

# **Fostering Skills to Enhance Critical Educators: A Pedagogical Proposal for Pre-service Teachers**

**Fomentando habilidades para preparar a educadores críticos:  
una propuesta pedagógica para profesores en formación**

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This article aims to share with teacher-educators a pedagogical proposal which we have applied in the past year. This investigation analyzes issues linked to critical pedagogy using movies connected to educational themes and readings based on critical pedagogy. We have used this study to generate class discussions in order to analyze educational topics from a critical point of view. This experience has guided us to help pre-service teachers acquire skills to eventually become critical educators of the future.

**Key words:** critical pedagogy, movies, pre-service teachers, reflection

Este artículo tiene como objetivo compartir con formadores de docentes, una propuesta pedagógica con la cual hemos trabajado durante el último año. Esta investigación da cuenta del análisis de problemáticas ligadas a la pedagogía crítica. Se utilizaron películas relacionadas con temáticas educativas y artículos con contenidos de pedagogía crítica. Lo anterior a fin de generar discusiones sobre temas de educación desde una perspectiva crítica. Esta experiencia nos ha servido para guiar a futuros profesores en la adquisición de habilidades a fin de encaminarlos para ser eventualmente educadores críticos en el futuro.

**Palabras clave:** futuros profesores, pedagogía crítica, películas, reflexión

## **Introduction**

Our intention with this pedagogical proposal is to motivate teacher-educators to utilize movies about education and to enhance reflection on issues such as power relationships,

stereotypes, gender, individuality, resistance, etc. As teacher-educators we consider that we need to be proactive while watching a movie and then reactive after watching it.

The importance of this pedagogical proposal for professors in English teaching programs lies in the fact that we need to foster in pre-service English teachers the idea that teaching English is not only related to the structural aspects of the English language, but that it also accounts for the social dimension English language teaching implies.

This pedagogical proposal is also important for our context, the School of Languages at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia in Tunja, due to the fact that the pre-service teachers enrolled in this institution will mainly work in public or private schools either in cities or in rural areas. For this reason, pre-service teachers need to understand the social dimension of the context they will face. These pre-service teachers may find a mixture of students in their classrooms coming from different backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities and religious beliefs. Discussing educational topics portrayed in movies and readings will help pre-service teachers become acquainted with and reflect upon real challenges that schools face.

Although movies about educational elements tend to stereotype certain behaviors, such as the roles of teachers, students, administrators, and parents, films related to the school environment are not far from the reality of society. These movies are full of samples of what occurs on a daily basis in school settings, and they represent educational culture. Dalton (2004) mentions that popular culture is an important and often overlooked source of social knowledge. That knowledge is created by constructs played out in the mass media. For this reason, we selected an assortment of movies that not only allows the audience to perceive how popular culture inside schools is represented in movie plots, but that these movies also encourage the audience to question the way some issues are dealt with in educational settings.

This pedagogical proposal was based on six different films: *The Chorus*, *Not One Less*, *School of Rock*, *Radio*, *The Principal*, and *Mr. Holland's Opus*. We analyzed these movies through the lenses of critical theory for classroom practice as established by Kanpol (1999).

Firstly, our intention with this article is to present to the reader the theoretical foundations on which we based our pedagogical proposal: pre-service teachers and the role of reflection, critical theory for classroom practice, and the role of films in the EFL classroom to promote reflection. Secondly, we introduce the pedagogical proposal based on films and readings about critical pedagogy. Thirdly, we account for the results of the proposal. Lastly, we include some pedagogical implications and conclusions about the effects of this proposal.

## **Literature Review**

To support this pedagogical proposal three main concepts are considered below: pre-service teachers and the role of reflection, critical theory for classroom practice, and films in the EFL classroom and their role in promoting reflection.

### **Pre-service Teachers and the Role of Reflection**

As educators of future teachers, we decided to bring films about education into the classroom to promote discussions about critical aspects in the field of education. “At their best, video presentations will be intrinsically interesting to language learners. The learner will want to watch, even if comprehension is limited. The material should be motivating; the learner should want to see more, to ask questions, to follow up ideas and suggestions” (Loneragan, 1994, p. 5). As part of watching films about education, we truly believe that discussion has to be generated among the audience in order to clarify doubts and perceive different points of view among the pre-service teachers.

Having said this, we argue that students are able to think, reflect and reevaluate their beliefs about diverse aspects of education. LaBosky (1994) stipulates that the main objective in teacher education is to give pre-service teachers the possibility to evaluate their beliefs about teaching, learning and language and to confront these beliefs with theory in order to build a solid knowledge base.

The classes in which we chose to work with the films were fifth, sixth and seventh semester classes in the Foreign Languages and Modern Languages teaching programs. Students in these programs are required to complete a total of ten semesters. The main objective of these courses is to improve oral and written production through the analysis of educational issues.

The films generated much discussion among students, who were left questioning and reasoning about the material they had witnessed. These reactions were confronted with the theories from the assigned readings. Comparing issues and positions perceived in the movies against the theories in the readings helped to mold pre-service teachers’ ideas about critical issues. They learned to state their own positions in papers they were asked to write. The films, as well as diverse articles related to critical pedagogy, were used as a starting point to generate class discussions and as “food-for-thought” when writing reflective papers. Akcan (2010) mentions that reflection on one’s teaching should be encouraged from the beginning of the “learning to teach” process in order to help teacher candidates become perceptive practitioners. Reflective teaching helps teachers become more confident in their abilities and enables them to make more informed decisions about their teaching practices.

According to Dewey (1933, p.50), reflective action involves active, consistent and careful consideration of any practice or belief. He considered the following principles as the starting points of the process of reflection:

- The issue upon which the teacher reflects must occur in the social context where teaching occurs.
- The teacher must be interested in the problem to be resolved.
- The issue must be “owned” by the teacher; that is, derived from his or her own practice.
- Reflection on the issue involves problem solving within the teaching context.
- Ownership of the identified issue and its solution are vested in the teacher.
- The teachers’ ideas need to be tested through the practice of teaching.
- Ideas about teaching, once tested through practice, must lead to some course of action.
- Reflective actions may be transformed into new understandings and can redefine teaching practices.
- Tested teaching practices should result in change.
- Reflective actions should lead to new understanding and changes in teaching.
- Reflection is a cyclical or spiraling process in which teachers continually monitor, evaluate, and revise their own practices.

