

Drama in Education as a Form of Critical Pedagogy: Democratising Classrooms in Chile

[CATALINA VILLANUEVA](#)

UNIVERSIDAD DE CHILE

[CARMEL O'SULLIVAN](#)

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

ABSTRACT

Drama in Education (DiE) is a valuable site for the practice of critical pedagogy. However, there is little research that explores the critical potential of drama as a methodology for teaching and learning across the curriculum in a Latin American context. This study analyses the critical pedagogical potential of DiE for the practices of Chilean teachers. Findings revealed that for most teachers, learning about DiE strengthened their critical pedagogical mission. Teachers recognised DiE's potential for democratising their classrooms. However, teachers also identified difficulties in the application of DiE, citing motivating equal participation in students, identifying drama strategies that best suited curricular aims, and insufficient time for reflection as particular challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Chilean education is recognised as an example of a market-oriented educational system (Bellei, Cabalin, & Orellana, 2014). In the 1980s, the dictatorial government of the time introduced neoliberal policies directed towards the decentralisation and privatisation of education, establishing a system regulated by the logic of supply, demand and competition, rather than social justice and equity (Corvalán, 2013).

These market-oriented policies enhanced socioeconomic school segregation, discrimination and inequality (Valenzuela et al., 2013; Bellei et al., 2014). The strong neoliberal orientation of the Chilean educational system and its negative social impact were denounced by Chilean people through recurrent protests beginning in the mid-2000s (González López & Parra Moreno, 2016). These protests, led by secondary and tertiary level students, demanded that education be understood as a basic universal right rather than as an individual commodity. A former president, Michelle Bachelet, developed educational reforms in 2014 that appeared to support a move away from a heavy market orientation in education. However, these reforms were received unfavourably by some who saw it as grounded on market-oriented narratives (López & Medrano, 2017). The unfairness of the educational system contributed to kindling the revolution on October 18th 2019, to which the current government of Sebastián Piñera responded with harsh repressive measures, resulting in the violation of human rights (OACNUDH, 2019). This social revolt led to a referendum where an overwhelming majority of Chileans voted to write a new Constitution that will replace the one written during the dictatorship which promoted a subsidiary rather than a well-being state (Watson, 2020).

Against this background, an examination of alternative approaches to pedagogy that challenge neoliberal conceptions of education appears necessary. Recognising that one of the tasks of critical pedagogy is to make schools “safe from the baneful influence of market logics” (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p. 28), it seems pressing to inquire into teaching and learning methods that may help Chilean teachers bring this paradigm into their classrooms.

Critical pedagogy is presented as a heterogeneous educational movement committed to emancipatory social change and a just distribution of power (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). Despite its longstanding presence in education, there are some who believe that

critical pedagogy has remained in the academy, emphasising theory over practice, and failing to reach a general teacher audience (Teemant, Leland, & Berghoff, 2014). In responding to mid-twentieth century social movements such as feminist, African, Native American, Aboriginal, disabled civil rights, and gay and lesbian rights, critical pedagogues are now interplaying with multiple postdiscourses around transformative identity (gendered, racial, social, temporal, cultural, etc.) to change the conditions of the oppressed, disadvantaged and marginalised. Such multiple perspectives problematize original theories on critical pedagogy, causing the movement to transform and ramify. Therefore, there is a need to discuss alternative and critical pedagogies in contextualised ways, exploring different approaches to bring them into practice, whilst acknowledging that consequent tensions and problems might arise in that practice.

Drama and theatre education has long been identified as a valuable site for critical pedagogy (Doyle, 1993). While some scholarship developed in recent years analysing this in more depth (Freebody & Finneran, 2016; O'Connor, 2013), limited research is available that focuses on a Latin American context. Moreover, there is a scarcity of studies on critical pedagogy and Drama in Education (DiE), understood in the context of this article as a methodology for teaching and learning across the curriculum (Ackroyd, 2007).

In this article, we report on a 15-hour Teacher Professional Development (TPD) workshop using DiE as a form of critical pedagogy, undertaken by teachers in a Chilean school. Although the main study was much larger, our focus here is on teachers' experiences of being introduced to DiE strategies which were developed on the other side of the world by renowned European drama pioneers. Specifically, we wanted to explore these teachers' evaluation of the TPD sessions and whether they saw potential in DiE as a form of critical pedagogy in their classrooms.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND DRAMA IN EDUCATION

A crucial first step in this inquiry was to clarify what we understood by critical pedagogy. This was a challenging task considering the prolific body of literature which has developed around this educational paradigm. But in spite of its heterogeneity, we were able to identify

shared principles in Paulo Freire's oeuvre and in more recently published articles on critical pedagogy (see Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2019). The most fundamental of these is a transformative aim towards social justice. While some commentators question its effectiveness to provoke tangible social change (Rouhani, 2012), we argue that it can, at the very least, present teachers with a valuable framework through which to question the political role of education, highlighting possibilities to act as social agents in promoting social justice. Based on neo-Marxist critical theory, critical pedagogues understand society as a network of power relationships that result in the oppression of certain groups (McLaren, 2008). In this context, education is not neutral, but reflects a selection of knowledge coherent with dominant ideologies. Consequently, schools are spaces where social injustices can be reproduced, but also where they can be resisted and transformed (Giroux, 1985).

