

Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Concurrences and Complementarities

Pensamiento Crítico y Pedagogía Crítica: coincidencias y complementariedades

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Abstract

The article links two important pedagogical currents that have made criticism their hallmark: Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy. The main objective of this work is not to point out the differences between the two currents -as usually done in academic reflection-, but to identify their coincidences and complementarities through the review of the most representative texts of both currents. In the first and second parts of this article, we introduce each current: the traditions they belong to, reference authors, intellectual styles, practical applications... In the third part, we discuss three aspects in which both currents coincide or complement each other. Firstly, the fact that both John Dewey and Paulo Freire—the main referents of each current—agreed on the relevance of active critical thinking: the North American through the concept of experience; the Brazilian through the concept of praxis. Secondly, the main contributions of the two currents are complementary in that each one emphasizes different dimensions of critical thinking. Critical Thinking has rigorously conceptualized this type of thinking and provided methods, techniques, materials, and activities to develop it. Critical Pedagogy, has focused on the direction of critical thinking, questioning inequality and power relations in today's society and

understanding education as a form of social transformation. In other words, while one current has focused on the “what” of critical thinking, the other one has focused on the “why”. Finally, the two currents coincide in an omission: they have given very little consideration to European pedagogical achievements that have been, *avant la lettre*, fully consistent with both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy.

Keywords: critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical pedagogy, experience, praxis, reflective thinking.

Resumen

El artículo pone en relación dos importantes corrientes pedagógicas que han hecho de la crítica su seña de identidad: la del Pensamiento Crítico y la de la Pedagogía Crítica. El objetivo principal de este trabajo no será -como es más habitual en la reflexión académica- señalar las diferencias entre las corrientes estudiadas, sino localizar sus posibles coincidencias y complementariedades mediante la revisión de los textos más representativos de ambas corrientes. En la primera y la segunda parte del artículo presentamos cada una de las corrientes: tradiciones en las que se inscriben, autores de referencia, estilos intelectuales, aplicaciones prácticas... En la tercera parte, documentamos y comentamos tres aspectos en los que ambas corrientes pueden coincidir o complementarse. En primer lugar, el hecho de que tanto John Dewey como Paulo Freire -principales referentes de cada una de las corrientes- coincidían en la relevancia que otorgaban a un pensamiento crítico realmente activo: el norteamericano mediante el concepto de *experiencia*; el brasileño mediante el concepto de *praxis*. En segundo lugar, las aportaciones principales de las dos corrientes resultan complementarias, ya que cada una de ellas ha hecho énfasis en dimensiones distintas del pensamiento crítico. Una, conceptualizando rigurosamente este tipo de pensamiento y aportando métodos, técnicas, materiales y actividades para desarrollarlo. La otra corriente -la de la Pedagogía Crítica-, polarizando su reflexión en el sentido del pensamiento crítico: cuestionar la desigualdad y las relaciones de poder en la sociedad actual y entender la educación como una forma de transformación social. Por decirlo de otra forma: una corriente ha centrado su interés en el *qué* y la otra en el *para qué* del pensamiento crítico. Finalmente, las dos corrientes coinciden en una omisión: ambas han tenido muy poco presentes realizaciones pedagógicas europeas que han sido, *avant la lettre*, del todo coherentes con los planteamientos tanto del Pensamiento Crítico como de la Pedagogía Crítica.

Palabras clave: pensamiento crítico, pedagogía crítica, experiencia, praxis, pensamiento reflexivo.

Introduction

The ability to think critically, with independence of mind and using one's own criteria, has become a highly-regarded faculty in a wide range of fields (education, politics, economics, culture, etc.: Ennis, 2018; Facione, 2020). Our society seeks a critical citizenship committed to the development of democracy and the common good. Universities, for their part, set out to train critical intellectuals and scientists who can contribute to producing new knowledge. Today it seems even companies want their workers to think critically in order to solve the problems they face, examining all available options and improving productivity. For all these reasons, fostering Critical Thinking is currently one of the most important goals of education (Blair, 2021).