We identified three main stages for reflection to take place in Dewey’s proposal. The first stage relates to the analysis and appropriation of a teaching issue in its real context. The second phase involves the action to be taken once the teaching issue is analyzed, and the third concerns the evaluation of the action taken. Through the pedagogical proposal, we explored Dewey’s first stage before, during, and after watching the films.

The last two stages were not considered for this pedagogical proposal because they have to be developed in-situ, in other words, when the students become full-time teachers. The students considered for this proposal were not full-time teachers and they had little or no experience as teachers. Meanwhile, the first stage was explored because it could be approached from a theoretical point of view considering educational situations in the movies and readings.

### *Critical Theory for Classroom Practice*

The main objective of the courses in which this proposal was carried out was to emphasize the use of speaking and writing skills in reference to educational topics. Due to the fact that these courses were taken by pre-service English teachers, most of whom will work in

diverse contexts, including rural, bilingual, private, public and religious schools, the program content stressed the revision of pre-service teachers' roles as educators and the analysis of different teaching situations they may face. In this sense, Hinchey (2004) mentions that each teacher must undertake a conscious analysis of every teaching situation and design action based on that analysis.

We wanted to foster what Kanpol (1999) calls critical theory for classroom practice. In doing so, we analyzed the following aspects in the movies: resistance, reskilling, similarity with difference, individuality, positive competition, democracy, critical empowerment, and critical literacy.

**Resistance.** “Resistance involves the conscious and unconscious attempt by teachers and students to challenge the dominant/ or hegemonic values in our society” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 37). Some individuals in any society are reluctant to follow rules, patterns or any kind of direction indicating how they should behave, think or act. Resistance has to do with the act of questioning why individuals are required to follow certain rules. Hinchey (2004) asserts that a citizen creates resistance by actively questioning authority. An act of resistance could be when a teacher arrives at a new institution and does not follow the pre-established syllabus for a class, but rather he or she designs his or her own syllabus from which to teach.

**Reskilling.** “It happens when teachers are able to intellectualize the role that the states play in hegemonic constructions. It occurs, then, when teachers first become aware and then critical of the multiple forms of deskilling-issues of technical control” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 39). In other words, reskilling has to do with a teacher's intervention in several parts of the curriculum i.e. when a teacher actively participates in the decision-making process of an institution. For example, the selection of an English textbook different from the one that the institution has been using for a long time is reskilling, as opposed to deskilling, in which a teacher is not given the chance to switch the textbook.

**Similarities with differences.** “This approach to multicultural education will seriously consider race, class, and gender relations of minority cultures” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 43). Teachers have to acknowledge students' diverse backgrounds and experiences to create a teaching and learning atmosphere in which differences in culture, race, gender and class are not weaknesses or issues with which to stereotype students but rather strengths that enrich the learning process, nourishing it with different perspectives. Freire (1998) suggests that the experiences of students who come from a low socioeconomic background could be starting points to generate discussions in the classroom in order to improve their own environment. He further asserts that educators should not neglect those experiences. In the same way, McLaren (2003) argues that there is a need for teachers to validate students' previous knowledge, experiences, culture, problems and, in general, students' backgrounds.

**Individuality.** “Individuality assumes that achievement is always relative. A critical pedagogue will adopt critical individuality by always listening to the students. Cultural and social heritage is used as a method to learn more about individuals’ particular historical, cultural, social and economic circumstances and differences” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 45). In the same vein, Canagarajah (2000) states that schooling is deeply influenced by the larger social and political contexts in which it lies. By respecting students’ voices, teachers can learn a great deal in order to shape teaching in meaningful and contextualized ways for students.

**Positive competition.** “Positive competition for a critical pedagogue means directing the students to see multiple aspects of competition” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 47). The first aspect of competition has to do with improving one’s conditions, which requires reflecting on personal aspects to improve. The second aspect deals with the sense of competing because of the knowledge gained from competition, not because students want to beat the rest of the class in the school environment.

**Democracy.** “Teachers’ authority will be negotiated with students” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 49). In the same way, Canagarajah (2000) suggests that it is important to negotiate knowledge more consciously and to involve teachers and students in the learning process because collaboration simulates the social process of knowledge. Democracy in school settings is created by the participation of all members of the school community in the decision-making process. In Colombia, one example of this type of democracy is when students, teachers, administrators, and parents take part in writing a School Code of Conduct.

**Authority.** “A critical postmodern notion of authority first allows for multiple users of authority. Teachers and students will discuss language use, stereotypes and seating arrangements.” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 52) In the same way, Shor and Freire (1987) propose that a student-centered approach may reflect critical pedagogy where students are invited to think critically about issues, to co-develop the session with the “expert” or teacher, and to construct peer relations instead of authority-dependent relations.

**Critical empowerment.** “Within a critical postmodernism, the teacher must seriously investigate multiple forms of knowledge as related to race, class, and gender with the intent to modify and/or change curricular usage to alleviate alienation, subordination and oppression of others” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 53). In the school context, a teacher must reflect upon the decisions that are made and how they positively or negatively affect students. Some decisions may be fair for certain individuals in a class depending on issues related to race, class and gender, but the same decisions could be perceived as negative by other individuals in the same class. Critical empowerment is not a mechanism for applying rules in a school, but rather it deals with teachers’ consideration of how those rules have an impact on students’ lives. An example of critical empowerment is the issue of viewing testing as punishment, so then the teacher has to come up with different ideas for assessment.

**Critical literacy.** “Critical literacy empowers individuals to analyze and synthesize the culture of the school and their own particular cultural circumstances (race, class, gender relations as connected to policy making, curricular concerns, teacher-student and teacher-teacher relationships)” (Kanpol, 1999, p. 55). In this sense, as Shor (1987) mentions, curriculum is understood in terms of a theory of interest and a theory of experience.