At a classroom level, critical pedagogues contest what Freire termed a "banking model" of education (Freire, 2000, p. 71). In that model, teachers are the holders of valid knowledge, while students are empty vessels to be filled. A hierarchy between standard knowledge and everyday knowledge is thus perpetuated, establishing a vertical, authoritarian relationship between teacher and students. In contrast, critical pedagogues promote a democratic model. This implies a valorisation of the students' lived experience and interests, which are integrated into the learning process. Instead of teacher-monologue, a dialogue is fostered where knowledge is constructed collaboratively and where both teacher and pupils learn (Shor & Freire, 1987). Through critical dialogue, students can be empowered to question knowledge and their taken-for-granted views of the world. However, critical pedagogy's principles are not unproblematic. The feasibility of creating a dialogic space where all involved can participate equally is challenged by some (Bali, 2014; Ellsworth, 1989). For these authors, critical dialogue can actually become repressive rather than liberating in certain contexts, particularly in multicultural classrooms where competing worldviews exist.

While some writers argue that the act of disrupting the verticality of the teacher-student relationship can "be an act of social justice itself" (Breunig, 2009, p. 255), for most, the purpose of dialogical approaches is to promote *conscientization* or critical consciousness (Chubbuck, 2007). Advanced by Freire (1973), conscientization refers to the ability

of critically analysing reality and our possibilities of transforming it. It implies becoming “aware of the various levels of power and privilege operating on, in, and through different aspects of [our] lives” (King-White, 2012, p. 390), as well as our means for altering oppressive ideologies and practices. Conscientization is, therefore, related to notions of critical thinking and empowerment and it entails a problematization of curriculum contents so that social justice issues can be addressed (Horton & Freire, 1990). Again, this concept is challenged by some, who have denounced its paternalistic and indoctrinating potential (Ellsworth, 1989; Greenhalgh-Spencer, 2014). From a postmodern stance, these authors question the teacher’s entitlement to determine what counts as just, challenging meta-narratives of social justice. However, others respond to this criticism by arguing that if moral principles rest on too relative grounds it becomes impossible to name social injustice, and critical pedagogy’s emancipatory aim can be neutralised (Chubbuck, 2007).

Based on these principles, we explored seminal writers on DiE. Referring to a commonly perceived symbiosis between DiE and critical pedagogy, Grady (2003) highlighted the dangers of establishing “accidental” alliances in the field (p. 79). She noted a patronising potential in critical pedagogy and therefore called for rigorous reflection on the aims and ideologies underlying our practices. In this study we attempt to embrace Grady’s clarion call, acknowledging that there are no intrinsic qualities to DiE per se, but rather “it is what we do, through our own human agency, with drama that determines the specific pedagogy and specific powers” of the medium (Neelands, 2004, p. 48). Adhering to critical pedagogy’s transformative goals, but aware of the need for constant reflection, we embarked on an analysis of the writings of a sample of DiE pioneers from the anglophone world (Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O’Neill and Jonothan Neelands) with the aim of exploring the connections between their theories and critical pedagogy. We hoped to identify potential opportunities and challenges for the subsequent application of DiE as a form of critical pedagogy in Chilean classrooms. Although O’Neill and, especially Neelands, aim explicitly at transforming social injustice through DiE (Neelands & O’Connor, 2010; Taylor & Warner, 2006), all four pioneers agree that effecting transformation is a primordial goal in drama. In addition, they share a belief that the creation of democratic classrooms is fundamental to DiE. Basing learning on students’ lived

experience is advocated by all. They are also adamant about the capacity of drama to subvert the traditionally vertical teacher-student relationships, particularly through the 'teacher-in-role' strategy, where a teacher assumes a role from within the fiction and interacts with students usually framed in a collective role. Moreover, dialogue is central to the work of these pioneering drama educators. This is illustrated in O'Neill's (Taylor & Warner, 2006) characterisation of drama as "a model for authentic classroom dialogue" (p. 112) because of its collective and inquiry-driven nature. Involving students emotionally and intellectually, verbally and physically, is understood as increasing the chances of creating an accessible space for equal participation in DiE. However, the varied forms of engagement that drama offers can pose challenges to realising critical dialogue in classrooms (Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2020).