Nevertheless, the very notion of Critical Thinking and the question of how people should be trained to think critically are, from the outset, complex and controversial issues. This is where the two currents that are the subject of this article come into play; namely, Critical Thinking itself, rooted in Western rationalism, which seeks to train students to think according to strict intellectual standards; and Critical Pedagogy, stemming from the Marxist tradition, which aims to train critical thinkers to engage with their condition as political subjects and commit themselves to social transformation. Both these approaches have sought to combine the critical with the educational, but are, of course, quite distinct in terms of their backgrounds, founding authors, intellectual styles, methods, practical applications, etc. At first glance, the only thing they have in common is that they both feature the term "critical" as a mark of identity. Apart from that, there are very few explicit links between them and they do not usually cite each other, except critically, as Burbules and Berk (1999) documented amply some years ago.

Burbules' and Berk's text also helps define the subject of this article, which has a certain kinship with their work; thus it is only fair to acknowledge our indebtedness to them from the outset. Their study, which shows in-depth knowledge of the two opposing currents, is of great interest. Yet recognizing this debt does not mean that our article is a replica of or commentary on theirs. In both, the aim is to relate the current of Critical Thinking to that of Critical Pedagogy; but there is an important difference. Burbules and Beck focus mainly on the existing differences between the two currents, whereas the aim of our article is to identify and discuss their possible

coincidences. The intuition we start from and which we seek to verify is that the two traditions, far from being contradictory or incompatible, may be complementary, despite their differences. To this end, we have undertaken a systematic reading of the most representative texts of both.

The first two sections of this article, then, are devoted to the presentation of each current respectively. In the third section we present and document the coincidences and complementarities between them. An epilogue reflecting on our findings closes the article.

Critical Thinking

The work of John Dewey and the progressive education movement, developing in North America in the first half of the 20th century, awakened interest in Critical Thinking in education (Ennis, 2011). However, the term used by Dewey in *How We Think*¹ – the seminal text for writers in this current – was “reflective thinking”, which Dewey put forward as the optimum type of thinking and which he described as “turning a subject over in one’s head and taking it seriously with all its consequences” (Dewey, 1989, p. 21). Reflective thinking, then, for Dewey, drives inquiry and consists of the “active, persistent, and careful examination of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (1989, p. 25).

Dewey is a constant reference in the Critical Thinking current, but according to one of its leading authors, Robert H. Ennis, a number of events in the second half of the twentieth century – the Sputnik crisis (1957) and the 1960s movement against the war in Vietnam War, amongst others – renewed interest in Critical Thinking, causing many American educational institutions to engage with teaching and researching it (Ennis, 2011, 2018). This growing interest and the lack of a clear vision of what skills to teach and how to teach and assess them led, in the late 1980s, to the American Philosophical Society asking Peter Facione, a philosopher of education, to investigate the topic (Fisher, 2021). Facione assembled a panel of 46 experts from the United States and Canada, many of them from organizations founded specifically to promote Critical Thinking. For two

¹ The full title of the book is *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*, and its first edition dates from 1910. *How we think*. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company Publishers. Here we use the 1989 Spanish version.

years, these experts, including Robert Ennis, Richard Paul, Robert Swartz and Harvey Siegel, engaged in a Delphi discussion of their views in order to agree on a common position. The culmination of these conversations was a joint statement entitled *Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction*, in which they stressed that Critical Thinking requires both cognitive skills (interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, self-regulation) and a series of dispositions or mental habits, namely: (a) curiosity directed at a wide variety of topics and issues; (b) concern for being and remaining well-informed; (c) readiness for opportunities to use Critical Thinking; (d) confidence in rational research processes; (e) confidence in your own reasoning skills; (f) open-mindedness with respect to different worldviews; (g) flexibility in considering opinions and alternatives; (h) understanding of others' opinions; (i) impartiality in assessing reasoning; (j) honesty towards your own predispositions, prejudices and stereotypes; (k) prudence when suspending, making or changing judgments; and (l) willingness to reconsider and revise your views (Facione, 1990).