### *Films in the EFL Classroom and their Role in Promoting Reflection*

Although films have often been used to foster listening and reading skills in the EFL classroom, they can be used as a powerful tool to explore educational aspects such as gender, social roles, and power relationships as well. In this sense, Ryan and Kellner (1988, p. 13) argue, “films themselves become part of that broader cultural system of representations that construct social reality.” Dalton (2004, p. 2) also mentions “general knowledge about the relationships between teachers and students, knowledge beyond the scope of the personal or anecdotal, is created by constructs of popular culture played out in the mass media.”

In order to examine these aspects, pre-service teachers need to be aware of the importance of watching movies as critical spectators. They need to think about their role as future English teachers and start targeting issues that they may find in the schools where they will be working, so that they can search for ways to cope with those challenges that can affect the school and teaching/learning environment.

According to Maley (2001, p. ix), “Films attract students through the power they have to tell a story. Motivation to engage with a narrative, especially one with a high affective charge, is enhanced. Films also offer an enlargement of our knowledge of the world and the cultures that it contains. It is in the broadest sense educational.” In the same sense, Stempleski and Tomalin (2001) assert that the medium of films is an excellent means of communicating cultural values, attitudes and behaviors. It is very effective in bringing the outside world into the classroom and providing a stimulating framework for classroom communication and discussion.

## **The Pedagogical Proposal**

### *Context of the Experience*

This pedagogical proposal took place at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia in Tunja, Colombia (UPTC). It was carried out with students from the languages teaching programs who were preparing to be future language teachers. Specifically, this proposal was conducted in two programs: the Modern Languages teaching program, whose students study to become high school Spanish and/or English teachers; and the Foreign

Languages teaching program, whose students study to become future English and/or French teachers at elementary schools. Both programs emphasize the necessity of creating professional foreign language educators with a broad vision of pedagogy, research and strong communicative competence.

The names of the courses in which this pedagogical proposal was implemented were Oral and Written Production Workshop II & III, and Communicative Project VII. The former belongs to the Foreign Languages teaching program. Its main objective is to discuss in an oral as well as written way topics related to pedagogy. The latter belongs to the Modern Languages teaching program. It “focuses on participants’ development of writing and reading skills in an integrated-skill approach which does not leave aside oral practices. The course involves students in the academic mastering of language skills by connecting two related areas in the Modern Languages program: pedagogy and research” (Viáfara, 2009).

The amount of time students spent in class was an average of sixty four hours during a semester which lasts sixteen weeks. Twice a week students attended a two-session class. The students that attended the class in which this proposal was carried out had already taken courses related to EFL pedagogy and research. They were acquainted with topics such as classroom interaction, assessment and evaluation, pedagogical paradigms, curriculum implementation, and Colombian educational policies. Due to the fact that the main objective of these courses was to emphasize the speaking and writing skills referring to educational topics, the directors of this proposal took advantage of the students’ previous knowledge to deepen those topics and invite the students to assume a critical point of view regarding the aforementioned topics.

The directors of this experience were teacher-educators (the authors of this paper), and both of us were in charge of selecting the movies and articles that were the starting points for analyzing educational issues. We also provided students with the workshops to be developed and directed the discussions that took place during the sessions. Our role as educators of future teachers was to inquire about students’ previous knowledge and their beliefs as future English teachers.

On the other hand, pre-service teachers who were in their fifth, sixth or seventh semester in the programs described above were the main participants and were those from whom opinions were heard. Sixty students were enrolled in this proposal: twenty from each semester. Students who attended these courses ranged in age from 19 to 30 years old, and the majority of them had an intermediate knowledge of the English language. A typical student was able to read academic readings and to write coherent texts in English; however, these students had little or no experience as teachers.

The pre-service teacher’s role in this pedagogical proposal was very important and active. We wanted to foster critical pre-service teachers who were able to determine what was



appropriate or what was not, depending on their context. In this proposal, pre-service teachers had three main activities to develop. The first task was to watch the movies about education. The second activity was to read the articles and contrast their contents with what they had watched. The third was to discuss and adopt a critical position towards the material they had watched and read. Finally, they were asked to write their reflections in a short essay.

### *Objectives of the Pedagogical Proposal*

The main objective of this pedagogical proposal was to incorporate critical pedagogy themes into the class syllabus. This inclusion of material was accomplished by reading articles and watching movies about educational topics to help students reflect upon their future role as English teachers. The secondary objectives were related to the issues of providing pre-service teachers with the opportunity to analyze and reflect upon educational issues in different contexts, to raise awareness about the implications of teaching a language, and to help pre-service teachers become competent in oral and written production.

### *Conditions of the Implementation*

The pedagogical proposal consisted of a series of workshops carried out with pre-service teachers made up of discussions based on movies and articles related to critical pedagogy. The movies presented situations that were highly controversial in educational terms. Some of these movies showed extreme situations teachers and students have to face: poverty, rural education, inclusion, students with disabilities, and power concentrated in school principals and administrators. These controversial themes made the movies conducive to classroom discussions and debates. The movies were from France, China, and the United States. We decided to focus on those movies because of their high content of educational issues that inspired class discussions. The main issues that were addressed in each movie are summarized in Table 1.

The following articles were distributed to students to supplement the film material: *Teachers' Lives in Period of Crisis: Tensions of Meaning, Tensions of and between Cultures, Coming to Terms with Difference* by Kanpol (1999); *Radical Pedagogy and the Politics of Students' Voices* by Giroux (1997); *Interactive Language Teaching I* by Brown (2001); *'I said it!' 'I'm first!': gender and language learner identities* by Castañeda-Peña (2008); *Gravely Pregnant with Freireian Alternativity: Can Foreign Language Learning Avoid Reinforcing Cultural and Social Hegemony?* by Pratt (2005); and, *Power Relations through Oral Interaction: A Dichotomy between Traditional and Autonomous English Classrooms* by Ramos (2009). These articles were selected based on the following criteria: (1) Articles that account for our Colombian educational reality and educational issues from other countries; (2) Authors of the articles have done research in the area of critical pedagogy; (3) Language used in the written text was appropriate for the students' English reading proficiency levels.

