

## Original Paper

# My Path towards Teaching with an Attitude... A Testimony on Becoming a Critical Pedagogue (Note 1)

Adriana Castañeda-Londoño<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B.A Teaching English as a Foreign Language, M.A Applied Linguistics to the Teaching of English, Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá Colombia

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### **Abstract**

*This paper sets out to recount my journey in order to become a critical pedagogue in the field of English language teaching. I talk about core experiences as a student, teacher, and human being. I rely in tenets of critical pedagogy, Chicana studies and decolonial thought in order to find a voice of my own in the academic arena. I contend that writing our own testimonies towards transformation brings out little but significant changes in the way we exist in the world as teachers. Readers will encounter a reflection of my approach towards pedagogy and knowledge enriched with students' own ideas and outcomes.*

### **Keywords**

*Teacher knowledge, teacher's testimony, English teacher*

“Considero el *testimonio* como un "discurso" coherente y permanente de la educadora progresista”.

--Freire, 1994.

## **1. Introduction**

In the next lines, I will share my own testimony as a teacher committed to introduce tenets of Critical Pedagogy (CP) into my English class intending to overcome the technical rationality that has pervaded language education in the last century. I have deliberately chosen to write this text in a manner of testimony for several reasons. First, because I want to come back to the heritage of oral traditions that are rooted in Latin America. I also intend to counter the grand narrative of “The North/West as articulate knower for all the Americas” (Gandhi, 1998; in Saavedra, 2011, p. 262) and the domination of the traditional academic text that stems from what Chilisa (2012) calls our *scientific colonization* which “imposes the colonizer’s ways of knowing” (p. 9) and consequently of writing. Second, because

in narrating my own story of epistemological, emotional, and social struggle, I am simultaneously narrating other educators', colleagues' and relevant ones' lives. By bringing their voices here, I am not only healing myself but those others who are brought up to the story, acknowledging their contribution in my constitution as a human being.

My aim is not only to raise awareness about the use of CP but to stimulate thought provoking ideas in those who read this document. Backed up in Delgado Bernal, Burciaga and Carmona (2012), I here see myself as researcher and participant unveiling my own collective story “bypassing the role of an interlocutor”(p. 4), interrogating prevailing notions of who constructs knowledge. Testimonies follow the line of thought of Chicana critical pedagogies that question the academia as the only site of knowledge production and the apparently individualistic character of *the subject* that is taken from granted in Western thinking (Saavedra, 2011). This text is not intended to be a “discourse of individual authorship” (Elenes, 2000, p. 105) therefore I draw on several voices here because as Freire (2000) rightly stated, words shouldn't be the license of a few, but everybody's right.

### *1.1 A Testimony of Struggle and Hope*

When I first read Akbari (2008) in August 2017 two ideas called my attention. Firstly that critical pedagogy was “not a theory” but “a way of doing learning and teaching” (Akbari, 2008, p. 276; citing Canagarah, 2005). Second, that CP was “teaching with an attitude” (Akbari, 2008, p. 276; drawing on Pennycook, 2001). These concepts started to resonate in me as I intended to make up my mind for my own definition and practices of “teaching with an attitude”. Since then, my main interest with CP has been to be able to use its tenets for real life classrooms purposes. Otherwise, it would turn out to be either another fad in English Language Teaching (ELT) or words that *vanish into thin air*.

### *1.2 My Own Schooling*

While commuting from home to my PhD coursework or from there to my job some memories of my childhood come back to me and inspire me to think on and on that “today I want to teach with an attitude, so what sort of actions can foster that?”, I keep in mind the English books cold contents and think of ways for twisting the so-called neutrality of the ideas they bring. I feel “suspicious about neutrality claims in textbooks” as Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011, p. 165) say. Almost simultaneously I think of my education as a working class girl back in the 90s; I studied in a school where teens were taught trades and skills so that we eventually could add up to the working force of our country. We were supposed to learn secretarial studies and principles of accounting, electricity, and other stuff. At that time, *era lo que había (That's what we had)*. I was a working class girl whose mother had to migrate to Bogotá from a small town in Caldas Colombia where nursery wages didn't help make ends meet. My mother recalls: “We had a lot of work; there were just two nurses at the hospital, me and another. The doctors operated up 13 patients on Thursdays. Thursdays looked like slaughter -she jokes-, and we were the only ones responsible. The hospital was very active at that time because it was a charity. They didn't charge much, like 20 or 30 Colombian pesos, and what they paid to me was very little”. Then my mom decided to quit and move to the capital in the late 1980s. It hasn't

been a secret that the regions and the countryside have had less economic development in Colombia and people are inevitably forced to move.