From this perspective, educating effective critical thinkers means combining the cognitive skills mentioned above with dispositions that foster introspection and are, in turn, the basis of a rational, democratic society (Facione, 1990). For this reason, egocentrism is seen by these authors as a limitation to Critical Thinking. People, as Paul and Elder suggest, “do not usually consider the rights and needs of others, nor do we usually appreciate the point of view of others or the limitations of our point of view. We become aware of our egocentric thinking when we train ourselves to do so” (2003, p. 9). Thus it is necessary to distinguish between “weak” and “strong” Critical Thinking (Paul, 1981). In the “weak” version people use critical skills to strengthen their own position; in contrast, “strong” critical thinkers use these skills to shed light on their own cognitive and affective processes, precisely in those areas where they are more prone to egocentric or sociocentric biases. Teaching students to think critically in the weak sense leads them to become more sophisticated and more adept at rationalizing their own biases and maintaining their prejudices or irrational habits, whereas the strong sense gives Critical Thinking a self-reflective and dialogical character, involving exchanges between different points of view, frames of reference, interpretations, etc.

This distinction between strong and weak Critical Thinking, put forward by Paul more than forty years ago, is particularly timely in the light of current phenomena such as the social media, fake news and,

in general, the development of technologies that enable very broad sectors of society to publicly exercise criticism (Comas et al., 2021; Cañas et al., 2022); an activity previously reserved for minorities (politicians, journalists, media intellectuals, and so on) with access to the conventional media. Now, new technologies and platforms make it possible for much wider sectors to publicly share their Critical Thinking. This is undoubtedly a democratic achievement. But, at the same time, it forces users to exercise their discrimination constantly, as they encounter criticism of all kinds: trash criticism, insults, undocumented opinions, fake news, etc. (Innerarity, 2022). All of this existed previously, but the conventional media tended to filter it, while today's platforms are normally much laxer. This means that it is the receiver who is obliged to discriminate between the critical thoughts on offer. Thus, it is now an urgent educational task to train citizens in this function of selecting from the multitude of critical thoughts available to them. Paul's two categories are therefore a first step in providing useful criteria for this task of discrimination.

For the authors of the Critical Thinking current, then, educating people to be critical means developing a set of intellectual skills, acquiring awareness and control over the thinking and learning processes needed to improve these skills, and training mental dispositions or habits that can produce valid reflections. Hence, Critical Thinking is identified, according to Facione (2020), with the model of liberal education, which consists in learning to learn and learning to think for oneself, both individually and in collaboration with others. A number of authors in this tradition have developed educational proposals and guides for this type of education (Lipman, 1998; Ennis, 2005; Paul and Elder, 2007; Facione, 2020). Critical Thinking, in their view, is a cornerstone of rational, democratic societies, since it involves advancing from a position centered on personal decision-making to one that embraces a concern for social justice and the common good (Facione, 2020; Paul and Eder, 2007; Ennis 2018).

Critical Pedagogy

Just as in Critical Thinking John Dewey is the paramount reference, in Critical Pedagogy this position is occupied by Paulo Freire, although with two significant differences: one in chronology and the other contextual. Freire's lifetime and that of the founders of Critical Pedagogy partly

coincided, which made it possible for some of these authors to maintain direct, continuous and even personal contact with the thinker they had taken as their model (Giroux, 1990; Apple 1996; Kincheloe, 2004; Darder, 2017); while this, for obvious chronological reasons, was not possible for John Dewey and the authors of Critical Thinking.² Further, although it is true that both currents developed mainly in North America – we return to this issue below – Freire made his first and most important contributions in a social context (the so-called Third World) very different from that of the main authors of Critical Pedagogy (centered on the developed countries). This issue has been discussed by some of advocates of Critical Pedagogy (McLaren and Kincheloe, 2008).

Giroux (1990), Apple (1996), Macedo (2000), McLaren and Kincheloe (2008) and Darder (2017), amongst others, found in the Brazilian educationalist's pedagogy a way to combine a "language of critique" with a "language of possibility" (Giroux, 1990), a combination that led them to describe education as a two-sided institution, with distinct purposes and outcomes. On the one hand, there was education governed by a standardized program serving the interests of the dominant power and of students most closely linked to the social and cultural standards associated with that power; and on the other, there was democratic education, sensitive to differences and pursuing social and cultural inclusion and advancement especially for students from disadvantaged groups. The program of Critical Pedagogy was thus built on the critique of educational institutions serving the capitalist system, as analyzed in critical theories of reproduction (Althusser, Bourdieu and Passeron, Baudelot and Establet, Bowles and Gintis, etc.), but also on the projection of new ways of understanding educational action aimed at changing the social injustices and power relations arising from the system.

