REVIEW   *******   **RESENSIE**

Bonny Norton and Lelleen Toohey (Eds). 2004. *Critical pedagogies and language learning*.
Cambridge University Press. pp 362.

> *Advocates of critical approaches to second language teaching are interested in relationships between language learning and social change. From this perspective, language is not simply a means of expression or communication; rather it is practice that it constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, their possibilities for the future.(p. 1)*

Norton and Toohey provide a clear orientation to the complex and varied territory of the book in the first chapter. They begin by explaining the nature of critical pedagogy in relation to language learning. The title of the book emphasises their position that there 'cannot be a unitary set of texts, beliefs, convictions or assumptions' (p. 2). Essentially critical pedagogies reflect 'a responsiveness to the particularities of the local' (p. 2).

The book is divided into four sections, each with a slightly different focus. Although, there is some inevitable overlap in the second language education, second language identities, critical practices and teacher education, the divisions make it possible for a variety of critiques on particular aspects to emerge. It is probably important too that the book should not be too neat – that would gainsay the emphasis on process and responsiveness.

The first section, **Reconceptualising second language education** has contributions from Allan Luke, Ryuko Kubota, Aneta Pavlenko and Elana Shohmay. The foci are race, gender, pedagogy and assessment. Luke reflects on the term 'critical' in relation to language education tracing its roots to liberation movements. For him, it is the 'rules of exchange with a social field' that critical pedagogical approaches call up for scrutiny:

> Each approach to the critical is normative, predicated on assumptions that the refashioning of language and literacy in this way will have an impact not just on individual capacities and laife pathways, but also on the reshaping of institutions, of local cultures, of social lives, and of civic and political spheres. There can be more overtly normative challenges to educational systems, educators, and the state than how they manage their cultural and linguistic Others. (p. 28)

In my view, Ryuko Kubota's chapter, "Critical multilingualism and second language education" challenges notions of multiculturalism that underlie OBE in South Africa. For her, notions such as respect for cultural difference, support for the idea that all are equal and so should have equal opportunities in society, tolerance and acceptance are not enough to challenge the inequalities in the classroom. Specific awareness of the needs of learners and the use of alternative teaching/learning strategies are essential. She cites the deleterious effects on Hispanic students to support her argument. She is even harder on the superficial treatment or essentialisation of aspects of the culture of Others calling it 'cultural tourism' (Sparks, 1998).

> In focusing on only the customs and traditions of different people, the culture of the Other is often exoticised and reduced to neutral objects for one to respect and appreciated (p. 35).

E Ridge

Critical multiticulturalism calls assumptions such as universal commonality and natural equality into question. Kubota advocates that issues such as the ways certain racial and other groups have been systematically oppressed and discriminated against should be examined in greater depth making it possible for learners to become more aware of injustices and consequently to become agents of change.

Pavlenko, well-known for her work on identity, focuses on the systematic inequalities which extend beyond female–male divides to those experienced by female learners as well as working class boys. Her complex discussion explores the reasons why immigrant women are particularly marginalised or even silenced as are working class boys and girls. Her brief discussion of inclusivity, engagement and authenticity in a feminist curriculum highlights the both the importance and the complexity of troubling western ethnocentrism.

Shohamy takes a very different perspective. Her concern relates to the way in which assessment can serve to perpetuate dominant knowledge of majority groups. Her chapter suggests a number of ways in which a multicultural democratic society should guard against and resist testing practices which violate fundamental democratic values and principles. This chapter would make useful reading for those involved in higher education who want to ensure that testing promotes equity and justice through meeting the highest is ethical and fair.

The second section **Challenging Identities** provides complex exploration by Pippa Stein, Sue Starfield and Brian Morgan of the ways in which language learning engages the identity of second language learners.

I found Pippa Stein's chapter, "Representation, rights, and resources: Multimodal pedagogies in the language and literacy classroom" in which she argues for multimodal pedagogies richly suggestive of the ways in which these allow for alternative modes of representation.

Perhaps her most telling challenge relates to assessment:

> Are students not succeeding because they do not share the worldview of their assessors or because they do not have the potential to succeed?

In "Subversive identities, pedagogical safe houses, and critical learning" Suresh Canagarajah identifies some 'hidden spaces in the classroom where students negotiate identities with positive consequences for their literacy development' (p118). He explores one of the ways in which language learners continue to be members of their home language community and culture, while learning a second language. In this instance it involves adopting what he terms 'subversive identities'.

Sue Starfield shares her experience of providing support to PhD students in the chapter entitled '"Why does this feel empowering?": Thesis writing, concordancing, and the corporatizing university'. Students found that concordancing (using a computer to search out the particular use of vocabulary or functions) particularly empowering. Starfield used a workbook by Thurstun and Candlin (1998) to enable students to pay particular attention to words to the left and right of key words to familiarise themselves with its use. Students were able to 'expand their linguistic and discursive resources to make more complex meanings, build their arguments and appear authoritative – to begin to develop identities as academic writers' (p. 150). This is an exciting demonstariton of 'how one's work can still be empowering both for oneself and for students and expropriate a domain in which to work to lessen powerlessness – to take back words, discourses and social spaces' (p.154).