Upon arrival in Bogotá my mother found a job, in her area of expertise, and her monthly salary tripled. Still, we had to leave our beloved hometown where everybody valued a more communal life and start from scratch in a city where it rained every day and everybody was on its own. My mom recalls: “Then we arrived in Bogotá I was accustomed to living in a big house with a garden, balconies, very clean, and we got to a shantytown... really depressing”. Despite, the new wages, we could not afford for me to study elsewhere. The school had a technical approach. Now that I look back, I reflect that the school was the product of an elusive top-down curricular imposition to public schools, a way to subtly define our future as working class kids, the ones who by art of curricular decisions would end up doing the technical jobs in society. Although these jobs are not inferior to other jobs in any sense, what was perverse was that it was the system and not us deciding upon our futures. The fact that we devoted several hours to studying accounting, office management, and things like those was taking time from Math, Social Studies and other subjects that were going to be evaluated in the State tests which, in turn, would give us a chance or hinder our entrance to higher education. No wonder why not so many public school students got a place to study at state universities by that time.

Both, consciously and unconsciously I resisted to be driven towards a totalizing destiny. Against the odds I managed to disrupt this status quo and got a place to study at a state university. As a working class girl I was supposed to work in a working class trade because “a working class hero is something to be”. But I have never been a person that easily accepts. I guess I inherited this from both my parents. To a certain extent, what happened can be explained drawing on Giroux (2010) when he says that “history is an open narrative and is not a predefined text to be memorized and accepted unquestionably” (p. 717).

My encounters with CP date back to the undergrad school in the 2000s when I first took a course and came across “Cartas a quien pretende enseñar” by Freire (1994) and other critical pedagogy readings that at the subconscious level could have helped me have a very personal teaching style. In this first CP class I was still in my pampers, both in teaching and CP. Actually, I can barely recall the teacher explaining and me just passively listening. My friend K has generously helped me dig into these memories by saying that “we took that class of CP because it was among the elective subjects and it called our attention; it wasn’t part of our program. Other students took classes like elective languages, other elective courses, but the two of us chose this one. It had an impact on me because it was the first time I knew about Freire. The teacher made us read a lot by Freire and the teacher’s ideas about pedagogy were deeper”. I asked K if we were just sitting down listening, which is what I recall and K said that “we had some feedback from the readings but what happened was that we had this class with people from different majors, didn’t know the other students well and our teacher’s personality was introverted; it was like a lecture type of class but there were some students’ interventions”. When I asked K if she recalled a learning she said she made a connection between *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

(Freire, 2000) with other seminar she took by that time. This was already about 13 years and much water has flowed under the bridge.

As time passed by and the pressing need to comply with the free market demands towards me as teacher, the different standardized practices required by ELT institutions and some degree of brain washing of second language acquisition, methods, strategies, and other imported stuff from the North academia, I had, but just to some extent, relegated my impetus as a teacher-transformer. Indeed, I must confess that for some time I got to confuse critical thinking in the Bloom's taxonomy way with Critical Pedagogy, in the Freirean style. Sigh! Giroux (2010) can help understand these situations when explaining that "as schooling is increasingly subordinated to a corporate order, any vestige of critical education is replaced by training and the promise of economic security. Similarly, pedagogy is now subordinated to the narrow regime of teaching to the test coupled with an often harsh system of disciplinary control... teachers are increasingly reduced to the status of technicians, removed from having any control over their classrooms" (p. 715). Upon my return to the journey of conscious reading and reflection, I have felt revitalized as a teacher and full of motives to keep on working.