In a context marked by colonial and national liberation struggles, student protests and the emergence of the social movements (feminism, civil rights, pacifism, environmentalism, etc.), the 1968 publication of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated into English in 1970, was a source of inspiration for communities and educators in the United States who were fighting for a world free of domination and

² It should be noted that, although Freire has always been Critical Pedagogy's main reference point, this current also values Dewey's contributions positively (Apple and Beane, 2000; Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg, 2003; Giroux, 2020; McLaren, 2022).

injustice (Kincheloe, 2008, Darder, 2017). Freire's political-pedagogical praxis made it possible to overcome the oppositions between subject and object, person and world, consciousness and reality, theory and practice; and also to conceive education as a process of awareness-raising (termed "conscientization") through peer interaction in which subjects dialogue with each other and the world to problematize and transform their reality (Trilla, 1989; Ayuste and Trilla, 2005).

From this perspective, with antecedents in Gramsci and the Frankfurt School, the *raison d'être* of education is to train a critical citizenry capable of building an egalitarian and truly democratic society. To this end, the work of Critical Pedagogy has consisted in examining how the capitalist mode of production – and also patriarchy and colonialism – affect educational policies and practices; and, at the same time, to further the principles of democratic education and the role of teachers as intellectuals developing counter-hegemonic pedagogies (Apple and Beane, 2000; Giroux, 1990). Critical pedagogies, according to Giroux (1990), "not only empower students by providing them with the knowledge and social skills they will need to act critically in society as a whole, but also educate them for transformative action" (p. 35). And this emphasis on educating for transformative action is one of the aspects that most distances Critical Pedagogy from Critical Thinking.³

Another contribution of Critical Pedagogy, according to McLaren (2022), is its questioning of the concept of knowledge as "neutral" or "objective" and its endeavor to understand the political nature of education. Hence, one of the main tasks of this current lies in trying to understand, from below or, in other words, from the perspective of the oppressed themselves, the mechanisms of oppression imposed by the established order. However, with the passage of time, as McLaren also warns, Critical Pedagogy has become more eclectic and less focused on the critique of

³ The study by Burbules and Berk (1999) cited at the beginning of the article gives a useful account of the differences between the two perspectives. The most substantial differences they identify can be summarized as follows: for Critical Thinking, as we have seen, the main purpose of education is to develop the skills and dispositions that allow the person to think for her/himself according to strict intellectual standards; whereas for Critical Pedagogy this is insufficient, given that the ultimate goal of education is not only to understand reality but also to transform it. To this end, political literacy is a basic requirement. This is something that Critical Thinking rejects, since (according to these thinkers) it entails a high risk of indoctrination. The educational content put forward by the two currents is also different. For Critical Pedagogy, content should be closely related to the context and experience of the students, while in the view of Critical Thinking, familiarity with the context and the problems to be addressed there can accentuate cultural biases and limit impartiality.

capitalism and the inequalities it produces. The scope of Critical Pedagogy now extends to multicultural education, bilingual education, language learning and critical literacy (including media literacy). And, since this shift, its main exponents have combined Critical Pedagogy with different transdisciplinary traditions, including theoretical incursions into the work of authors such as Rorty, Lacan, Derrida and Foucault. This, according to Wheeler-Bell (2019), has plunged Critical Pedagogy into an identity crisis.

In an era marked by neoliberal economic Darwinism, the mercantilist colonization of everyday life and new varieties of fascism, in the words of Giroux (2022), it is urgent for this current of thought to put education back at the center of politics. Critical Pedagogy as a form of cultural politics offers the “promise of a protected space within which it is possible to think against the tide” (Giroux, 2022, p. 201). As a component part of a language of hope, Critical Pedagogy continues to aspire to become a framework in which theory and practice can converge to produce alternative ways of teaching and learning, connecting education to issues affecting citizenship and the advance of democracy (McLaren and Kincheloe, 2008; Giroux, 2020).