**Table 1.** Issues addressed in each movie

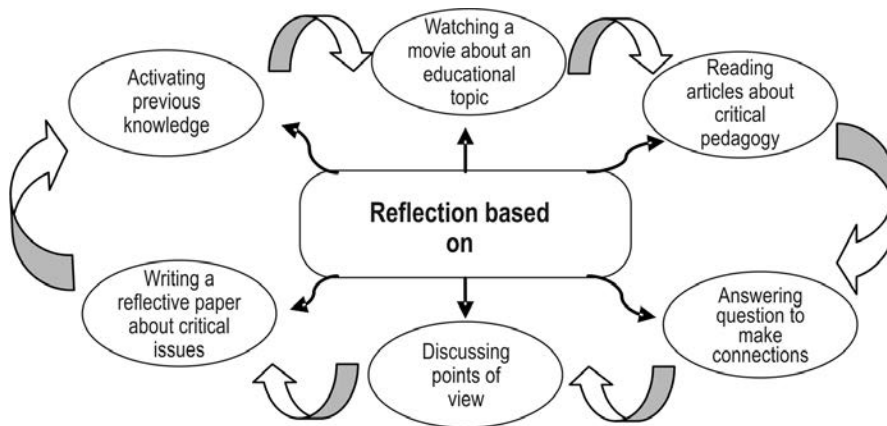
Movie	Pedagogical issues
The Chorus	Individuality, positive competition, critical literacy, Colombian educational system vs. various educational systems, power relationships.
Not One Less	Democracy, critical literacy, classroom interaction, educational policies, Colombian educational system vs. various educational systems, socioeconomic status.
The School of Rock	Similarity with difference, positive competition, democracy, classroom interaction, Colombian educational system vs. various educational systems, gender stereotypes, socioeconomic status.
Radio	Resistance, reskilling, similarity with difference, individuality, positive competition, critical empowerment, Colombian educational system vs. various educational systems.
The Principal	Resistance, reskilling, individuality, democracy, critical literacy, educational policies, Colombian educational system vs. various educational systems, gender stereotypes, socioeconomic status, power relationships.
Mr. Holland's Opus	Resistance, individuality, critical empowerment, educational policies, Colombian educational system vs. various educational systems.

As teachers, we were willing to negotiate the order of some of the workshops' steps in class. For some movies, students wanted to watch the movie first and then merge into the theoretical concepts from critical literature. For other movies, students read first and then watched the movies. However, our main outline for all the workshops was as follows:

1. **Presentation of reflective questions to activate students' previous knowledge.** The first section of the workshops had some questions in which the students expressed their ideas regarding educational aspects, such as males vs. females, authority in the classroom, students' culture, etc. All these aspects were related to the institutions where they had previously studied or worked. We borrowed and adapted some questions from Kanpol (1999) to trigger this knowledge:
  - Discuss the kind of environment you grew up in. Was it educationally conducive?
  - What role did your parents play in your education?

- What values did your parents instil in you regarding education and other issues, such as sex, race and class?
  - Was there peer pressure to succeed or fail in your school? If so, how did it come about?
  - How have your past school experiences affected your views on education today?
  - Discuss race, class, and gender relationships in your past educational experiences.
  - What was the role of your teachers when you were in school? Based on your answer, what do you think your primary role as a future teacher will be?
2. **Watching the movie to start making connections with students' prior knowledge.** After discussing the questions in step one, students watched the movies in the classroom. Because pre-service English teachers with intermediate English levels made up the audience, English subtitles were set to watch the movies.
  3. **Reading the articles to contrast information with students' previous knowledge and with the content of the movie.** Pre-service teachers were given articles related to critical pedagogy to help them acquire knowledge. The idea was for pre-service teachers to support, clarify and consolidate ideas so that they could contrast their previous knowledge with the information provided in the movie and the critical theory behind it.
  4. **Posing questions to reflect upon aspects related to critical theory for classroom practice and making connections with the students' own context.** The fourth section of the workshops included questions that challenged the students to answer from a critical and pedagogical point of view. This activity led class discussions to an argumentative level. The questions were prepared beforehand in order to ensure that pre-service teachers were ready for the discussion. Although the entire bank of questions could be used with any of the movies presented, some of the questions initiated much dialogue among students and formed the core of the class discussion, so it was unnecessary to employ all questions for each movie (see Appendix 1).
  5. **Writing a short reflection.** The students were given the following instructions to write their reflections: Write a five-paragraph essay. This essay should show your critical and reflective position towards the topic of your choice. To address your paper, some topics you may think of are gender, power relationships, authority, resistance, etc. Try to include some authors you read to support your ideas. The

first paragraph of your essay must be the introductory paragraph and the fifth paragraph must be the concluding one. Paragraphs must have a topic sentence and supporting sentences. The main objective in this activity was to have pre-service teachers write a reflective paper about a critical issue discussed in class. Figure 1 summarizes the main steps we followed in the pedagogical proposal.



**Figure 1.** Cycle for the pedagogical proposal

## *Findings*

The findings we present in this paper are divided into two main parts. On the one hand, we account for the outcomes from the students. On the other hand, we show the analysis made for each one of the movies in relation to what Kanpol (1999) addresses as critical theory for classroom practice.

Based on the information provided in class discussions and pre-service teachers' written reflection essays, we identified two main issues related to a critical reflection of educational aspects. The first one showed how pre-service teachers moved from a pedagogical reflection to a critical reflection. In the former, the focus was to compare the theory to what happened in the classroom. In the latter, pre-service teachers went beyond the analysis of pedagogical issues and began to argue about the significance of making responsible decisions as future teachers.

The second element was related to a critical reflection of educational aspects dealing with consciously thinking about the consequences of every single decision pre-service teachers will

make as English teachers. Pre-service teachers reflected upon their future role as teachers in order to predict the outcomes of the decisions that they will make.