A tipping point in my career as an English teacher came when I applied for a post at a state university to be a full time teacher-educator. It turned out that my teaching experience, credentials and *my attitude* meant nothing to get this job. For second time in my life I had to fight the totalizing destiny of being a technician and struggle for the right to be an intellectual. Therefore, I sat down, cried a bit and reflected: "It looks like an M.A is not enough to thrive in the current academic world". Anyway *there is no bad from which good does not come*, or so it says a proverb. I thought to myself: "I will have to pursue a PhD"; backed up in a scholarship that I earned because of my previous intellectual efforts I enrolled in an avant-garde ELT program and oho!!! CP popped up again.

As I perceive it, our CP class at the PhD program intended to reflect dialogism and conscientization that is why, we, seven PhD students and our professor, frequently agreed in-situ on the threads of discussion and our conversations reflected basic characteristics of dialogue as explained by Freire (2000) such as humility, hope, or commitment to the profession.

In our weekly meetings, the words *learning* and *knowledge* underwent polysemic changes such as: un-learn, re-learn, co-construct, re-construct. When I asked Edgar, one of my classmates, how he had participated in my own knowledge construction of CP he pinpointed: "I think I took part in Adriana's construction of knowledge regarding CP in two ways, in exchange of ideas on-tasks in our doctoral seminars and off-tasks anywhere else. On-tasks while in our doctoral seminars, I always listen to what she says. Her ideas connect to a sense of doing with the students on what they live and need. I mostly agree on what she shares about her teaching practices and the way she sees language education. I agree because I have found myself kind of doing similarly. Possibly in my replies to her contributions she may have seen teaching collaboration as I have from hers. When I do not much agree on what she says, I just share my points of view from my understanding of how I see things happening. In these replies, she may have also gotten something. Off-tasks anywhere else is less institutional. We can talk with

each other on our way to our jobs, classes, events breaks, etc. We exchange our viewpoints about how our teaching experiences are lived. I remember the two of us telling each other some of the activities we are going to do in our classes, or the situations that have happened in our jobs, and one asking the other for more details and feelings about them. In that exchange, we suggest each other do a bit more or less, or consider this or that, but always for collaboration, a friendship coming into being. Both manners, on-tasks and off-tasks, have helped us achieve more critical consciousness about how we do as teachers in teaching practices and jobs, we do not simply talk about surface issues, I guess; in our exchanges we go deeply into the contexts, causes, consequences, and experiences. Little by little, and maybe subconsciously, we question our ideologies, beliefs, and current conditions about what we are and do as teacher educators”.

When Edgar mentioned that I tried to do things that related to the students on *what they live*, I felt I had been able to convey my ideas towards what CP meant to me, because he had been able to summarize it in a sentence: *relate to students on what they live*. I agree with him: dialogues towards CP have helped us collaborate with each other and what’s more striking is that our conversations about CP have turned into *a friendship coming into being*, a friendship that constantly unsettles our taken for granted ideas as we learn from agreements and discrepancies.

Helena, who was our CP educator, also had room in this narrative of encounters. When asked about the way she had participated in my construction of knowledge, she kindly shared: “...Did I take part? I would like to think I did. And let’s imagine I did. I guess being the teacher of the class had something to do with it. I mean, I selected most of the readings we discussed and posed a lot of questions. I tried to open the space for Adriana and her classmates to elaborate on the readings and on their personal take on them and on the themes that emerged from the discussions. Did she construct knowledge? I don’t know. I have the feeling that a lot of her ideas were not constructed in the class but were dormant in her mind and just woke up and started to make sense as the semester passed. And was it knowledge? I don’t know. How would we define “knowledge”? Can we think of knowledge of something that stays in time? Or could it vanish? Or can we think of knowledge as an individual take on the world? Or should knowledge be collectively agreed upon? How can we know for sure that whatever sits in the mind of someone is the same as what one intends to transmit? Share? In this road together, I have learned many things about myself as a teacher, as a researcher, and as a woman...”

It appeared to me that first our professor took a cautious approach as to whether she had partaken in my construction of knowledge; to a great extent I think she did. Selecting what students will read is not only a pedagogical act but a political one cherished by critical pedagogues. As well, leading the discussions and allowing room for deep talk are ways to foster knowledge construction, re-construction, un-learnings, or re-learnings. It called my attention that she wanted to problematize what the very concept of knowledge entailed and its very different and possible intersections, a task that is clearly connected to CP and Chicana traditions of disrupting the Western taken for granted conceptualizations of knowledge as dwelling in the mind, separated from the body, the spirit, the communal. Speaking of

me as having “dormant ideas that woke up as the classes passed by”, reminded me of my previous lines in which I had narrated how different situations of life had isolated me of exercising more criticality in my teaching.