Coincidences and complementarities

Now that we have summarized the essentials of both currents, we can move on to the specific object of this article: shedding light on the existing and potential coincidences and complementarities between Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy. This discussion is divided into three sections. In the first, we look at a similarity that is particularly important since it relates to the main founders of the two traditions. Secondly, we note that each current stresses different aspects of Critical Thinking, which – in a positive reading – therefore makes them complementary. Finally, we highlight a further coincidence; in this case a shared omission, however.

A meeting point: Dewey and Freire; experience and praxis

John Dewey and Paulo Freire, as we have seen, are the essential pedagogical models for each of the two currents. *How we Think* (1910) by the American philosopher and pedagogue is an almost obligatory

reference in Critical Thinking, while the Critical Pedagogy movement constantly refers back to Paulo Freire.

Here, it is not our purpose to match the ideas and approaches of these two thinkers. The historical, social and political contexts in which (and for which) they worked were, of course, very different; and therefore the answers they provided could not be the same (Corbett and Guilherme, 2021). However, this does not mean that points of convergence cannot be found between the two.

To start with, Dewey and Freire share the key status that contemporary pedagogy gives them, although for different periods. Dewey was, without doubt, one of the greatest educationalists of the first half of the 20th century, while Freire held the same role in the second half. Both also continue to be important models for both pedagogical thought and educational practice. Beyond this, however, there is one shared aspect, highly significant for our topic, where we can trace an analogy between them: the importance that both gave to the essentially *active* aspect of Critical Thinking – although they used different terminology to discuss this; namely, *experience* in Dewey's case and *praxis* in Freire's.

The role of experience in Dewey's concept of education is well known. For one thing, in the definition of education he gives in his major work, *Democracy and Education*, experience is the central element: education "is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which gives meaning to experience and increases the capacity to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 2004, p.74). In other words, we educate ourselves through experience and never otherwise. In fact, through this concept of education as a reconstruction of experience, Dewey complexified and gave depth to the famous slogan of *learning by doing*, but without denying it in any way: we learn by *doing*, but not by doing just anything. The experiences that truly educate us are those which, based on our previous experiences, help us to understand them better and, at the same time, also serve as a guide for subsequent experiences.

Thus, the concept of experience, as seen by Dewey, is what makes it possible to establish a mutually enriching relationship between theory and practice, between action and reflection. This, it seems to us, bears a significant likeness to what Freire meant by his concept of *praxis*. As we have discussed elsewhere (Trilla, 1993, 151-175), and as other analysts have also stressed (Gadotti, 1996), praxis is a fundamental concept

for the Brazilian pedagogue: “Separated from practice, theory is pure inoperative verbalism; detached from theory, practice is blind activism. This is why there is no authentic praxis outside the dialectical unity of action-reflection, practice-theory” (Freire, 1984, p. 30). And elsewhere, introducing the concepts of the *theoretical context* and the *practical context*, Freire wrote:

Praxis, through which consciousness is transformed, cannot be pure action, but needs to be both action and reflection [...] Theoretical praxis is nothing other than what we do from the theoretical context, by stepping back from the praxis carried out or being carried out in the concrete context. This is why theoretical praxis is only authentic to the extent that the dialectical movement between it and the subsequent praxis to be realized in the concrete context is not broken. Hence, the two forms of praxis are inseparable moments of the same process by which we acquire knowledge in critical terms (Freire, 1975, pp. 12-13).

Thus, according to Freire, the concept of *conscientization* or awareness-raising – basic to his approach, as is well known – involves more than a simple awareness of one’s own reality; it is a form of consciousness that aims to be objective, critical and committed, and can only be acquired through praxis, and never through mere intellectual activity detached from concrete action (Freire, 1985).

The experiences that, according to Dewey, truly educate us are those – restated in Freire’s terms – that make us more critically aware of the reality in which we exist and act, and serve to guide our subsequent praxis. In different times and contexts and in different terminology, the key models for each of our two pedagogical currents concur in the essentially *active* (experiential/praxis-based) nature of thought and education.