In 'Modals and memories: A grammar lesson on the Quebec referendum on sovreignity' Brian Morgan demonstrates how traditional language teaching such as a grammar lesson can raise consciousness of the formal properties of language and thus develop critical citizenship skills. In this case he used 'modality' to allow students to explore feelings of ambivalence and possibility regarding

53

the future, and at the same time to explore the meaning potential that is embedded in the lexicogrammatical system. A grammar lesson then becomes an occasion to discover the links between microstuctures of language with the macrostructures of society (p.6).

Third section is concerned with **Researching critical practices.** The contributors are Inês Brito, Ambrizeth Lima and Elsa Auerbach, Bonny Norton and Karen VanderHeyden, Jane Sutherland and Constant Leung, Roxy Harris, and Ben Rampton.

The first of the contributions focuses on non-standard language. In "The logic of non-standard teaching: A course in Cape Verdean language, culture and history", Brito, Lima and Auerbach recount an action research and reflective inquiry involving the collaboration of teachers-as-researchers and researchers-as-teachers in teaching a non-standard form of Portuguese, Cape Verdean … A feature of this research is the active role the students played.

Bonny Norton and Karen Vanderheyden explore the value of Archie comics in enabling second language learners in a Vancouver elementary school to read. The multimodal cues provided the scaffolding to make independent reading possible. It also enabled these language learners to become part of a 'community of readers' across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Their notion that comic books read in the mother tongue could be a way of maintaining their pre-immigrant identities is an intriguing one which deserves attention.

In "Classroom interaction, gender and foreign language learning" Jane Sutherland's exploration of the gender dynamics in foreign language classrooms in England challenges assumptions about male dominance in co-ed classrooms. Sutherland found that girls dominated the classroom in terms of academic contributions. Interestingly, although the teacher seemed offer boys far more so some types of attention, the teacher was actually 'treating – or, arguably *constructing* – the girls as the more academic students'(p. 229). Ironically, however, what looks like advantage in the classroom may be limiting the future careers of these girls since their affirmation in the language classroom may lead them to choose languages areas rather than the more lucrative careers in science, engineering and technology, for instance. As Sutherland concludes, 'investigation and critique need to go beyond what can be observed and recorded to what is expected and what is not'.

Leung, Harris and Rampton trouble particular research paradigms in which what constitutes reality and what does not is a fundamental issue. In gathering naturalistically occurring data, the key question is what to select or conversely what to exclude. They use data from one West London classroom to show how raw data could undermine received ideas on the theoretical construct of task-based teaching. Decisions on which data to present must take account of the complexity of the data. Here they trouble the central assumption that tasks can promote social interaction between the participants and consequently provide opportunities for task-related language use and acquisition. The utterances produced …

The contributors to the final section, **Educating teachers for change** are Angel Lin, Kelleen Toohey and Bonnie Waterstone and Alistair Pennycook.

Lin provides a remarkably candid account of her experience to introduce critical pedagogy into her teacher education programme in Hong Kong. Some of her difficulties reflect the challenge of providing a responsiveness to the particularities of the local. She raises an important issue; the in-service teachers found the critical texts, which were intended to help them re-imagine and discover possibilities, inaccessible.

In some respects, the situation the teachers faced is not unlike the current South African situation. Teachers were experiencing an overwhelming sense of powerlessness in the face of some of the demands being made on them. Being able to voice their views in a professional newspaper was a

In the next chapter, the difficulty of persuading teachers to publish their practice are explored. What Toohey and Waterstone uncover is the unwitting complicity of university teacher researchers in the entrenchment of existing hierarchies of knowledge. As a means of contesting the hegemony of accepted practice in publications, the authors advocate a blend of narrative which recounts and analysis of classroom events, in which theory and practice are explored in relation to one another. In doing so, they are taking up the challenge to find practices which allow for different and alternative possibilities.

Tara Goldstein provides a fascinating demonstration of the exciting possibilities ethnographic playwriting and performed ethnography hold. In this account, she describes the opportunity she created for pre-service monolingual teacher educators to explore the complexities of multilingual classrooms and the racial, ethnic and language identities. In enacting their roles pre-service teachers where able to engage with and come to an understanding of different perspectives. For me, an even more telling possibility, this kind of practice holds is the opportunity to reflect on issues of silence. In second-language classrooms, many learners are inhibited. Having to provide an alternative ending to the play enables students not only to reach a conscious awareness of conflict and discriminating practices and to engage in conflict resolution.

Alistair Pennycook provides the final contribution. His reflective narrative of the discussion which he and a student teacher engaged in after the lesson focuses on three critical moments (points of significance, instants when things change). These relate to gender politics, the use of authentic language (as opposed to classroom practice discourse) and ownership of English.

Although the discourse is not always readily accessible, teacher educators and postgraduate and other researchers involved in language education will find a great deal to interest them. This challenging volume provides a comprehensive discussion of a number of important contributions to critical pedagogy.

Elaine Ridge
University of Stellenbosch