In DiE teachers facilitate students to challenge and question their previous perceptions of the world, provoking changes in understanding, which could potentially lead to conscientization. However, the dramatic experience does not lend itself easily to pre-established goals. O'Neill (1995), for example, is clear that a lack of flexibility over learning goals in drama can hinder possibilities for discovery. Bolton similarly remarks that "while it is possible to indicate the door that is being opened by the play or the classroom drama sequence, one cannot specify what any one individual will learn, or even guarantee that s/he will go through that door!" (Bolton & Davis, 2010, p. 52). So even when an educator might plan a drama with the aim of developing students' critical awareness about a particular theme, there are no assurances that the fluid dramatic experience will result in the achievement of such goals. This is due to the extent of the creative responsibility that students have over the development of the dramatic journey, especially in process-drama approaches (O'Neill, 1995). Arguably, this could make DiE less effective in the pursuit of critical pedagogical goals. However, applying critical pedagogy through DiE may help avoid risks relating to indoctrination, as the teacher appears to have less control over the destiny of the lesson than in more traditional approaches.

In terms of the role of the teacher in regulating the moral compass of the dramatic experience, there are some differences amongst these pioneers. For Heathcote (1991), students "must forge their own truths for themselves" (p. 70), without being encumbered, at least at an

earlier stage in the dramatic work, by their teacher's moral judgements. This view seems more aligned with postmodern voices in the critical pedagogy literature that challenge the universalising and paternalistic potential of the paradigm. Neelands (2005), on the other hand, seems to hold a stricter view, believing that teachers should have "no concerns about either banning, or confounding, prejudicial images and characterisation" (p. 61). For him, an excessively non-interventionist teacher stance can actually reproduce oppressive behaviour and opinions in the classroom. The modern/postmodern debate evident in the literature emerges again in relation to the level of moral guidance, if any, that teachers should/could pursue in drama education. However, there is consensus in the field that as human beings have agency, it is our role and responsibility as drama educators to facilitate this ability to actively resist and critique the failure of society to serve large diverse populations who remain marginalized and exploited.

In a country and continent where inequality rages (Aste Leiva, 2020), we were keen to explore whether drama could provide a forum to explore social justice issues through a critical pedagogical lens, and how best we might do that whilst working within the demands of busy school schedules. As drama is mostly limited to extra-curricular spaces in Chilean schools, teachers are generally unaware of drama's potential as a teaching and learning methodology (Aguilar & Arias, 2008). Indeed, Chilean teachers' lack of awareness of DiE makes sense in view of its origins in the Anglophone world (O'Toole, 1992), where most of its theory is written in English. A crucial aim therefore of this TPD programme was to make this body of knowledge accessible to Chilean teachers through an extended in-school workshop.

METHODOLOGY

In this study we adopted a case-study methodology within an overall qualitative approach. This responded to our philosophical assumptions as researchers and our goal of including the views of the various actors involved in the phenomenon under study. We did not aim at producing generalisable conclusions. Instead, we intended to understand the phenomenon in its particularity. Adhering to a critical educational research paradigm (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011), we pursued catalytic validity to motivate teachers in becoming

more aware of their transformative power (Lather, 1986). The case, a school in Santiago, Chile, welcomed the project, and offered a unique setting: a secular, co-educational school comprising pre-school, primary, and secondary levels. Funding was provided by the State and from a private managing body, and students paid no tuition fees. When the fieldwork took place (2016-2017), over 80% of the school's student population (approx. 450) was considered vulnerable because of their low socioeconomic status. Students had low attendance rates, high attrition, and low academic achievement. The school's mission was to educate individuals who are "socially committed, critical and responsible towards the transformation of reality" (Mission Statement, n.d., *our translation*). At the time of the fieldwork, the school was attempting to concretise a recently adopted critical pedagogical ethos. However, they were experiencing challenges, such as reluctance by some teachers to embrace the paradigm, and considerable student apathy (Interview, Head of Teaching Staff). Therefore, school management reported being keen to explore practical ways of supporting staff's enactment of critical pedagogy in classrooms.

In response, a 15-hour workshop on DiE as a form of critical pedagogy was facilitated by Dr Catalina Villanueva (first author) with the 15 teachers who signed up to participate. Following that, eight of those teachers volunteered to coplan and coteach with Catalina over a 9-week period, applying what they had learnt in the workshop to their own classroom. In this article, we focus on their responses to the workshop component of the TPD programme.

Methods for gathering data included participant and non-participant observation, interviews, document analysis, audio and video recording, questionnaires, and drama conventions. Data were gathered from the 15 teachers, the Principal and the Head of Teaching Staff. Ethical permission to conduct this research was granted by Trinity College Dublin, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

SETTING THE SCENE

A diverse group of teachers participated in the workshop from across the school (see figures 1 and 2). We note that Drama is not a subject on the curriculum in Chile.

