2010).

## **5. CRITICAL LITERACY AND THE KOREAN NATIONAL ENGLISH CURRICULUM**

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of similarity between the KNEC and CL resides in the concepts of student-centered pedagogies and the necessity of dialogism in the classroom. The KNEC (Ministry of Education, 2015) lists many of these similarities in different sections of the curriculum with the earliest clear representation of these pedagogical necessities is found in the ‘Teaching and Learning Methods’ section and states that teachers should:

Teach students to develop fluency and accuracy through a variety of meaningful communication-oriented activities and to develop the ability to communicate and exchange meaning in real situations. Therefore, teaching

methods that emphasize language acquisition should be applied so that students can be central in the English classroom. (p. 48)

While this excerpt clearly states the primacy of English acquisition, which traditionally means grammatical accuracy (Brown, 2007), it also clearly states that multiple pedagogies should be applied in the English classroom which implies that teacher-centered, or 'banking' forms of literacy need to be supplemented with various other pedagogies. The aspect of 'fluency' clearly reflects the goal to include social-constructivist pedagogies that require student-centered activities that promote dialogism in the classroom (Lantolf, 2006). Moreover, the passage also emphasizes that students should be the center of the classroom which signifies a student-centered approach to pedagogy, which is consistent with the practices of CLT (Savignon, 2000).

Specific guidelines of the KNEC's (Ministry of Education, 2015) Teaching and Learning Methods of Secondary School's schemata makes the necessity of student-centered practices and dialogism in the classroom of paramount importance by stating that:

3. Teaching self-directed learning through learner-centered tasks and experiential learning. (p. 53)
  
9. Appropriate use of cooperative and collaborative learning, problem-solving learning and small groups, and task-based activities that encourage active interaction between teachers and learners, learners and learners. (p. 53)

In addition, the High School Listening section guidelines affirm these dictates by stating that teachers should approach their practices:

...According to students' abilities, interests, and knowledge, use various methods to induce motivation and allow for a student-centered class. Participate in a variety of activities to maintain your interest and motivation in English to improve your ability to continue to learn English. (p. 49)

These aspects of the Teaching and Learning Methods guidelines not only more clearly state the aforementioned passage, but also demonstrates the dialectical relationship between student-centered pedagogies and dialogism. It also demonstrates its similarities with the practices of critical literacy as it codifies that the relationship between teachers and students, and between students, must be dialogical in nature, and therefore participatory, for effective learning to occur (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2004). Moreover, aspect 'L' clearly resembles situated learning in that the

knowledge, experiences, and interests of the students are crucial to the practices of a student-centered classroom (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2004; Pederson, 2012). As the most fundamental aspect of situated learning is the contextualization of content knowledge within individual student experiences and interests, its application to student-centered and dialogic practices are not only naturally occurring, but are a fundamental part of the process of inquiry, or conscientization (Freire, 1970), that is fundamental to the practices of CL (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2006).

The KNEC's (Ministry of Education, 2015) the section on Secondary English Speaking stresses that students should be able to "...explain key content and specific details such as topics and points, and interact with them according to purpose, situation, and format." (p. 85) and that this "...means that they can communicate according to the situation and purpose. Effective meaning through group activities with active interaction among learners in various situations." (p. 85), further the previous concepts by stipulating that students should be willing and able to express their opinions on content knowledge. This not only follows the practices of CL in terms of dialogism, but also directly implies inquiry, cultural critique, and publishing, or representing, how knowledge has been transformed through the process of inquiry (Beach & Myers, 2001). Additionally, in the KNEC's (Ministry of Education, 2015) Secondary English section the quotation "Through learner-centered cooperative learning and self-directed learning, students will develop creative thinking and right humanity, and improve their understanding of other cultures to enhance their qualities and literacy as global citizens with international eyes" (p. 81) encapsulates the purpose of the dialectics of CL practices by linking the concepts of morality, independence, and citizenship, or in other words, a citizen who is both willing and capable of full participation in a democratic system (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Luke, 2013). It is also worth noting that the Assessment Guidelines stresses that teachers should "Make appropriate use of collaborative and cooperative learning, problem-solving learning and small groups, and task-based activities that induce active interaction between teachers and learners, learners and learners" (p. 91). Clearly these activities could be defined as being of a 'student-centered' nature, and as such, would have to include holistic forms of evaluation. This analysis is affirmed on the following page by stating that teachers should: "Plan the evaluation by devising various evaluation methods to help develop creative thinking and develop personality" (p. 92).

These clauses in the KNEC are significant in that they stress that teachers should be involved in a reflective practice of teaching, but also that multiple forms of non-objective, ST-based, student evaluations should be a regular part of assessment. While being a reflective practitioner is a standard part of all teacher education today, it is specifically emphasized in the practice of CL (Apple, 2004; Norton & Toohy, 2004). In addition, the guidelines of using integrated and holistic assessments necessarily means that pedagogies



derived from social-constructivist epistemologies would be applied in the classroom (Haertel & Herman, 2005; Spolsky, 2004). These assessment guidelines also parallel the Korean government and Ministry of Education's initiatives to move away from, or ameliorate the negative effects of HST (Jin, 2011; Min, 2008).