Differing emphases

Above we advanced the idea that the Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy movements may be complementary, since each stresses different aspects of education. In Critical Thinking, the endeavor to conceptualize this type of thought rigorously is evident. The fact that studies on Critical Thinking have been conducted mainly in analytical philosophy has led some analysts to enquire into *self-critical* thinking

or to pose the question of how Critical Thinking might *think itself*. Also, on a more strictly pedagogical level, Critical Thinking has also put forward methods, techniques, activities and materials, some very specific, for developing this type of thinking: i.e., how to learn to think critically (Lipman, 1998; Ennis, 2005; Paul and Elder, 2007; Facione 2020). Thus Lopez (2012) has identified four models of teaching Critical Thinking: the *process evaluation* model, the *dialogical thinking* model; the *community of inquiry* model; and the *controversy* model. Similarly, tools for assessing Critical Thinking have also been developed (Saiz and Rivas, 2008).

On the other hand, it seems that the Critical Pedagogy movement has focused its interest mainly on the evaluative and projective aspects of Critical Thinking: i.e., thinking critically about our social reality and about the society that we should build. If the academic disciplines most associated with Critical Thinking are psychology and philosophy (particularly analytical philosophy and pragmatism), Critical Pedagogy is much more closely linked to sociology. It also relates to philosophy, but to that of Marxist and neo-Marxist authors such as the Frankfurt School; although later Critical Pedagogy also draws from post-structuralism with a view to building a concept of human agency that is not limited to social class but also embraces gender and culture (Wheeler-Bell, 2019; Ichikawa, 2020).

Returning to our hypothesis on the complementarity of the two currents, it sometimes seems that Critical Pedagogy is weak in the *how*, while Critical Thinking may lack grounding in the *what for*. It is true that the former can always fall back on Freire, since he did develop methods, strategies and activities. But leaving aside his achievements and a few other experiences to which these analysts also refer (Apple and Beane, 2000), when reading Critical Pedagogy we often find ourselves missing examples, projects, methods, techniques and specific activities to put their high-minded ideas on social transformation through education into practice. Critical Pedagogy, then, has up to now consisted more in theory than practice. With Critical Thinking, on the other hand, the opposite is true: techniques, materials and activities to develop it are provided, but *what for* is much less clear. It is as though they take it for granted that the world is going to be a better place simply because more people think critically. Some writers who can be included in this current, as we saw earlier, come almost to identifying

critical with scientific thinking. Thinking critically is thinking reality (describing it, explaining it, understanding it, etc.) as rigorously and objectively as possible; we could almost say that, for these analysts, thinking critically is *thinking well*. The question that is begged, though, is this: thinking well, but to criticize *what*? These differences, in a certain way, make the two currents complementary: the one, because it provides content that helps us better understand the *what* and *how* of Critical Thinking; the other because it responds more clearly to the *why* of Critical Thinking.

In relation to the above, it is curious (or paradoxical) that currently what is most often associated with Critical Thinking is training for entrepreneurship. If we Google “critical thinking” and “entrepreneurship” (or any of the derivatives of this fashionable word), hundreds of thousands of websites appear, in addition to entire books⁴ and articles dedicated to the need for entrepreneurs to think critically. And this happens not only on the internet and in business discourse, but also in political and pedagogical discourse itself. An international body as prominent as the Council of the European Union, in its recommendations on *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2018), mentions Critical Thinking in only three of its eight key competences;⁵ and one of these three is, of course, “entrepreneurial competence”.⁶ Such clear and direct associations between Critical Thinking and technocratic-entrepreneurial discourse may scandalize the most radical proponents of Critical Pedagogy, but not necessarily those of Critical Thinking. The former have a clear answer to the question posed above: Critical Thinking, certainly, but to criticize the inequality inherent in class society, to denounce the power relations in capitalism, to find and put into practice transformative alternatives to the “banking” style of education, which perpetuates oppression, and so on. There are differences, of course, between Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy, particularly between the more politically neutral thinkers of the former and the more radical of the latter.

⁴ *Kant in Silicon Valley: Critical Thinking for Entrepreneurs*, by Rais Busom, is the title of one such book circulating on the Internet.