Baseline data revealed a common tendency towards critical

pedagogy in teachers' thinking, particularly in their student-centred inclinations and in their general support of social justice, conscientization, and transformation as educational aims. However, according to baseline observations, only a third reported being familiar with critical pedagogy, and the majority did not see themselves as critical pedagogues. This reflects the broader context in Chile where educational theory and practice is closer aligned with a constructivist rather than a critical paradigm. Efforts to democratise their classrooms were visible in a majority of teachers' lessons, however, only a few provoked a critical reflection of students' previous experiences, and fewer still established explicit links between curricular contents and

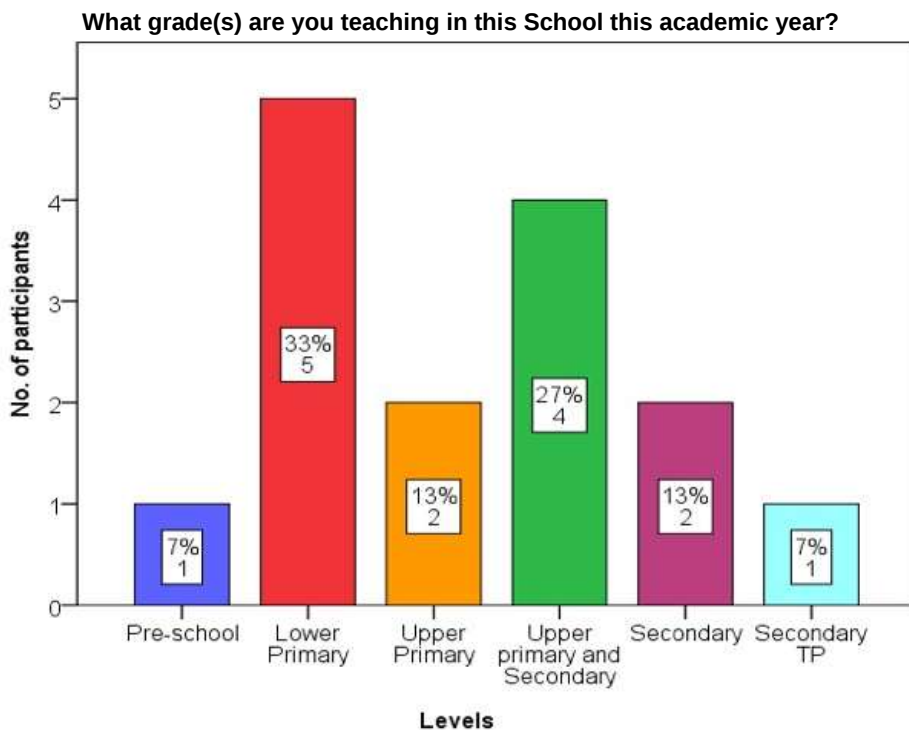


Figure 1. Grades taught by teachers

What subject(s) do you teach in this School this academic year?

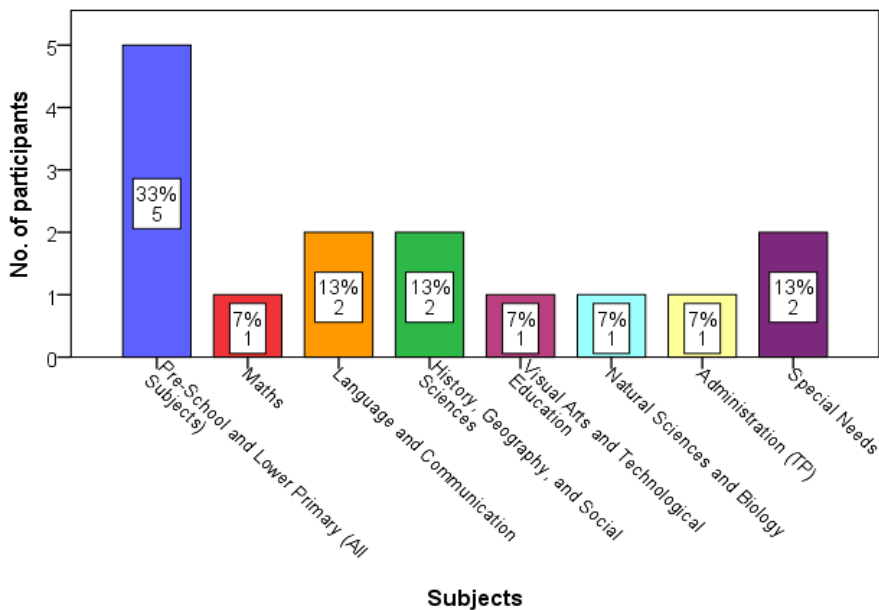


Figure 2. Subject areas taught by teachers

social justice issues. Taken together, the data suggested that critical pedagogy was not being strongly enacted in these teachers' practices despite its adoption as the school ethos. In addition, baseline data revealed teachers had little or no previous knowledge of DiE.

THE DRAMA IN EDUCATION WORKSHOP

The workshop was designed to introduce teachers to basic principles and practices about DiE, promoting exploration of the critical possibilities, and potential challenges of using several DiE strategies advanced by renowned figures in the field. The sessions followed an experiential format meaning that Catalina modelled demonstration lesson plans while teachers engaged as learners. The aim was to experience, first-hand, a process of learning and teaching across the curriculum through DiE.