**Moving from pedagogical reflection towards the first steps of critical reflection.** We found that at the beginning of the courses, pre-service teachers tended to pay attention to the structural and methodological parts of the classes taught in the movies. They were concerned about discipline problems, teachers' and students' roles, and the development of students' communicative skills in the classroom. Pre-service teachers compared those issues with what the theories in the readings suggested. During the workshops that were part of this pedagogical proposal, pre-service teachers posed questions about how to treat those main problems that can be found in a classroom. However, after the analysis of the articles and the movies, the first steps relating to a critical reflection began to emerge. In the following excerpt, taken from a discussion held in class, a pre-service teacher mentions how important it is for a classroom teacher to understand the problems students have at home because those problems affect students' performances at school.

[...] Teacher Wei, in the movie *Not One Less* teaches us an important aspect to reflect. She helps their students in their critical moments, for instance: when her student has problems at home and she does everything possible and more. This teaches us that more than being a teacher you can demonstrate to your students that you are a confident teacher and a person in which they can trust. If you are confident, then the students will become more confident too [sic] (Discussion 3, Wksp III, S1)

In the next excerpt from another class discussion, we asked the students about the role of teachers in the educational setting. The reader can recognize that this pre-service teacher considers teachers to be an integral part of a school community and believes that they should work for the betterment of it.

[...] The teacher should always be committed with student learning process as well as being a part of the school community. Fulfilling the functions of a teacher means that the teacher is also engaged in learning... learning about themselves, the changes in their field, the expectations of the community and society and most importantly learning about their students and ways of enabling their students to grow; one example is in the movie *School of rock* where Mr. Finn encourages students to develop their music skills, then students were improving by themselves. (Discussion 5, Wksp I, S4)

In the sample that follows, taken from a reflective essay, the pre-service teacher highlights the importance of listening to students' voices so that teachers can learn from them and their context.

Today foreign language teaching profession faces that it is not just to be an expert in language, as a teacher, a lot of qualities are needed to enrich the professional and personal

teacher's life, but the most important aspect is before thinking in own necessities, it would be better to think in the students ones. [sic] (Reflective paper 3, Wksp III, S4)

Another aspect that we noticed while analyzing pre-service teachers' feedback was how they began to consider obstacles of the educational system they will face as Colombian teachers. After watching the film *The Principal* and reading Giroux's (1997) ideas, one of the participants in this proposal wrote about the similarities and differences between the Colombian school system and the school system portrayed in the movie.

Nowadays, Colombian educational system has had some changes. For instance, Colombian government has created laws which are against of improvement, performance, and quality of schools. Although there is more educational coverage, schools do not have enough economic resources for developing classes. As a consequence, there are school desertion. Prejudiced teachers, illiterate children, unresourceful institutions, uncultured society. The same happens in most of the schools that are portrayed in the movies we saw. [sic] (Reflective essay 3, Wksp III, S4)

Another pre-service teacher talked about the limitations teachers might face depending on the school system in which they are immersed.

[...] Depending on the country, sometimes teachers are limited by prejudices and problems of society and educational systems. [sic] (Discussion 4, Wksp III, S9)

According to Larrivee (2006), during critical reflection, teachers reflect on the moral and ethical implications and consequences of classroom practices on students. They extend their considerations to issues beyond the classroom to include democratic ideals. The same author further asserts that by acknowledging the fact that classroom and school practices cannot be separated from the larger social and political realities, critically reflective teachers strive to become fully conscious of the range of the consequences of their actions.

**Thinking about my responsibility as a future teacher.** According to Larrivee (2006), responsibility is the careful consideration of the consequences of one's actions, especially as they affect students. During the development of this pedagogical proposal, we noticed that pre-service teachers highlighted some characteristics "good" teachers have. We relate this aspect to responsibility because by reflecting on how pre-service teachers want to be as future teachers, they analyze their decision-making skills. In the excerpts taken from the reflective essays and the discussions held in class, we noticed that pre-service teachers acknowledge that the role teachers play in the school environment impacts students' lives.

Something that teachers have to be aware it is to work the students feelings and values. Education could not be just scores; it has to be the humanistic sense too. For example, Mr Finn took the best of every one of his students to made them explore themselves and

new things that ever never before they had tried, for example: The bands concourse. [sic] (Reflective essay 6, Wksp II, S4)

Teachers should act as the girl-teacher. She needed one of her students to come back, she used the students abilities in mathematics to solve the problem and all children participated. This is to say, the girl-teacher played a role according to real circumstances. [sic] (Reflective essay 3, Wksp III, S9)

Teachers should know that they learn from their students. (S5). What is the good environment to a successful class? Only the teaching experience and the context will give teachers the answer. [sic] (Reflective essay 4, Wksp III, S9)

These samples represent how pre-service teachers began to acknowledge the fact that teachers must be aware of students' needs and context in order to help them solve real problems in their lives. This evidence also shows us that pre-service teachers will probably make decisions based on real needs as voiced by the students. In this sense, the curriculum will be based on the realities with which students live instead of abstract concepts proposed in a syllabus.

In the following samples taken from class discussions, pre-service teachers idealized how teachers need to guide students to find their own methods of learning, in contrast to the philosophy that teachers should be the center of the teaching process. In this way, the pre-service teachers came to identify the option of assisting students to gain academic independence instead of solely acting as lecturers in the teaching-learning process.

[...] The teacher must be a mediator where the students are autonomous in their learning developing abilities and competencies in their own way to acquiring knowledge or facilitator teacher as well respecting the individuality of the students. [sic] (Discussion 5, Wksp I, S11)

[...] The teachers' satisfaction are also shown when the students become aware of their own knowledge acquisition and when they are able to assess themselves and see what they have learn along the teaching process with the teachers' help. [sic] (Discussion 8, Wksp III, S1)

Having shown the findings from the students, we think the following paragraphs relate to the analysis we made of the movies regarding resistance, reskilling, similarities with differences, individuality, positive competition, democracy, authority, critical empowerment and critical literacy.