⁵ The eight key competences are: (1) Literacy competence; (2) Multilingual competence; (3) Mathematical, scientific, technological and engineering competence; (4) Digital competence; (5) Personal, social and learning-to-learn competence; (6) Civic competence; (7) Entrepreneurship competence; (8) Cultural awareness and expression competence.

⁶ The other two are: literacy and digital competences.

A shared lacuna. Similar pedagogies *avant la lettre*

To return to the coincidences between the two currents, both are of North American origin, with the incorporation into Critical Pedagogy of a singular Latin-American reference (Freire). Both currents, in any case, originate on the other side of the Atlantic. And this is noticeable: it is a bias into which both have fallen, despite criticisms they themselves make of any kind of “centrism” that might cloud the objectivity necessary in *strong* Critical Thinking. This American centrism perhaps explains the fact that there have been very few European authors, strictly pedagogically speaking, in either tradition.⁷ Here, then, we will therefore discuss some European educational experiences and movements that we believe are fully comparable to the approaches of both Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy. In the interests of brevity, we will focus on only two of these, both of which also have some notable common characteristics. The first of these is that they have been widely recognized internationally, which makes it even stranger that, with some exceptions, the most significant analysts of the two American currents have not considered them as predecessors or, at least, as traveling companions to their own approaches. The other salient feature is that the two European pedagogies stem from real, practical experiences; they are not merely theory.

In order of seniority, we should first discuss Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, his Modern School and the rationalist pedagogy movement it gave rise to. There can be no doubt that the development of the most genuine type of critical thinking was one of the key objectives of his school in Barcelona at the beginning of the 20th century. Also, Ferrer and his followers pursued social transformation through education:

To demonstrate to the children that as long as one man is subjected to another, abuses will be committed and there will be tyranny and slavery; to study the causes that maintain popular ignorance; to determine the origin of all the routine practices that give life to the present antisocial regime; to have the students reflect on everything they see; such must

⁷ It is true that Critical Pedagogy has been linked to Gramsci and the Frankfurt School, but this has been on a philosophical rather than strictly pedagogical level. It is also true that there are thinkers who have situated European educational theories of reproduction within Critical Pedagogy. But precisely what Critical Pedagogy has tried to overcome are this type of closed, circular reproductionist approaches that deny any possibility that education can be a determining factor of social transformation.

be the program of the rationalist schools. [...] Rational and scientific teaching must persuade future men and women that they should not expect anything from any privileged being (fictitious or real); and that they can expect everything from their own reason and from freely organized and accepted solidarity. (Ferrer y Guardia, 1976, p. 103-14).

Much of what is advocated by current Critical Pedagogy can already be found in Ferrer's practice of more than a century ago: the coeducation of the sexes (truly scandalous at that time); the struggle for social equality and against exclusion, which he addressed through educating different social classes side-by-side; and for the times, a truly radical feminism:

Women should not be confined to the home. The radius of their action should extend beyond the walls of the house; that radius should end where society itself extends to and ends. But for women to exercise their beneficial action, the knowledge allowed them should not be little less than zero; it should be the same in quantity and quality as that which men provide for themselves. (Ferrer and Guardia, 1976, p.52).

The Modern School was Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking in its purest form; as was another forgotten school in a small village in Tuscany, Barbiana, a village to which the priest Don Lorenzo Milani was banished for being critical, rebellious and antiestablishment. *Letter to a Teacher*, a short book written by the students of the school under the priest's guidance, is a clear example of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy in unison. For one thing, the booklet is an early but reliable example of *reproduction theory*, criticizing an exclusionary education embodied by the teacher the young people of Barbiana address their letter to and the classist school system (even detailed with statistics) from which the students had been expelled. But the booklet, in showing how they worked intensely in the Barbiana school, also demonstrates that the reproductive function of the school system is not necessarily inexorable, but that there are feasible pedagogical alternatives and that education can be a real force for social transformation. The student-written book is itself Critical Thinking in action; Critical Thinking exercised, among other activities, through daily newspaper reading. As one Barbiana students writes:

I know well the history I'm living through. That is, the newspaper that we read aloud every day in Barbiana, from cover to cover. [...] Nothing in the newspaper is useful for your exams. It is the proof that there

is little in your school that is useful for life. That is precisely why we should read it. (Pupils of the Barbiana school, 2017, p. 20).