The first demonstration lesson was based on Neelands' scheme of work on *Antigone* (2005, pp. 67–75). It addressed the Chilean subject areas of Language and Communication, History, Geography, Social Sciences, and Visual Arts at secondary school level. It included a

number of drama conventions (Neelands & Goode, 2015) such as 'conscience-alley' and 'teacher-in-role'. Many teachers highlighted the democratising potential of the teacher-in-role strategy, perceiving the value of an educator's active involvement alongside their students as a way of challenging traditional classroom hierarchies and disrupting authoritarian teacher-student relationships. A smaller number also appreciated the promotion of critical thinking and argumentation through the conscience-alley convention. However, potential difficulties were identified in relation to the 'whoosh! storytelling strategy' with a few expressing concern that students may be reluctant to participate if they were unfamiliar with the story. Concerns about possible teasing from classmates when watching others perform were also noted. These comments queried how a space for equal participation could be created when more performative-based drama strategies were used which may intimidate or silence some students in the class. Others wondered how DiE could be applied in non-humanistic subject areas. In order to address this, one of the demonstration lessons focused on the subject areas of Biology and Maths at upper primary/lower secondary level. In this session, teachers experienced a Mantle of the Expert inspired approach. Developed by Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995), Mantle of the Expert (MoE) places students in role as experts and invites them to work collaboratively using a task-based, problem solving methodology. Here, the teachers assumed the role of nutritionists who were asked to help a young girl with an eating disorder. Teachers rated the interdisciplinary nature of MoE highly, seeing it as a tool for transforming the official curriculum. Several identified that investing students with responsibility in MoE could lead to empowerment and ownership of their learning. The role of teacher in MoE as an active participant working alongside students, was also highly valued.

In order to problematize the official curriculum and thus examine DiE's critical-pedagogical potential, one of our goals in this demonstration session was to invite participants to explore the influence of the market on cultural ideas of beauty. However, judging by their in-role contributions, only a few picked up on this. Afterwards, an interesting conversation developed around the importance of fostering social criticality in students about issues such as eating disorders, rather than just studying them from a purely health-related perspective. MoE's potential for opening critical discussion was

foregrounded here. However, very few actively participated in this conversation. We had hoped that more might become involved in the debate, revealing our own flawed agenda setting, but when they didn't, it substantiated the notion of the indeterminacy of DiE and the unlikelihood of pushing participants to draw pre-set conclusions.

This demonstration lesson was critiqued by Sofía, a primary school teacher, who said: "I don't know how attractive for students this theme would be". Her remarks provoked a dialogue about the balance between students' interests and a teacher's goals when planning DiE lessons, something we ourselves experienced. For Michelle, a pre-school teacher, addressing younger students' interests and broadening them out into society could be problematic, since these are sometimes restricted by their socio-cultural context. Several were concerned about the indeterminacy of DiE in relation to achieving specified curricular objectives. The teachers' discussion revealed a tension between the time and energy required to plan meaningful, engaging, and challenging experiences through DiE, against the uncertainty of outcomes achieved. This underscores a duality in education systems globally which also effects the practice of DiE; education systems demand mastery of pre-determined outcomes, but critical pedagogy and DiE cannot by definition deliver fixed and closed outcomes.

Another demonstration lesson followed a process-drama format (O'Neill, 1995). Touching on issues of prejudice and stereotype in the story of *The Three Little Pigs*, it was linked with the subject areas of Language and Communication, and Orientation (a curriculum area addressing social and personal education in Chile) for lower primary level. Based on Philip Taylor's storydrama (2000, pp. 9–18) exploring a classical fairy tale from an alternative angle, it included strategies such as role-play, student-in-role, teacher-in-role, and still-image. Teachers reflected on the critical possibilities they envisioned in a lesson such as this with children, particularly in the questioning of taken-for-granted positions that was fostered through the dramatic process. They also valued opportunities to examine multiple perspectives through strategies such as still-image and thought-tracking.

We used drama to explore and unpack teachers' different views and knowledge about critical pedagogy in order to increase their self-awareness about the critical pedagogical potential of their own practices. For example, in one activity, teachers were presented with a series of quotes about critical pedagogy (placed at intervals on the

floor), and asked to choose the quote that interested them most and form groups accordingly. In those groups, teachers created still-images that deconstructed and represented their response to the selected quote (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Teachers working on their still-images about critical pedagogy

The quotes reflected multifaceted understandings of critical pedagogy, and led to an animated debate. One secondary teacher, Laura, chose the following quote about critical pedagogy's indoctrinating potential: "Though more subtly (without making explicit use of force), oppressive power may also be exerted in [critical pedagogy] when trying to influence people's beliefs and actions" (Sicilia-Camacho & Fernández-Balboa, 2009, p. 450). She and her teammate constructed an image of a puppet master standing over a puppet, controlled by strings. In her explanation, Laura said:

