

Critical Pedagogy for Transforming Literacy Education at Border Schools in Thailand

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Abstract

The English language is in high global demand in political, economic, and social contexts, yet marginalized students living near the border of Northeastern Thailand are impeded toward upward socioeconomic mobility due to incompetence to communicate in English. Teachers, as frontline gatekeepers, should empower the students and help them attain academic achievement. In doing so, language teachers must be critically conscious of the untapped potential of marginalized students to acquire linguistic and cultural capitals through English literacy education. This paper aims to introduce critical pedagogy as an alternative for teaching English literacy to marginalized students in the borderland school context in the northeastern region of Thailand. Having reviewed related literature, conducted field visits to a school near the border of Laos in the Northeastern region of Thailand and had informal conversations with the teachers in the school in the area, the authors proposed three basic conditions that need to be considered in order to optimize the use of critical pedagogy. These are students' family and community backgrounds, teachers' experience, and institutional restrictions. Moreover, suggestions for implementing critical pedagogy in this specific context are proposed: 1) deconstructing the oppression which students encounter; 2) transforming real-life experience into knowledge; and 3) negotiating between transformative theory and reality to accommodate difficulties in teaching English literacy.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, language and literacy, educational transformation, Greater Mekong Subregion

Introduction

The macro issue of educational inequality affecting students living near the border of Laos in the Northeastern region of Thailand is of great concern. The shared riparian border comprises the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), across which six countries share the Mekong river—Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. These member countries cooperate using the economic corridor approach. While the use of the English language is important and significantly influential in political, economic, and social domains in a global context, the languages used for cross-border communication between people living in Northeastern Thailand and Laos tend to be shared dialects, as well as emerging Chinese dialects. Consequently, the English language is relevant to few activities in people's everyday life in the area (Bruthiaux, 2008).

In this sense, the English language has served as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society, with the means to transform economic and cultural identity and enable social mobility (Grant and Lee, 2009; Pennycook, 1994). Demand for English language literacy is accordingly high for Thai students. However, problems with English literacy learning among marginalized students in Thailand extend beyond language skills development. Social issues have also been addressed intensively (OECD, 2018; Toomthong et al., 2014), many of which are linked to students' academic underachievement, including poverty, remoteness of schools, under-resourced educational facilities, and family burdens. Academic inequality continues to exacerbate a lack of motivation to learn among students living in suburban areas (Draper, 2012). These issues perpetuate low literacy and low quality of life among marginalized students.

At a micro educational level, recent literature has revealed gaps between the policy of inclusive education and the actual practices carried out in the classroom. For instance, previous studies show that transmissive approaches continue to dominate and inform instruction, which reproduce a culture of silence (Darder et al., 2008). A lack of foreign language learning materials with culturally relevant content has

also been noted (Baker, 2008; Kaur et al., 2016). The curricula mandated by the Ministry of Education and used in many different countries convey cultural hegemony and dominant oppressive ideologies (Apple, 1993, Giroux and McLaren, 1987; Shor, 1992). Moreover, it has been asserted that unfamiliarity with legitimate academic discourse can cause predominantly marginalized students to be disadvantaged from academic learning (Boriboon, 2004).

Thai students are more familiar with the tendency for teachers to transmit knowledge as the Thai educational system has been heavily critiqued for its spoon-feeding teaching tradition (Darasawang and Watson Todd, 2012; Nicoletti, 2015). Normative practices in English literacy education result in learners finding themselves in an oppressive educational environment. It is challenging to find opportunities for empowering teaching approaches to flourish within the realm of English language teaching in Thailand when the currently standardized norms still hold legitimate status regardless of the disparities among Thai students. In other words, the unequal capitals that marginalized students bring to their learning can reciprocally lead classroom teachers to domesticate them, both culturally and linguistically.

The implementation of more innovative teaching approaches can be difficult as some teachers also seem to resist the change to student-centered pedagogy and still perceive the role of teachers as a center of knowledge transmission (Thamraksa, 2003). This educational norm has played a major role in language teachers' pedagogical practices in order to avoid conflicts with the authorities. These widely utilized educational practices fall under the concept of 'banking education' (Freire, 2000). It is a transmissive approach through which knowledge is systematically deposited into students. Banking education reflects the culturally hierarchical value and social order of Thai society. This type of educational practice obstructs students from questioning the knowledge they receive and negotiating their power to acquire meaning from what they learn as well as how it can be applied to their lives.

Those students who are in a banking educational system can consequently become self-depreciated (Freire, 2000). The crucial point is that these students do not realize their own potential to voice their ideas, since they are not provided the power to do so. Meanwhile, teachers may not be critically aware that students' backgrounds can be relevant to their academic motivation and achievement (Lin, 1999). From a bottom-up perspective, teachers are viewed as a vital key to either widen or reduce the achievement gap of students since they have the authority to exercise legitimate power through their selection of instructional approaches and learning materials.

To acknowledge the problem, educators have proposed critical pedagogy as an alternative instructional approach (Giroux and McLaren, 1987; Kubota, 2004; Pennycook, 1994; Shor, 1992). The philosophical principle of critical pedagogy aims to empower marginalized students who are disenfranchised from their own cultural existence. As humans, these students need to raise their critical consciousness and become aware of their potential to change. This idea can be applied in language classrooms to help both teachers and students discover the unwanted and hidden ideologies in their prescribed curriculum, such as a hegemony of school culture, politics of language and power, and oppressive classroom practices that have become a tool of dehumanization.