**Considering critical theory via analyzing movies for classroom practice (Kanpol, 1999).** Kanpol (1999) proposed critical theory for classroom practice as a tool to be used in the analysis of real school settings. However, we used Kanpol's theory to analyze the movies mentioned in this pedagogical proposal. This analysis is part of the findings of this pedagogical proposal.

**Resistance.** In the movies, we observed how teachers were unwilling to follow institutional rules. In *The Chorus*, Mr. Mathieu decided to follow his own rules to change the institution for the better, even though his rules went against the institutional policies. In *Not One Less*, the female teacher made an impact on her community by incorporating some new rules into the rural school where she worked. Since she did not have experience as a teacher, she just followed her heart to improve the rules.

In *School of Rock*, Mr. Finn explicitly wanted to change the students' attitudes toward the music course. He did not understand why the school administrators authoritatively imposed a music class on young students in elementary school. Instead of teaching his regular classes, such as math, language arts and history, Mr. Finn transformed his classroom into a place where students could play in a rock band. This type of activity was something students enjoyed more than a traditional classroom setting because, in a certain way, they were able to make decisions about the type of instrument and the kind of music they wanted to play.

Coach Jones, in *Radio*, was not only a disciplined teacher but also a coach. This position helped Mr. Jones to have an impact on an individual nicknamed Radio, who had physical and mental limitations that prevented him from registering in a regular high school. However, Mr. Jones did not consider it an impediment to have Radio in his classes, even though he was not abiding by the school or the Board of Education's rules. In the film *The Principal*, Mr. Latimer was an experienced teacher but an inexperienced administrator. Because he did not know the administrative policies, he could not follow them well. He started to expand upon diverse alternatives to solve problems and he impacted his community. In the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*, Mr. Holland fought against the educational system, which wanted to eliminate subjects related to the arts from the curriculum due to budgetary concerns.

**Reskilling.** We also found in *School of Rock* that Mr. Finn got the school principal to break the school's rules for field trips. The school policy was to disallow substitute teachers the right to go on field trips, but Mr. Finn managed to plan a field trip with the consent of the school principal. In *Radio*, Mr. Jones resigned from his position as football coach to devote his free time to assisting one student in achieving his academic objectives, even though the student was not allowed to stay on the school grounds because of his age and other issues. In *The Principal*, Mr. Latimer went far beyond breaking the state rules by visiting his students' houses and asking them questions about their personal lives.

**Similarities with differences.** In *The Chorus*, the lead voice wanted to break the rules and belittle his classmates. The teacher made him understand that in a choir, everybody is equal no matter which role they play. In the movie *Not One Less*, there was only one classroom for all students ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade, and there was not enough room for differences to take place. In *School of Rock*, as well as in *Mr. Holland's Opus*, the teachers did not mind the poor but talented students they worked with in their classes; what they wanted was



to help students develop a love for music. In all of these movies there was no room for stereotypes in the classroom. Racism, prejudice, physical condition, age and social class did not matter to the teachers, who continued doing their jobs by highlighting each individual's skills. In *School of Rock*, a female student played the bass guitar, which is usually a stereotyped position for males in musical groups. In the same movie, there was room for both musically gifted students and for those who did not excel in music because positions were created for anyone who wanted to participate. In *Radio*, Mr. Jones was defiant: He adopted one student with disabilities in his classroom, even though the school board and the principal were against his opinion. In *The Principal*, Mr. Latimer concentrated his efforts on helping minority students succeed at his institution.

**Individuality.** In *The Chorus*, Mr. Mathieu listened carefully to the students' pleas for help. Mr. Mathieu worked in a boarding school in which parents did not spend a lot of quality time with their children. Mr. Mathieu learned how to listen to his students' problems and the stories behind them. He took advantage of his students' previous issues to help them succeed. For instance, there was a student whose parents never visited him and Mr. Mathieu comforted him by letting him know that even though his parents were far away, their absence was not an obstacle in life that he could not overcome.

In *Not One Less*, one student's family situation became a challenge for all of his classmates to help him overcome. The teacher used her power to lead the class in an "all for one and one for all" effort. In the movies *Radio* and *The Principal*, Mr. Jones and Mr. Latimer visited students in their home environments to get acquainted with their problems in order to create a plan for them to succeed. Mr. Holland, in *Mr. Holland's Opus*, listened to his students' stories about their future as a way to comfort them and also as a way to empower them.

**Positive competition.** In *School of Rock*, the teacher did not mind that his students were involved in a music contest created for more experienced or advanced musicians. He empowered his students to compete with more mature musicians because he wanted to show his students that their musical talent and ages were not obstacles. In *Radio*, the players on the football team committed an injustice when they took advantage of a physically and mentally impaired individual who visited the school. After the coach witnessed the football players' cruelty and discrimination against the handicapped individual, he taught his team members a lesson: Handicapped individuals are also members of society.

**Democracy.** In *School of Rock*, Mr. Finn listened to all of his students' ideas to create a surveillance system to keep the band's rehearsals hidden from school administrators. In the movie *Not One Less*, Ms. Wei took into account the students' ideas in order to collect money for her trip to the city. The class discussed all the proposed ideas and then voted on one.

**Authority.** In *Not One Less*, Ms. Wei negotiated some activities (like working in a brick factory) with the students outside of the classroom in order to raise money to bring a student

back to class. In *School of Rock*, Mr. Finn, the teacher, and his students broke several school rules in order to continue practicing music. However, there was a consensus because they all sought the same objective: to play music. In *Radio*, Mr. Jones and the school principal agreed on breaking some parameters implemented by the central school board so that Radio, a handicapped student, could remain inside the school premises. In *The Principal*, Mr. Latimer negotiated certain school rules with some students in order to get information about what was happening inside the high school.

**Critical empowerment.** In all the aforementioned movies, critical empowerment is reflected to a certain level. All of the teachers tried to contact their students' families in order to help the students improve in school. These teachers were not only worried about teaching their classes, but they were concerned about how some students were oppressed by society. They went far beyond the classroom in order to look for beneficial learning alternatives for their students.