Many times we speak, or some speak, about being critical pedagogues, but (...) we are not giving the opportunity for students to choose their own actions without influencing them. (...) It's like if I, as a Biology teacher, said 'support abortion, support abortion, support abortion' but I never gave them the vision from the other side. (Laura, video, June 30, 2016)

To this, Violeta, a language teacher who stood out in the baseline data as knowledgeable about and committed to critical pedagogy, responded:

I believe that supporting critical pedagogy does not mean that you impose something, rather, you take sides about an issue (...) I think it is essential to show everything, the thing is that there is a part of that everything that has never been shown. (Violeta, video, June 30, 2016)

A lively debate ensued between having an explicitly critical position as a teacher, avoiding imposition of viewpoints, and/or adhering to outcome-based standards, echoing the disputes between modern and postmodern perspectives on critical pedagogy in the literature. It also touched upon notions of teacher as “neutral information deliverer” (Brownstein, 2007, p. 510) in standards-driven systems of education that devalue multi-layered notions of truth, knowledge, and intelligence, requiring teachers to instruct students in curricular facts only. These teachers were beginning to deconstruct a mechanistic psychological paradigm which serves to alienate and disempower students, leaving little space for creative, critical thinking. A modernist belief in the supremacy of ‘objective’ facts still prevails in Chile and in many countries worldwide, where a teacher’s role is to deliver facts, and students’ role is to receive them without question, interpretation “or otherwise making sense of them” (Brownstein, 2007, p. 515).

Beyond this particular debate, teachers’ open and diverse interpretations of critical pedagogy became real and visible during sessions, such as through their pictorial representations of a critical pedagogue, following a role-on-the-wall convention. While all agreed that reflexivity was a key trait of a critical pedagogue, half emphasised the critical educator’s ability to generate a democratic classroom by promoting equal participation and dialogue, and the other half prioritised the emancipatory goal and political role of a critical educator. Although several remarked that DiE can be a valuable way of approaching social justice issues, interest in dealing with these matters explicitly in their classrooms was not evident amongst the majority. Rather, most identified DiE’s potential in creating democratic, dialogic and communicative classrooms. A distinction between these two elements of critical pedagogy emerged in the post-workshop

evaluations, which by the end of the larger TPD project several months later, had become even more complex.

IMPACT OF DiE AS A FORM OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

After the week long workshop, eight out of the 15 teachers continued to engage with the TPD programme. They co-planned and co-taught with Catalina over a further nine weeks. However, at the end of the school year, all 15 teachers who participated in the workshop were invited to complete a final retrospective questionnaire to assess the impact of this experience on their professional lives.

Teachers evaluated the workshop component very positively (6.4 out of a top rating of 7), commending its structure, timetable and experiential format, and identifying the new and relevant knowledge, skills, and strategies they experienced. Teachers most valued the opportunity to experience and ‘live through’ DiE strategies, and as one primary teacher reported, it gave teachers a chance to be “in other’s shoes, living and experiencing what students would feel when performing the different strategies” (Tamara). Several mentioned the importance of the critical pedagogical premises being demonstrated not only in the contents of the TPD workshop, but also in its implementation. One secondary school teacher stated that “the whole process was marked by critical reflection and mediation. From the day when the proposal was presented to us [by Catalina as facilitator-researcher] until the last classroom visit” (Patilla). However, concerns were expressed about the shortage of time for reflection to really dig into the social justice issues which emerged either directly or obliquely, and all noted that 15 contact hours was insufficient to introduce newcomers to DiE. We also found this challenging, especially when our aim was to achieve a balance between theory and practice in the delivery.

Teachers’ stances on, and practice of critical pedagogy had shifted eight months on. A third were now problematizing their curriculum contents so that social justice issues could be addressed, and over 70% reported that the workshop helped them reflect about critical pedagogy, promoting a deeper understanding and/or a reconsideration of the paradigm. This seems to have influenced several teachers’ self-identification as critical pedagogues, with a third

more describing themselves in that category by the end of the school year (Figure 4).

