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Special Issue

Critical Pedagogies and the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages in Dangerous Times

Guest Editor:
Panayota Gounari

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

It is my distinct pleasure to start off the academic year 2020-2021 with this special issue, *Critical Pedagogies and the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages in Dangerous Times*, guest edited by Panayota Gounari, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, specialized in language policy, critical discourse analysis, and critical pedagogy. I have long been eager to bring to the attention of both practitioners and researchers in Applied Linguistics the dynamic and politically engaged field of Critical Pedagogy.

In 2007, the journal *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* ran a special issue, *Critical approaches to world language education in the United States*, guest edited by Ryuko Kubota and Theresa Austin. This issue first drew my attention to the fact that foreign language education was being conceptualized from a different angle than usual. In 2012, a new journal, founded by David Gramling and Chantelle Warner, *Critical Multilingualism Studies*, responded to the need to focus critically on the increasingly multilingual nature of foreign language education. Since then, there has been a growing awareness among language educators of the political nature of language education and applied linguistics, as evidenced by such titles as: *Decolonizing foreign language education* (Macedo 2019), *Language as symbolic power* (Kramsch, 2020), *Translanguaging and epistemological decentering in higher education and research* (Bojsen et al, forthcoming), and *Applied Linguistics and politics* (Chun forthcoming). Today, with the social, cultural, economic and health crises we face worldwide, language teachers are urged once again to go beyond grammar and vocabulary, and to take the opportunities offered by on-line classes to reflect critically with their students on the political repercussions of COVID19. But what is meant by “critical pedagogy”?

Originally inspired by the work of John Dewey in the United States and Paolo Freire in Brazil, Critical Pedagogy scholars have long sought to raise the social and political consciousness of students regarding social and economic inequalities in society. Professor Gounari's enlightening Introduction gives a good sense of the depth and breadth of the field and of its relevance to language teachers and learners at the university level.

Critical pedagogy owes a great deal to Critical Theory. Critical Theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it [. . .] Critical Pedagogy has been interchangeably used with: critical thinking, criticality, critical literacy, social justice, critical consciousness, critical awareness; but also with developing social and cultural empathy (as critical thinking), linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies, and

critical inquiry. I propose a definition where “critical” must necessarily a) be political, in the ways I discussed earlier b) be historically anchored c) be socially situated and d) have concrete content and a clear pedagogical and political project for transformation [. . .] While the goal of critical thinking is problem solving and appropriate decision making, the goal of critical pedagogy is human agency and sociopolitical transformation. (Gounari, Introduction)

As Gounari explains, Critical Pedagogy is not a teaching methodology to be implemented in different contexts. It is a different framework for the creation of curricula, materials and lesson plans – an opportunity to see and understand the world differently. Up to now, Critical Pedagogy has been thought of mainly for teaching reading and writing literacy to underprivileged youth and learners from “oppressed” minority groups. To what extent it can be used in the teaching and learning of foreign, second and heritage languages at institutions of higher learning is a challenge that needs to be “explored, owned and reinvented.” This special issue picks up the challenge and gives us much food for thought in these dangerous times.

The *L2 Journal* will be celebrating its 10th anniversary with a Roundtable which the Berkeley Language Center has graciously agreed to host online on Friday October 9, 2020 from 3-6pm on the topic: “What should form the knowledge base of foreign language teachers in higher education?” This will be an opportunity to cast a critical look at what we are in the business of teaching as we start a new decade. The discussion will be conducted by language educators from various language departments and by members of the journal’s editorial team. It will be moderated by Prof. Rick Kern, editor of the Instructors’ Perspectives section of the Journal.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Emily Linares, who has been the superb Managing Editor of this journal over the last three years, and to introduce our new manager, Dr. Mark Kaiser, Associate Director of the Berkeley Language Center and founder of *Lumière*, a film streaming service at UC Berkeley. Mark and I will be working together to shepherd the *L2 Journal* into this third decade of the 21st century.

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