**Critical literacy.** In the movies *The Chorus* and *Mr. Holland's Opus*, all music theory that was studied in class was put into practice during concerts attended by the community. In *Radio* the physical education syllabus was based on promoting a football team.

On a scale from one to three, we examined the movies using Kanpol's ideas regarding critical theory for classroom practice. We think that all movies about education that were viewed can be used to explore aspects about critical theory; however, we are aware of the fact that the content related to critical theory in all of the movies is not the same. Some movies present examples of social structures more clearly than others, such as showing how teachers create strong bonds within the community or the community's interest in school performance. Based on the previous grounds, ticks (✓✓✓) were used to express the degree of critical aspects examined, with three ticks (✓✓✓) being a high number and one tick (✓) representing a low degree of critical aspects observed (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Movies and critical theory

Movies Kanpol's ideas	The Chorus	Not One Less	School of Rock	<i>Radio</i>	The Principal	Mr. Holland's Opus
Resistance	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Reskilling	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Similarity with difference	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

<b>Movies</b> <b>Kanpol's ideas</b>	<b>The Chorus</b>	<b>Not One Less</b>	<b>School of Rock</b>	<b><i>Radio</i></b>	<b>The Principal</b>	<b>Mr. Holland's Opus</b>
Individuality	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Positive Competition	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Democracy	✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Critical Empowerment	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
Critical Literacy	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓

## Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

As the main objective of this pedagogical proposal was to lead pre-service teachers to reflect upon their future role as English teachers from a critical perspective, we think that after implementing this proposal, pre-service teachers started to develop some critical skills. For instance, their reflections changed from initially only considering methodological and instructional aspects of the classroom to now keeping in mind the social issues that affect the classroom environment as well.

One of the most common features of pre-service teachers' reflections was related to the idea of taking into account students' context and the school community in the decision making process at school. Another relevant characteristic in students' reflections was their awareness of the fact that the educational policies of a country have a high impact on school curriculum and also the recognition that these policies are not frequently on the side of the students. For this reason, many pre-service teachers will eventually need to fight against unjust policies to improve students' learning opportunities in school.

Finally, we identified, through class discussions and the analysis of written essays, pre-service teachers' opinions on being responsible teachers. According to these implications, responsible teachers who make responsible decisions are not just professionals who deliver class in a vacuum, but take into account the social dimensions that are immersed in the teaching process.

From a general perspective, we think that as teacher-educators we cannot expect to develop competent and critical future teachers if we do not promote and expose pre-service teachers to situations where they can analyze critical issues they may face in their real teaching experiences. One way to bring educational situations into the classroom is through movies.

Considering the various themes depicted in movies, future teachers can reflect upon the educative aspects they are going to face in their practicum and in their future life as teachers.

It is our belief that by reading articles about critical theory, by watching movies about educational topics, and by writing reflections about critical issues and arguing ideas, we can greatly help pre-service teachers initiate a process for understanding the social dimensions of teaching which may in the future support their becoming reflective pedagogues. Eventually, it would be a first step for pre-service teachers to become future critical educators.

Another important aspect to keep in mind is that movies should not be limited in their use by EFL teacher-educators to solely promote listening and reading skills in students. There is still a need to search for creative ways to use movies, especially commercial ones, because of their easy access as tools to bring educational realities closer to our future English teachers.

Finally, we can assert that in this project we, who were responsible for carrying out the pedagogical proposal -professors of these future teachers- were not at the center of the teaching-learning process, but rather pre-service teachers, our students, were the foundation. Our role was to acknowledge pre-service teachers' previous knowledge, experiences, culture and backgrounds in general. Pre-service teachers' voices were heard during the discussions, and they tended to conduct their own interventions during class sessions.

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## **Appendix 1: Questions for discussion in each movie**

1. What kind of interaction took place in the classes?
2. What kind of questions did the teachers ask?
3. To what extent was the teacher at the center of the teaching-learning processes?
4. How does a school district policy affect teachers and students?
5. How does a teacher cope with budgetary issues at school?
6. What kind of communication problems did the teacher have?
7. To what extent did society consider the teacher's academic practices right or wrong?
8. To what extent did society consider the teacher's personal actions right or wrong?
9. What was the role of children, teachers, society, mass media, citizens, and life conditions in the learning process?
10. How similar or different is the Colombian school system to the one seen in the movie?
11. How do the words perseverance, tenacity and commitment relate to the movie?
12. How did children in the school come to find meaningful learning?
13. How far can you go as a teacher in a situation similar to the movie?
14. How do students' anxieties affect learning?
15. What kind of approach or methodology does the teacher follow to teach his class?
16. Based on the movie, how useful or useless is it to have a lesson plan for teaching?
17. Based on the movie, how do you define life-long learning?
18. Based on the movie, what is the difference between students' engagement and students' motivation?
19. Provide examples of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation as seen in the movie.
20. How does the teacher deal with testing, evaluation and assessment?
21. How does the teacher deal with error correction?
22. How do the characters in the movie (the principal, the teacher, the students, the teachers' roommates, or others) represent Maslow's (1973) hierarchy of needs?

23. Based on the movie, can you provide some examples of the roles of the interactive teacher as described by Brown? (The teacher as the controller, director, manager, facilitator, and resource.)
24. Are there gender stereotypes represented in the movie? If so, which ones? How are they represented and why?
25. To what extent are authority and power relationships apparent in the movie?
26. Music was the main motivation for the teacher to teach his classes in this movie. What would be your reason to change the curriculum in a rural or city school in Boyacá?