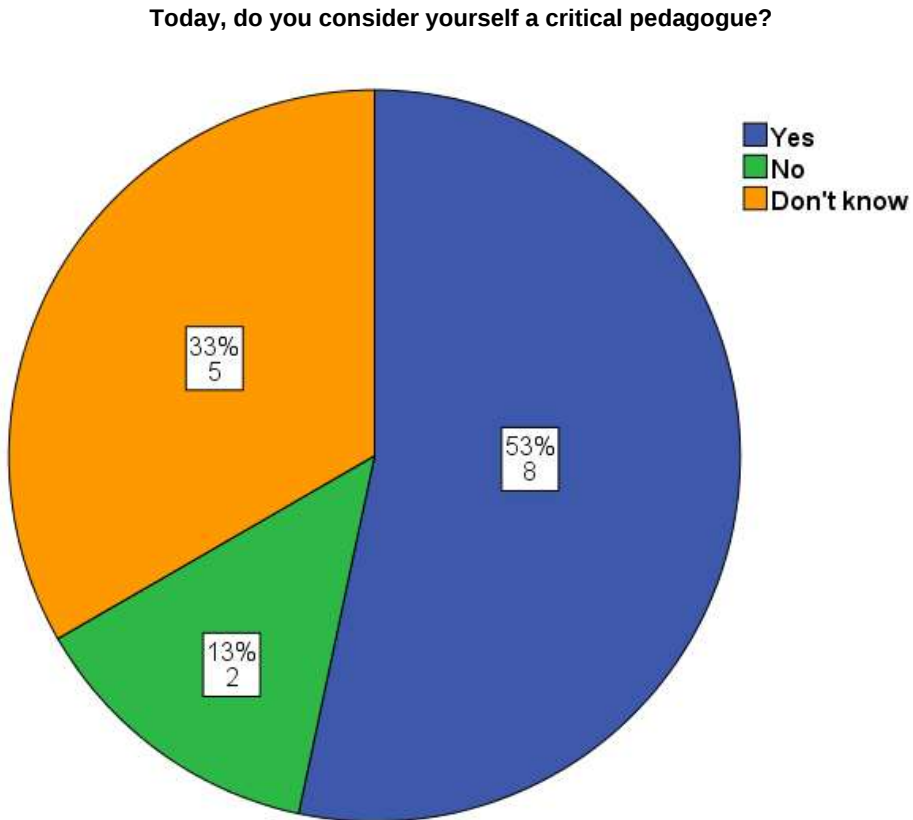


Figure 4. Teachers' self-identification in relation to critical pedagogy in final questionnaire

In the post-project analysis, only one teacher could be described as experiencing a transformational shift in beliefs about education when assessed against Mezirow's (2012) conceptual framework of transformative adult learning. However, there is evidence of what Mezirow (1978) calls "a disorienting dilemma" (p. 7) which signals the beginning phase of the transformative process. Our teachers reported the value of this collective, arts-based process of critical examination of their value judgements, normative assumptions and expectations around student abilities and behaviours. When faced with new knowledge and a heightened awareness about critical pedagogy and DiE, old meanings and perspectives appeared inadequate. However,

while many teachers reported being ready for change, and eager to dethrone positivistic epistemologies (objective facts) in favour of more phenomenological hermeneutics which “allow teachers and students to respect the epistemologies of a diversity of cultures, genders, races and religions that comprise a typical classroom by dialogically examining and understanding the nature of ‘truth’ in terms of multilogical (i.e. non-Western, female, etc) perspectives” (Brownstein, 2007, p. 518), several felt the educational system in which they worked wasn’t yet ready for such changes. For example, Roberto, an upper secondary Language teacher who had initially self-identified as a critical educator, now expressed doubts about whether he had fully grasped the meaning of the concept at all. Although he adheres to transformative aims, he now sees this paradigm as unfeasible in his professional context. The workshop had informed and developed his understanding, and for him now critical pedagogy is “a tool to transform society and to make it more equal, something that many of us aim to achieve, but which is really very difficult in the context and reality we live in (including the curriculum we must answer to)” (Roberto, final questionnaire).

Patilla, a Visual Arts and Technology teacher, seems to have taken the opposite journey. He did not originally identify as a critical educator, explaining that he saw critical pedagogy as a dated approach (first interview). However, in the final questionnaire, he declared himself a critical pedagogue, stating that the workshop helped him to “re-read the socio-critical model”, defining it now as an educational approach that “fosters reflection on the discursive-ideologies existing in culture (...) enabling a transformation of our reality” (Patilla, final questionnaire). For Patilla, DiE “can be a highly efficacious tool when first approaching the student with a socio-critical way of thinking”. He also highlighted the democratic value of DiE, seeing that it “neutralises the types of hierarchical relationships in the classroom”, opening meaningful and motivating spaces “for the participation of all”. Patilla was one of the most enthusiastic participants in this TPD programme, going on to create his own DiE strategies that connected critical reflection with his students’ visual culture.

All teachers reported that learning about DiE and applying it in their lessons potentiated their critical pedagogical mission, with Violetta noting that “[DiE] facilitated my work within the socio-critical paradigm”,

and it helped Gonzalo “to link the notion of social critique with concrete classroom practice”. For Michelle, besides being a useful way of “generating consciousness” and giving her kindergarten students more “spaces for protagonism”, DiE helped her reflect about her own teaching practice “especially when using the teacher-in-role strategy”.

However, data suggest that working through DiE involved stepping out of teachers’ comfort zones, inviting students to do so also, and investing greater time and effort in their lessons than previously. Motivating equal participation in students, identifying drama strategies that best suited curricular aims and students’ learning styles, and insufficient time during classes for reflection were signposted as challenges. However, encouragingly, just under 80% (n=14) reported being very likely to apply DiE in their lessons in the following school year (Figure 5).

How likely are you to integrate DiE in your lessons in the next academic year?