## 2. The Authors' Voices

Jeyaraj and Harland (2016) contend that CP in ELT is a fertile field of work as the subject has a history of supposedly taking a neutral stance and avoiding provocative issues (Wallace, 2003 in Jeyaraj & Harland, 2016). Opposite to traditional ELT, CP does admit locations in discourses regarding categories of classification like ethnicity, race, gender, class. Indeed, Akbari's (2008) article made me reflect deeply towards my path to be reborn as a critical pedagogue when he said that:

“Most cultural content, has been from the target language... the justification has been that those who want to learn a new language want to communicate with the users of that language, and successful communication would be impossible without familiarity with the cultural norms of the society with whose speakers the learner is trying to forge bonds. This assumption, of course, holds true for those groups of learners who want to migrate to countries such as the US or UK for work or study. The reality in which many other language learners find themselves, nevertheless, is different” (p. 278).

This quote struck a chord because as a teacher I had previously witnessed that most students did not relate the book contents with their own lives. Often times what books introduce is timeless, emotionless, politically correct, or extremely fake. Similarly, the statement that learners need to know the “target” culture because that is what they are going to encounter “when they travel” to the English speaking countries is a misleading idea because we have witnessed a) how the amount of non-native English speakers has outnumbered the total of native English speakers and people don't necessarily travel to inner circle countries to communicate in English and b) Culture is not a unitary concept. The culture of one part of a country does not necessarily reflect that of another region.

My deepest discomfort came when I re-confirmed what I had already discovered and dealt with (sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully) for several years. It was that course books:

“make use of language that is aspirational (Akbari, 2008; citing Gray, 2001) where most of the language introduced deals with the needs and concerns of middle and upper classes” and “in most of the dialogues of such books the interlocutors talk about issues which are far removed from the lives of many learners” (p. 280).

I felt appalled when I faced again lesson planning the classes with the course book that I had been given. I could not help to spot, by means of some previous knowledge of discourse analysis, the whiteness biases, the stereotypes, the gender discourses, the races underrepresentation, and shallow topics all over the book. Nonetheless, as a resilient teacher I deemed necessary to take action relying on my CP stronger awareness, more mature teaching experience, and intellectual and ontological responsibilities.

Certainly, my path towards *teaching with an attitude* was driven by two ideas. Firstly, the CP belief that it is necessary to “provoke students go beyond the world they know and feel comfortable in, to expand their understanding of a range of social possibilities and achieve a more equal and just future” (Freire, 1996; Giroux, 1995 in Jeyaraj and Harland, 2016) and secondly the awareness that “our gender, race, and ethnicity do make a difference” (Alcoff, 2010, p. 122) when judging reality. I have recently learned from Grosfoguel (2011) citing Dussel (1997) that this positionality is because we always speak from a particular standpoint in the *power structures*; no one can get rid of modern hierarchies such as those of race, geography, sex, gender, language, class, or religion.

### 3. How “Teaching with an Attitude” Has Resulted to Me

For Beverly (2005) in Saavedra (2011) what testimonio intends is not only to push the *subaltern* to expose the struggle which he/she has been subjected to but the actions that takes to overcome hardship. In a similar vein, Giroux (2010) asks: how do we make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative? Relying on these reflections, I knew that I didn’t want to continue crying over spilled milk thinking “that teachers are always handcuffed to take actions”. Therefore, in an attempt to always *teach with an attitude* I want to share in the next lines what my students achieved as a result of my commitment and their own willingness to embrace new ideas.

I usually accompany students for a period of six weeks which is the time allotted by the institution where I work to teach each English level. Thus, I have six weeks to open class spaces for students to reflect upon issues of wider social interest and draw connections with their own lives. So far I have had both, several positive and few less successful stories. Undeniably, I am interested in foregrounding the social issues that surround our situated realities, but in no way I want to particularly indoctrinate students to think or act as I want (something that Freire (2000) warned but that has also been a criticism to CP; see for example Jeyaraj & Harland, 2016). I give them options but they can also propose their own the ideas and work on what they feel most comfortable with.