Besides asking the previous questions, we used and adapted the following questions from Kanpol (1999):

27. How is the teacher reskilled in the movie?
28. How does the teacher reskill the students?
29. What methods exist for you to undercut negative forms of competition?
30. How does the teacher's view of teaching minorities differ from the principal's view?
31. How would you handle ideological differences among yourself, other teachers and the principal?
32. In what ways do teachers empower their students?
33. In what ways were the teachers in the movies empowered?
34. What are some of the challenges that these teachers face?
35. How is "difference" portrayed in this movie?
36. How do you view yourself as a teacher compared to the teachers in these movies?
37. Is there a hidden curriculum that these teachers employed? If so, what does it mean?
38. Do you identify with the teacher? Why?
39. How are the teachers in the movie portrayed?
40. Is there a sense of autonomy and/or control in the teachers' lives at the school?
41. Do the teachers challenge already established views?
42. If you were in these situations, what tools would you use to help alleviate the conflicts these teachers face?



<i>The Chorus</i>	<b>Not One Less</b>	<b>School of Rock</b>	<i>Radio</i>	<b>The Principal</b>	<b>Mr. Holland's Opus</b>
1 to 3, 9 to 19, 21 to 23, 25, 26, 29 to 31, 34, 36 to 42	1 to 19, 22, 23, 25, 31, 34, 36 to 42	1 to 3, 6 to 16, 18 to 26, 29, 31, 34 to 42	4, 6 to 11, 17, 19, 22 to 25, 27 to 29, 31 to 42	4, 6 to 11, 13, 19, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 34, 36 to 42	1 to 5, 10 to 13, 15 to 26, 31 to 34, 36 to 42

Questions for discussion in each movie

## Appendix 2: Sample of a workshop

### Movie: School of Rock



Get into groups of four people and read the first set of questions taken from Kanpol (1999). Relate them to your own experiences.

- *Discuss the kind of environment you grew up in. Was it educationally conducive?*
- *What role did your parents play in your education?*
- *How have your past school experiences affected your views of education today?*
- *Discuss the race, class, and gender relationships in your past.*

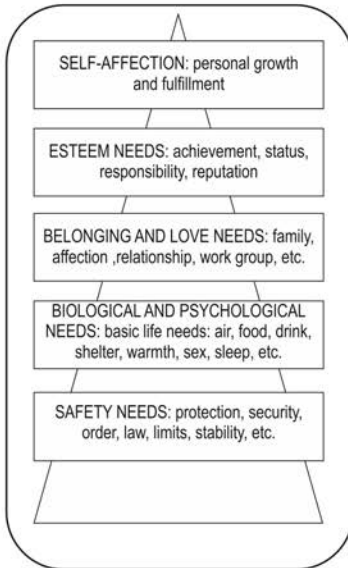


Now, take a seat, feel comfortable, and enjoy watching this movie. It is hilarious!

Picture taken and adapted from:  
[www.beconfused.com](http://www.beconfused.com)



Now, read the articles: *Tensions of meaning, Tensions of and between Cultures, and Coming to Terms with Difference* by Kanpol (1999), and *Interactive language teaching I* by Brown (2001).



Get into groups of four and answer the following questions. Try to reflect upon aspects related to critical theory for classroom practice, the movie, and your own teaching/learning experiences.

1. How does anxiety affect learning?
2. What kind of approach or methodology does the teacher follow to teach his class?
3. How useful or useless is it to have a lesson plan for teaching?
4. How do you define a life lesson?
5. How do you define life-long learning?
6. What is the difference between students' engagement and students' motivation?
7. Provide some examples of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation seen in the movie.
8. How does the teacher deal with testing, evaluation and assessment?
9. How does the teacher deal with error correction?
10. How is Maslow's (1973) hierarchy of needs represented in some characters (the principal, the teacher, the students, the teachers' roommates, and others) in the movie?
11. Based in the movie, can you provide some examples of the roles of the interactive teacher as described by Brown? (The teacher as the controller, director, manager, facilitator, and resource.)
12. Are there gender stereotypes represented in the movie?
13. To what extent are authority and power relationships perceived in the movie?
14. Music was the principal motive for a teacher to teach his classes in this movie. What would be your reason to change the curriculum in a rural/ or city school in Boyacá?



Write a five-paragraph essay. Paragraph number one must be the introductory paragraph, and paragraph number five must be the concluding one. Paragraphs must have a topic sentence and supportive sentences.

## **Appendix 3: Summary of Movies**

### **Not One Less**

A substitute teacher arrives at a poor elementary school located in a sub-settlement in a rural area in China. She is a young girl, about thirteen years old. The school facilities are in ruins, and the only classroom is overcrowded with boys and girls from kindergarten to fifth grade. At night, the classroom becomes the dormitory for students whose families live far away. Besides teaching, the substitute also cooks meals for the students. She faces a lot of problems when one of the students drops out of school due to family concerns.

### **School of Rock**

A substitute teacher is needed in a prominent private elementary school in the USA. The substitute teacher is a musician, and he tries to communicate his passion for music to his students. The students in this school are used to abiding by all rules and class directions. The teacher encounters some obstacles in achieving his goals as a teacher because neither students nor teachers can negotiate the school rules.

### **The Chorus**

A new teacher arrives at an all-boys boarding school in France. He is in charge of the music course, and he encourages his students not only to become good singers but also outstanding human beings. The school is full of students whose parents do not provide affection or have much contact with their children. The teacher fights against the rules imposed by the principal and helps the students to stand out in the community.

### **The Principal**

A high school teacher is promoted to the position of principal in the USA in a school full of problems. These issues are related to the staff in the school not being on the principal's side, and the students' performance is low according to state standards. This high school enrolls students from diverse backgrounds, ethnicity groups, and nationalities. Initially the principal struggles to be accepted and to make a mark at the school, but he ends up solving the diverse challenges by using creative strategies.

### **Radio**

A high school teacher in the USA, who is also a football coach at the school, encounters a lot of trouble in the school environment when he encourages a handicapped individual to return to high school to graduate. The entire community stands against this teacher: students, staff, the school principal and the school board. The teacher fights against all kinds of obstacles to help the handicapped student.

### **Mr. Holland's Opus**

A musician becomes a teacher in a high school in the USA. At the beginning, he encounters students who are not very talented musically, but he helps his students discover their strengths in music. He does everything to keep music courses running at the school because art and music courses are at risk of being removed from the curriculum. He impacts the community in a positive way for more than thirty years while he teaches.