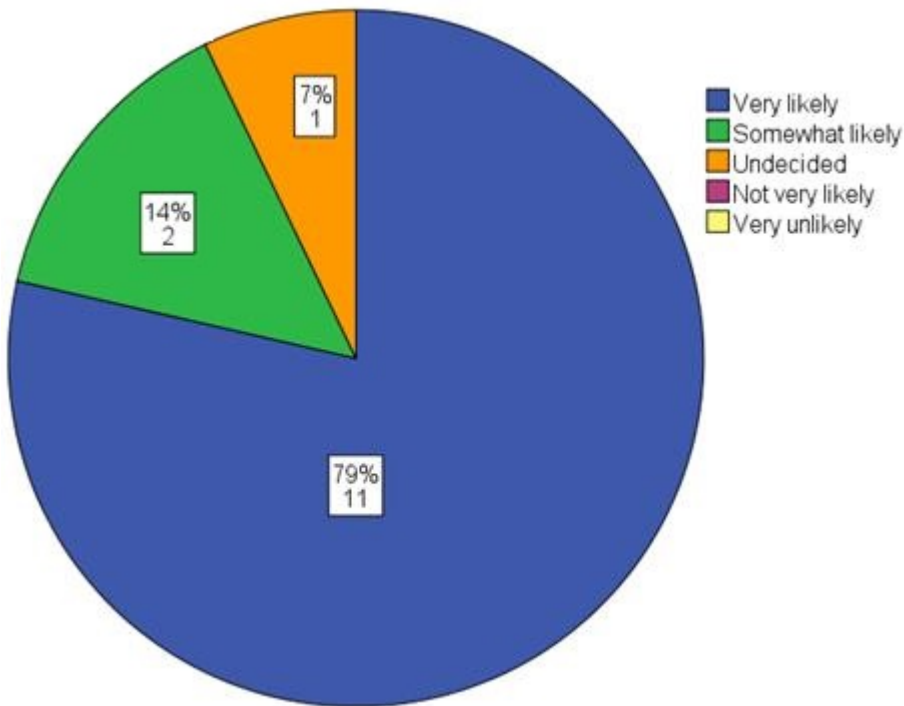


Figure 5. Likelihood of teacher-participants’ future application of DiE

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that these teachers' engagement with DiE as a form of critical pedagogy, whilst not transformative, had a positive impact on their professional lives. Results support that DiE strategies, originated on the other side of the world, may be useful to Chilean teachers in their exploration of critical pedagogical practices. Whilst tensions emerged regarding teachers' differing understandings of critical pedagogy, and no teacher fully enacted all its principles in practice during the study, there is evidence that for some it demanded a reformulation of the curriculum in order to include open discussions of social justice issues. Others focused instead on the democratization of their classroom. Although openly addressing social justice issues is vital to moving beyond a constructivist approach and into a critical one (Breunig, 2011), these teachers' democratisation of the learning experience facilitated through drama, could potentially be constituted as 'a form of critical pedagogy', or at least a powerful first step in that direction. In an era where on one side of the world newspaper headlines such as in *Chile Today* report 'Opposition decries Supreme Court nominee's record on human rights cases' (July 10, 2020), 'Chilean billionaires see net worth grow amid pandemic' (July 10, 2020), and 'President Piñera vetoes bill that prohibits cut of basic services during pandemic' (July 9, 2020), and on the other side *The New York Times* headline reads: 'Can we please talk about Black Lives Matter for one second' (July 2, 2020), the British playwright Edward Bond's words seem as relevant and challenging as they did some 20 years ago:

Only the human mind can ask *why*. It is a question the human mind must ask. Once it has asked it of anything, it must ask it of everything. For all *what* and *when* answers there is an open or covert *why* question. Finally, *why* can never be answered. Any *why* answer leads to another why question. *Why* is the imagination's question. Only minds able to imagine may ask it. (Bond, 1998, p. 2, italics in original)

We are indebted to the teachers in this study for going on a journey that brought us all a little closer to understanding how we might harness the potential of DiE as a form of critical pedagogy to create

classrooms where students and teachers are confident in questioning the dominant social, historic, political and economic ideologies reproduced in schools; where students and teachers are comfortable in accepting a lack of certainty about the world “they operate with and in” (Brownstein, 2007, p. 518); and where lived experience and interpretative ways of knowing resist traditional positivistic pedagogies.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Catalina Villanueva is a recent PhD graduate and member of the Arts Education Research Group (AERG), School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Catalina's teaching and research interests are in critical pedagogy and social justice through applied drama, and in drama across the curriculum in the Chilean school context. She currently teaches at Universidad de Chile, and works as a freelance teaching artist.

Carmel O'Sullivan is convenor of the Arts Education Research Group (AERG) and Professor in Education in Trinity College Dublin. Carmel's teaching and research interests are drawn from drama in education, and she is currently involved in several funded projects in the areas of Social Drama and Autism, early childhood arts education, and an arts-based work readiness program called Career LEAP for disadvantaged young people facing significant barriers to entering the workplace.