Drawing on Kachru (1994) I have come to understand that learners can’t be idealized as striving to achieve the native-like standards of communication/competence. I am now more aware that learners come to class with their life stories, limitations, strengths, and interests as learners. I know that in their emerging repertoire code-mixing is ok and I shouldn’t feel intimidated by monolingual biases. They won’t take over. I am not constructing students as “failed native speakers” anymore (Cook, 1999). I got to understand that learners are basically becoming users of the language (L2 users) and they have the right to do so in their way. Actually, their uses of the L2 hardly ever correspond to monolinguals’ use of the L2 (Cook, 2002). Having said that, the examples showcased here are taken from learners who were in their first English level and agreed to participate in this story.

#### 4. The Case of Students in English One

While lesson planning, I reflected that the reading activity (Figure 1) is intended to expand students' grammar knowledge of the *past tense verb to be* and is also meant to develop the reading skill. The biographies of British characters: King Henry VIII, actress Elena Bonham Carter and the Brontë family are shown. Some comprehension questions are asked.



**READING**

a Look at three more pictures from the National Portrait Gallery. Do you know who the people are or anything about them?

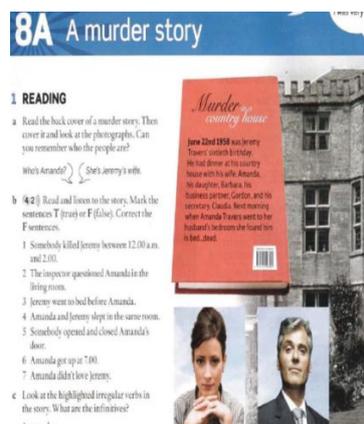
b 47 Read and listen to three audio guide extracts. Check your answers to a.

1 Henry VIII was born in 1491. He was King of England from 1509 to 1547 and is famous for separating the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church, and for his six wives. When he was young, as in this picture, he was very strong and good looking; he was an excellent sportsman, and was also a good musician and poet. However, in his old age he was very fat and always in pain.

2 The Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, were born between 1816 and 1820 in a small village in the north of England. They were

Figure 1. Book Material

Figure 2 is an excerpt of a lesson which introduces students to a murder story within a British upper class family and the different reports of the suspects. The first activity is intended to make students listen to the story for comprehension and note-take details of the story and second to introduce them to the past tense irregular verbs.



**8A A murder story**

**READING**

a Read the back cover of a murder story. Then cover it and look at the photographs. Can you remember who the people are? Who's Amanda? She's Jeremy's wife.

b 42 Read and listen to the story. Mark the sentences T (true) or F (false). Correct the F sentences.

- 1 Somebody killed Jeremy between 12:00 a.m. and 2:00.
- 2 The inspector questioned Amanda in the living room.
- 3 Jeremy went to bed before Amanda.
- 4 Amanda and Jeremy sleep in the same room.
- 5 Somebody opened and closed Amanda's door.
- 6 Amanda got up at 7:00.
- 7 Amanda didn't love Jeremy.

c Look at the highlighted irregular verbs in the story. What are the infinitives? ...

Figure 2. Book Material

What I just described is apparent at the surface level. However, considering the situatedness of the local, historical, political and personal lives of my students, the activities lagged behind to account for or foster social transformation of any sort. The ideology of the book having neutral content actually conceals another agenda which, to my knowledge, is intended to sustain the White, European persons

as models. More specifically the models of the white British person, in the case of picture one historical, artistic and literary characters while in the second case a personal account of a family event that does not connect in any way with students' past, present or future. In short, a lesson that looks unproblematic and neutral but that can be problematized within the frames of CP.

In contrast, when I asked students if they wanted to draft, prepare, and socialize biographies of their relevant ones or crimes that for them had had any sort of impact or importance, they positively responded with ideas, artifacts and small group dialogues in which they actively engaged in asking, answering and sharing. Their identities as historical, social, professional beings began to emerge not only with the selection of their topics but as they engaged in conversation with the other students.