Also, *Letter to a Teacher* states that “only language makes us equal. He is equal who knows how to express himself and understand the expression of others. Whether he is rich or poor matters less. It is enough to speak.” (Barbiana school students, 2017, p. 7). Milani died a year before *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968; first Spanish translation 1970) appeared; thus the Italian priest could not have known of Freire’s pedagogy,⁸ but there is no doubt that Barbiana is a clear case of “conscientization” *avant la lettre*. Milani and Freire never met personally, but they would certainly have found much in common.

In addition to Barbiana and Ferrer y Guardia, there are of course many other past and contemporary examples of European pedagogies that could be compared to the approaches of both Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking. We could cite various examples as clear as the two discussed above, for example the popular pedagogy that the French educator Celestin Freinet developed from his own practice. Likewise, our Eurocentrism – parallel to the Americanism already noted – has prevented us knowing of other pedagogical approaches outside these two centrismes which would surely coincide in many ways with the critical currents studied.

Highlighting the fact that the two currents focused on here omit references to important European pedagogical contributions and experiences fully comparable to the approaches of both also indicates some of the limits of our own work and, therefore, its potential extensions. It would be possible, of course, to study in depth each of the pedagogies we mention above (the Modern School, Barbiana, Freinet) as fully-fledged precedents of how Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy can be combined in practice. For reasons of brevity we have limited ourselves to outlining the argument that the European examples represent real practices that can be fully framed (albeit *avant la lettre*) within the main approaches of both Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking. Therefore it would make sense to devote further articles (or even longer works) to monographs on any of these experiences, thinkers or movements, seen

⁸ However, as Professor José Luís Corzo (2021) explains, Freire did later become acquainted with Milani’s pedagogical work, writing the “post-face” to a book coordinated by Corzo and Gesualdi (one of the Barbiana students) titled *Don Milani nella scrittura collettiva* (1992).

through the prism of the two more contemporary currents. They are of course approaches that have already been widely studied, but doing this in terms of the ideas and conceptual apparatuses of Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy would benefit both these schools and the two currents discussed here. First, this would highlight the relevance of experiments that, although conducted long ago, can still make practical contributions to the development of Critical Thinking. And further, the very traditions that are the subject of our article would be strengthened by such studies. As we noted above, they do not always offer concrete practical examples of their theoretical contributions; yet the experiences and movements mentioned can provide them in quantity.

Furthermore, as possible extensions of this study, what we have discussed of the three European examples could also be said of other experiences, past or present, in terms of both schooling or social education.

Epilogue

We would like to end this article with a final reflection on the meaning of approaches such as those discussed here. Our objective was to find possible coincidences and complementarities between Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy. To this end we started from two intuitions. The first we have developed elsewhere (Trilla, 2007) and thus we will not expand on it now. It is the intuition that perhaps it would be more productive, educationally speaking, to strive to find what different pedagogies have in common rather than what separates them. We already know that in the academic world there is a greater tendency to discover and emphasize differences than commonalities. Not that this is unimportant; in this article, although this was not our objective, we have not skimmed on highlighting the disparities between the two currents. Yet in spite of this, we believe that we must insist on the importance of endeavoring to find coincidences and complementarities; not least because education is always practice; action, rather than omission, in spite of what Rousseau said; and for action it is always better to add than to subtract: differences subtract and commonalities add.

The second intuition behind this article is a simple corollary of the first. To find coincidences and complementarities we need to be open to everything that at first seems foreign, different, distant and contrary.

Should we enclose oneself in our own paradigm (if there really are paradigms in pedagogy), focus on one centrism or other (be it European, American or whatever), declare ourselves followers of some particular pedagogical orthodoxy, or conform uncritically and in a sectarian way to some system of truths? Should we renounce from the outset the contributions of Critical Thinking because we have declared ourselves supporters of Critical Pedagogy (or vice versa), or set two giants such as Dewey and Freire in opposition to each other? Perhaps these are not the most recommendable choices for educational practice. Not even, surely, for pedagogical theory, for as Freire remarks in one of his memorable phrases, “to attain truths, it is necessary not to be too sure of them” (Freire, P., 1996, p.7).

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