

Critical Citizens for an Intercultural World. Foreign Language Education as Cultural Politics. Manuela Guilherme. ICE

María del Carmen Méndez García
Universidad de Jaén

Critical Citizens for an Intercultural World constitutes an essential reading for foreign language educators, policy makers and researchers willing to plunge into the intricacies of foreign language and culture learning as a markedly social and political phenomenon.

The author's starting point is the conception of education as the best social tool for change and progress. The theoretical foundations are laid in the first two chapters where the impressive theoretical and bibliographical apparatus displayed all over the book is at its best.

The solid argument of the first chapter reveals the interconnection between Critical Pedagogy and both, Cultural Politics and Foreign Language Education. The reader is invited to reflect upon the politically-bound nature of the education process and the role played by schools as institutions for fostering critical and action-taking citizens. Critical Pedagogy, which has to be interpreted as the background for critical cultural awareness in foreign language and culture education, is viewed as paving the way for the development of a new model of an 'intellectual and transformative' (22) educator.

The second chapter focuses on the philosophical foundations for Critical Cultural Awareness on the basis of Critical Theory and Postmodernism. Critical Theory's instrumental dimension is discharged in favour of a more critical/intersubjective rationality in the communicative process. Postmodernism is here looked at in the interesting shift it implies in the redefinition of the traditional canon. Cultural identity and difference and the concept of citizenship become key aspects in establishing bonds between postmodernism and critical cultural awareness. Critical Theory and Modernism have a relevant role in Critical Pedagogy; society is complex and multilayered and new approaches are needed that allow the approximation to its heterogeneity.

The third chapter, the Critical Dimension in Foreign Culture Education, is built upon the theoretical considerations brilliantly expressed before. The author encourages the reader to analyse the critical dimension in foreign culture education and states that it should indeed be at the heart of foreign language and culture education. The chapter opens with a series of principles suggested for Foreign Culture Education. Then, the notion of an 'Intercultural Speaker' is discussed in terms of Cultural Identity. Particularly revealing is the review of the critical dimension in models for Intercultural Communicative Competence that follows. Finally, the author discusses the Political Dimension of Foreign Language/Culture Education, emphasising cultural politics and citizenship education.

Chapter four is a turning-point since it links Critical Pedagogy, Critical Cultural Awareness and Foreign Language/Culture Education. It is based on a report of part of a study carried out in EFL classes in Portugal which analysed teachers' practices regarding critical cultural awareness. The methodology employed is a combination of questionnaires, focus-groups and individual interviews. Interesting conclusions on the status of critical cultural awareness in the EFL class in Portugal can be drawn. The author concludes that in spite of teachers' willingness to include cultural content in their language classes, Portuguese teachers have not managed yet to 'fulfil their roles as transformative intellectuals' (204) because they are not committed to the transformation of society, their teaching excluding action.

Similar studies carried out in Spain suggest that foreign language teachers are willing to incorporate the cultural component in the foreign language class, even though they do not exactly know how to carry it out due, among other factors, to an obvious lack of tuition in their teacher training programmes. Additionally, teachers' main role in Spain is still felt to be a facilitator and informant rather than a transformative intellectual. Like their Portuguese counterparts, Spanish educators appear to underestimate their powerful position in society.

The book culminates in a concluding chapter in which the most relevant tenets and findings expressed in the foregoing four chapters are put together with the view of Preparing Critical Citizens and Educators for an Intercultural World, a highly interesting chapter for those willing to understand the all-important role foreign language education plays in the intercultural sphere and in citizenship education.

The authors' excessive zeal for promoting critical and transformational professionals may, sometimes, give the impression that no single current practice is valid or worth being kept. Her emphasis on the need for deconstruction seems to advocate, in the same way, a radical rather than a gradual change. Educators find their transformative dimension difficult to implement because they work for a specific educational and political system they are required, willingly or unwillingly, to perpetuate to some extent. There are likewise other hindering elements such as the school material and professional environment. Change is desirable and inevitable, although the speed and rate of change does not, as I see it, depend on them as much as Guilherme seems to suggest.

The density of the first two chapters could partly have been avoided, because some of the key aspects are introduced and dealt with in both of them. Similarly, the third chapter would have benefited from a more extensive discussion of the diverse models of Intercultural Communicative Competence. Guilherme's fourth chapter concentrates on a few aspects of a more wide-ranging study; it would have been interesting to have access to the whole study on Portuguese FL teachers and their critical cultural awareness.

From my point of view, though, *Critical Citizens for an Intercultural World* constitutes an example of a well-knit work which helps the reader to consider education, in general, and foreign language education, in particular, in a new light, that of the transformative individual/professional Guilherme adopts from Giroux. No doubt, one becomes aware of the multidimensional meaning of the word 'critical' and the action-taking and transformative stances it implies. Even though the focus on foreign language education may seem somehow

indirect in the first two chapters, foreign language educators will find the last three chapters especially relevant. The valuable link established between foreign language education and Critical Cultural Awareness and the framework chosen for its representation explores new paths in foreign language education that should be espoused by present and prospective foreign language and culture educators. This book, no doubt, should be on their reading list.