**Figure 3. Jesus' Work**

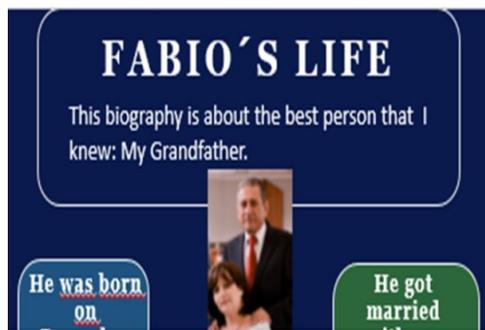
In this testimony, I want to voice my students as well in order to document evidence of my own transformation as a teacher and how it could be reflected in my students' own work. Jesus, for example is a social studies teacher who introduced himself the first day of class as being not very able to speak in English, actually not having graduated from his undergrad school because of not having complied with the English level requirement. He confessed being more engaged with the French culture because according to him "they have given us the poetry and the laws". He decided to share his work on the Colombia's historical crime of the Paramilitary in the South of Colombia. Self-assessing his project preparation and presentation Jesus, aged 32, explained:

"Me sentí muy motivado y retado frente a la investigación y la construcción de la presentación en inglés. Mis retos fueron traducir palabras muy propias del conflicto colombiano. No cuento con ayudas tecnológicas así que hice el 90% con ayuda del diccionario. La construcción gramatical del pasado aún me cuesta...Quiero escribir un documento investigativo sobre el impacto de las AUC en el desarrollo de las comunidades del pacífico en INGLÉS".

"I felt very motivated and challenged regarding the research and construction of the presentation in English. My challenges were to translate words, very specific words of the Colombian conflict. I don't have technological aids so I relied 90% on the dictionary. The grammar construction of past is still difficult for me... I want to write a research paper about the impact of the paramilitary

forces in the development of the Pacific region communities in ENGLISH”.

Engineer Jenny, who had studied some English courses before starting level 1 in the language school, always showed very positive attitude towards participating in the class activities and actually demonstrated much progress and commitment to her English language development. She chose to document the biography of her deceased grandfather.

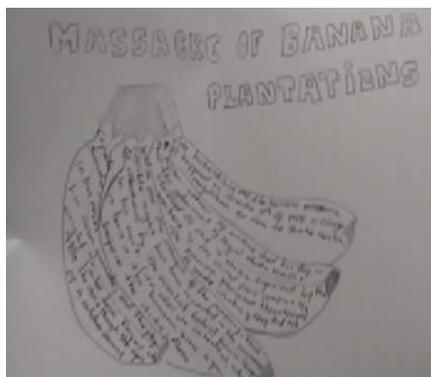


**Figure 4. Jenny's Work**

When explaining her learnings, Jenny, 27, said:

“Con el proyecto recordé muchas cosas de la vida de mi abuelo. Me sentí agradecida por la bendición de haberlo conocido, también muy agradecida por la oportunidad de aprender inglés de una manera muy entretenida y útil ya que me sirvió también para enriquecer mi historia familiar. Me encantó compartirlo con mis compañeros ya que cada vez que hablamos pierdo un poco más el miedo y fue interesante escucharlos y aprender acerca de otras personas o acontecimientos importantes”.

“With the project I remembered many things about my grandpa's life. I felt thankful for the blessing of having met him. I also felt thankful for the opportunity of learning English in such an entertaining and useful way as it allowed me enrich my family history. I loved sharing with my classmates because each time we speak I lose the fear [of speaking] and it was interesting to listen to them and learn about other people or important happenings”.

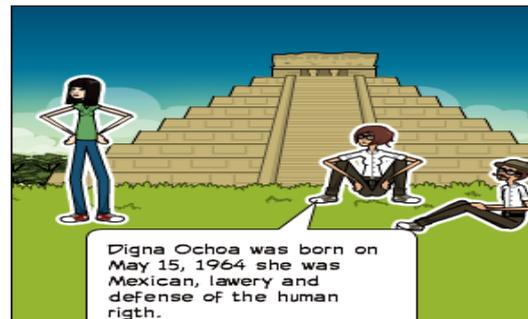


**Figure 5. David's Work**

Engineering student and employee David, 22, was repeating level 1 and felt a lot better now that, according to him, comprehended much more the grammar structures of past. He participated more in comparison to his previous course and managed to use more complex structures. When he reflected upon his work regarding the Massacre of the Bananas Plantation in Colombia, he explained:

“La actividad me pareció interactiva y muy dinámica ya que no proponía la típica exposición de pararse al frente y hablar como un robot. Si me gustó y me parece debemos tener más actividades como esta, también poder escoger el tema me parece bien para tener más gusto a la hora de hacerlo”.