Finally, the Characteristics section of the KNEC (Ministry of Education, 2015) addresses the position of English in an increasingly globalized world and stresses the need for the creation of 'cosmopolitan' citizens. The two following passages best describe the emphasis the KNEC places on cosmopolitanism:

English is now the most widely spoken language internationally and is the primary means of communication among people of different linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, the ability to understand and express English in order to respond to the changes of the global age and the age of knowledge informatization, and to play a leading role in the international society, has become a competency. (p. 9)

The English curriculum aims to cultivate learners' English communication skills, while at the same time fostering creative thinking that is closely related to exemplary citizenship and intellectual competence. It is also the goal of the English curriculum to know the value of Korean culture based on the correct understanding of foreign cultures and to develop international perspectives, basic etiquette, cooperation and literacy as a global citizen. (p.11)

These two excerpts are significant as they relate the necessity of English literacy to Korea as well as cosmopolitan citizenship. In addition, they also relate the importance of applying knowledge of the humanities to develop proper moralities with respect to both national and international citizenship, which obviously invokes an ethics of democracy. Thus, these excerpts are in line with the central purposes of critical literacy to foster social justice, social agency, and democracy in society[ies] (Luke, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2004). Similarly, the focus on cultural learning is consistent with CLT practices. As these excerpts also seek the application of the humanities to English education, it is clear that the inquiry that is fundamental to critical literacy, the dialogic situating of content knowledge within multiple socio-cultural contexts, is uniquely suited to attaining these goals of cross-cultural competency (Beach & Myers, 2001; Zhang, 2017). In all the examples given in this section, it is clear that CL is uniquely capable of addressing many of the foundational issues in the KNEC.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this paper shows that the guidelines of both the KNC and the KNEC have much in common with the theories and pedagogies of CL. Although much of these curricula support a standards-based curriculum which remains positivistic in nature and necessitates rote-learning and autonomous literacy (Street, 1995), many of the guidelines promote social constructivist approaches to pedagogy that align well with CL. According to some Korean scholars, this apparent disconnect in epistemologies and their concomitant pedagogical and evaluation practices arises from the Korean government and MOE's attempts to ameliorate the negative social effects of ST and HST that are a product of the competition meritocracy of 'hakbeol' ideology (Shin, 2010), which include high levels of student stress, low self-esteem, high suicide rates, the power and influence of 'shadow education', and the social reproduction of existing hierarchies through education (Jin, 2011; Min, 2008). As such, these scholars praise the most recent KNC while acknowledging that the actual practices occurring in public schools mostly remains one of autonomous literacy practices (Min, 2008; Shin, 2010), thus reproducing both social and educational practices. Nonetheless, it has also been shown that CL practices are not only occurring in Korean public-school classrooms but are an issue of scholarly pursuit as seen in Critical pedagogy SIG in KATE (KATE, 2019). It is also clear that the situated dialogic inquiry at the heart of CL would facilitate both the acquisition of English fluency, but also intercultural competency.

Thus, it appears that the situated dialogism of inquiry at the heart of CL not only is applicable to both the KNC and KNEC, but that it also coincides with much of the progressive scholarship being undertaken in Korean higher education. It has also been shown that CL practices need not be absolute in nature: that they may be included in teaching and learning sequences as activities that include the traditional positivistic practices of GTM and ALM as well as the social constructivism of CLT (Ur, 2013). As such, CL practices may be gradually added to the actual teaching practices in Korean public-schools over time. Moreover, the goals and practices of CL do not necessarily rule out the autonomous forms of literacy that support and necessitate ST and HST. In terms of the epistemological foundations of CL and the theories and pedagogies that arise from them, it is simple to state that the positivism of HST curricula are, by nature, opposed to each other (Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2006; Morgan, 2006). Nonetheless, as one of the key goals of CL is the development of student's social agency, one may make the argument that as ST and HST are analogous to the learning of content knowledge, or 'reading the word' (Freire, 1970), and serve gate-keeping functions that in many ways define the potential futures of students, it is logical that CL must embrace these practices as being necessary for students. However, while this argument is reasonable in terms of such

educational systems, it remains reasonable only if 'reading the world' is practiced in tandem with the traditional forms of literacy.

Perhaps the greatest similarity between the KNC, KNEC, and CL resides in their shared purposes of education for developing students to be knowledgeable, willing, and active participants in national and international democratic practices. These goals espoused in the KNC's 'Vision of an Educated Person' also invoke the ethical necessities of cosmopolitanism and the social justice of socio-economic equality that is one of the driving purposes of CL. As wonderful and humanistic as these goals sound, and the proposed means of achieving them, they are just words without the socio-political will to achieve them. Therefore, this paper does not advocate CL as a curricular mandate. Given the current nature of Korean society and its educational system, such an initiative would be impossible to achieve, much as the more progressive educational aspects of the KNC are not widely practiced in the public-schools (Jin, 2011; Min, 2008; Shin, 2010), particularly given the issue of overcoming the reproduction of social and educational practices endemic in all social systems (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Feire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1977). It is clear that these progressive aspects of the KNC that are in simpatico with the practices of CL cannot be effectively employed without the requisite time for teachers to be educated in these practices and for students, teachers, parents, employers and the majority of Korean society to recognize the necessity of such education and the benefits to be reaped by the individual and society. In addition, current MOE university Education Department reviews require the implementation of micro-teaching pedagogies in each class as well as the inclusion of theoretical 'code words' such as communication, cooperative learning, and creativity in course syllabi. These initiatives seem to be a more forceful approach by the MOE to implement the progressive pedagogies contained in the KNC and KNEC. In short, CL theories and practices need to be more widely taught in teacher education programs and be given sufficient time to work their way into the actual practices of public schools.

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