“The activity looked very interactive and dynamic as it didn’t propose the usual presentation of standing in front of the class and talk like a robot. I liked it and I think we should do more activities like this. Also, being able to select the topic looks good in order to choose keenly when we carry the activity out”.



**Figure 6. Valeria’s Work**

Valeria, 18, soon to study political science, described herself as being “negada para el ingles” (hopeless for English) at the beginning of the class. She felt that she could understand a bit more as the classes progressed and could actually converse about a woman who called profoundly her attention. Regarding this, Valeria commented:

“Pues de los trabajos que más me llamó la atención fue ese porque fue algo distinto, que me dio a conocer algo innovador que fue a Digna y lo que más recuerdo es como la asesinaron a ella y de la impunidad que tuvo ese caso en México”.

“So, one of the assignments that called my attention the most was that one. Because it was something different, it led me to know something innovative which was Digna [‘s life], and what I remember the most is how she was killed and the impunity that such case had in Mexico”.

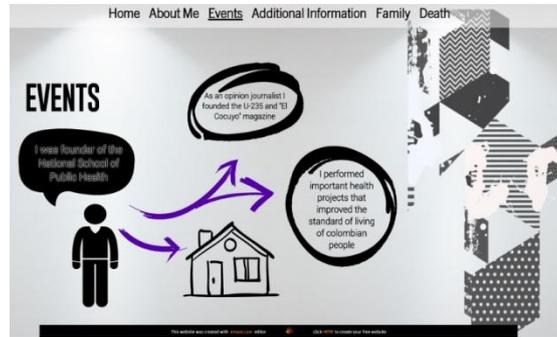


Figure 7. Yuri's Work

Yuri, 20, engineering student, when asked to self-assess her project, she said:

“Aprend í más sobre la vida de Hector Abad Gómez, las cosas que hizo mientras viv í y que sin importar la intención de otras personas por coaccionarnos, lo que importa es la dedicación y el esfuerzo por cumplir nuestras metas y objetivos. Me gustó hablar en inglés, porque una de las cosas que más me gusta es leer en dicho idioma. Siento que he mejorado lectura y escritura”.

“I learned more about Hector Abad Gomez' life. The things he did when he lived and that no matter what intentions other people have to coerce us, what matters is the devotion and effort to achieve our goals and objectives. I liked to speak in English, because one of the things that I like the most is reading in that language. I feel I have improved reading and writing”.

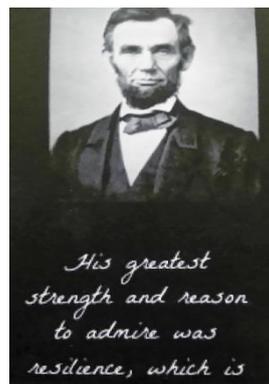


Figure 8. Alberto' Work

However, as I mentioned before, CP can have successful and less successful results. Alberto, 13, 8<sup>th</sup> grader, decided to investigate about his own interests but did not enjoy the talking activities at all. Had this been in another epoch of my life I would have seen this student as lazy, antisocial, probably failed but now I can't disengage myself from some circumstances such as the fact that he is in his teens; probably he might not be interested in being constructed by me as a knowledgeable, cooperative or willing student. I am aware that he is negotiating his different identities his own way.

When Freire (1994) said: “Otro testimonio que no debe faltar en nuestras relaciones con los alumnos es el de la permanente disposición en favor de la justicia, de la libertad, del derecho a ser” (p. 84). I came

to reflect that the student has the right to be as he is and does not need to meet my expectations. I am thankful that he overtly expressed his opinion and helped me question my certainties, because this is a chance to see how the classroom reality deals with different subjectivities that call for a place. He explained:

“Aprendí acerca de la vida y muerte de varias personas; no me gusta el proyecto porque no me gustan las presentaciones”.

“I learned about the life and death of different people, but I don’t like presentations”.

Despite this, I still believe that *teaching with an attitude*, is to transcend the mere mechanistic routines of language classrooms and the taken for granted myths of the ELT profession that many non-native English speaker teachers have swallowed uncritically and that students incorporate in their own repertoires. Through the different ideas expressed by the learners here, they showed that their learning experiences transcended the code and evolved to creating meaning in the language, problematizing historical accounts or giving meaning through experiences that related to them in situated practices as professionals, members of a family or citizens.

The *critical* also opens rooms for spontaneous interaction in the classrooms and opportunities to diversify the perspectives towards very monolithic topics, even to dig into *folk theories* or “beliefs and attitudes towards language by non-linguists” (Niedzielski & Princeton, 2009, p. 356).

For example, in the first day of class with my level 1 students, I introduced the contents, evaluation system, and class policies (as mandated by the Western University canon). Our interaction was in Spanish so that everything was clear. I asked them if they had any questions. One girl raised her hand and said: “Yes, teacher... what English are you going to teach us?” I said: “what do you mean?” She replied: “yes, American, British accent?” My answer was: “I’m going to teach you with my Colombian English, because I have Colombian accent. I think we all have accents in English and mine is Colombian”. My students showed some surprise and bewilderment. I went on to say: “Guys... we have learned that teachers have American or British accent but the truth is that in the world there are many accents in English, consider for example people who live in Africa, say for example Nigeria, they speak English but they have a specific accent, Nigerian accent”.

My students were then a bit pensive and I as well, because for the first time ever I had said something that was not politically correct regarding accents, but that opened the students’ eyes to other ways of seeing the English language world. Then I reflected that what Motha (2004) had said, made sense when stating that “In English classrooms in the US and the world, ideas about what constitutes English remain surprisingly static despite the language transnational reach and the multiplicity of forms under which it appears” (p. 109).

All in all, what I want to convey with this testimony is that teaching with an attitude also entails unmasking fixed truths in ELT that conceal interests, fixed views of learners and language users in general and the seemingly apolitical nature of education. Teaching with an attitude suggests that we go beyond dilemmas of mechanical order to those of moral order as the ones proposed by Tom (1987)

such as moving from questions like a) “How can I develop learning environments which entice youngsters to want to learn a particular topic or skill?” or b) How can I both move the classroom group along and respond to the interests of particular individuals?” to “Is a particular topic significant enough for me to compel a youngster to learn it?”, “When I do limit the freedom of my students or manipulate them, are there substantial educational reasons for these actions and not just an unconscious desire on my part to have power over other people?” (p. 14).

I acknowledge that being a critical thinker is like pulling teeth. It entails an intellectual, a moral, even a physical effort basically because preparing a lesson is not only about teaching proper grammar but learning with others how to live better in this ever changing and puzzling world. Following Foucault (1970) in Alcoff (2013), science advances when there are breaks or moments in which we deviate from conventional understandings. In ELT, a break entails, for instance, giving a look at textbooks searching for its normalizing discourses and thinking of the twist, the disruption, and how to tackle it.

As a teacher, I took what Ramanathan (2002) calls “a defamiliarizing stance” (p. 18) toward my profession, especially here a *defamiliarization* with the textbook and my traditional teaching practices. I know that distancing, as Ramanathan acknowledges may be problematic, probably fake or provisional because ELT, as a discipline, has not historically been critical, at all. Still, I embarked on CP and it has been so refreshing. I borrow from Frost (1920) that I have walked the road less travelled by and to me it has all made a difference. I wish this testimonio didn’t just finish here without the contributions by readers who would like to engage in dialogue replying with any insights to this polyphonic text constructed here. It would be very healthful and enlightening para la construcción de saberes desde lo local (for the construction of knowledges from the local standpoint) and for the dismantling of Western ways of doing research, that other voices were also heard because voice is not the privilege of a few.

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## Note

Note 1. This paper was the outcome of my process as a student in the seminar of Critical Pedagogy in the Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. Bogotá Colombia.