Critical pedagogy can help facilitate language teachers to convert theory into practice. In this manner, teachers should put students' background issues such as culture, language, socio-economic status, and gender at the forefront before planning their lessons. Freire (2000) argues that the most powerful means to help marginalized students living in subordinate cultural groups is to encourage reflection on what they learn from their own real-life experiences. Schools practicing critical pedagogy can provide students the freedom to assert their opinions which are central for laying down roots and moral responsibility in wider democratic society outside their classroom (Giroux, 2010).

This paper therefore aims to introduce critical pedagogy as a transformative philosophy and an alternative educational approach for teaching English literacy to marginalized students in the borderland

school context in the Northeastern region of Thailand. The literature and suggestions for critical pedagogical implications in this specific educational context derive from a synthesis of pertinent previous studies. In addition, the first author had a chance to visit the research site which is the elementary school established under the Thai government's scheme of basic education expansion to the border area. The name of the school is withheld from this study for ethical reasons. The author conducted informal conversations with two local teachers who teach English and Thai literacy subjects to gain more insights into their teaching situations.

With this alternative approach, teachers should develop their critical consciousness and pay closer attention to the investment of students' learning capitals which is currently incompatible with the mainstream English language educational system. The key principles of critical pedagogy, dialogic approach, problem-posing education, as well as funds of knowledge are illustrated herein. To maximize the implementation of critical pedagogy in particular contexts, teachers' beliefs and practices are discussed and taken into consideration.

Critical Pedagogy as a Practice of Freedom in Democratic Classrooms

The prominent Brazilian critical pedagogue, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), questioned power and oppression in school contexts. Living in a colonized country where little democracy was exercised, Freire raised critical consciousness of a Brazilian identity in a borrowed culture. Critical pedagogy becomes a vital apparatus for reflecting the relationship between the colonizer (the oppressor) and those who were colonized (the oppressed) (Freire, 2000). The seminal idea lays a solid rationale for decolonizing education which could perpetuate oppression in school culture.

This type of oppressive education is coined by Freire as 'banking education'. It is a narrative approach in which learners are provided with prescribed knowledge by teachers who position themselves as those

in authority. Banking education is a one-way transmission of knowledge. Freedom to negotiate a meaningful learning experience in a banking education context is limited since students are designated to be passive learners. Banking education creates a false perspective of teachers toward education and develops in students a sense of self-depreciation and a belief that they are incapable of learning.

Freire asserts that this kind of educational practice does not help learners learn, nor does it raise critical consciousness in teachers. As a central component of banking education, narrative instructional practices generate pattern-recognition and production (Matusov, 2020). The students' ability to derive meaningful content and skills is repressed, allowing them to absorb only given patterns of thinking, discourse, and acting. Teachers must be made aware that this passive form of learning prolongs banking educational practices.

From a critical pedagogical view, education is an act of knowing, a political act, and art all at the same time (Freire, 1985). The classroom is a situated space where both students and teachers can create a safe environment with a more interdependent relationship. Teachers need to respect and tolerate the fact that all students bring their own knowledge and experience to class. Education should be acknowledged as a practice of freedom. Critical pedagogy should be applied in the classroom so that teachers become a 'transformative intellectual agent,' who are aware that students have rights to learn. They must create opportunities for students to explore and discover that learning is about how to negotiate power in reconstructing knowledge (Giroux and McLaren, 1987).

It is said that a sole theory can be just a 'simple verbalism', but without the theory, a practice can become 'blind activism' (Darder et al., 2008). Critical pedagogy suggests that we as humans must raise our own critical consciousness that learners have the potential to challenge inequality and change problematized circumstances (Freire, 2005). In education, critical pedagogy links instruction and curricula with cultural and political ideologies (Widodo et al., 2018). The theory also helps to explain why students who are disadvantaged fail to achieve

mainstream literacy in the educational system. Traditional classroom structures and prescribed curricula intimidate learners' subjectivity by disregarding existing knowledge, native languages, interests, and the diverse conditions learners face. This type of instruction creates educational disparities especially among marginalized students who may suffer punitive attitudes from teachers (Shor, 1992). Educating marginalized students in this way discourages them from achieving academic success.

Meanwhile, practicing freedom of thought in democratic classrooms benefits students by developing their intellectual curiosity. The implementation of democracy in classrooms should lead teachers and students toward free dialogue. Democratic classrooms promote students' curiosity about knowledge as they begin to see learning as a process of co-construction providing the chance for all participants to expand their academic agency (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 2010). In other words, participants in democratic classrooms should be empowered, skeptical, and encouraged to pose questions (Giroux, 2010). These questions can address anything that affects their lives, including social, cultural, political, or environmental issues.

Schools practicing critical pedagogy occupy a political sphere where democracy is exercised. Teachers and students can learn from each other's real-life experiences and knowledge relevant to their lives. It is suggested that democratic teachers draw on their students' interests by planning their lessons around students' cultures and native languages. Teachers may start by posing problems related to students' lives and society, helping them approach issues from multiple perspectives and challenging them to imagine dilemmas of their own. The teachers' role is to facilitate processes of learning, construct generative themes, and stimulate thoughts so that the lessons can evolve from the students' own cultures and languages before merging expert knowledge and social issues into the learning content (Shor, 1992). Democratic principles in education maximize students' participation and engagement in their own learning and curriculum development. An empowering education cannot, and should not, be possible without democracy in the classroom.

Critical Approaches for Educational Empowerment

Dialogics and the Dialogic Approach

Freire emphasizes that dialogic teaching practices are derived from democratic principles. The concept of 'dialogics,' or the use of dialogue, is proposed as an instrument for classroom practice. The word 'dialogue' denotes two-way communication. It is a horizontal and reciprocal relationship between persons. A dialogic approach helps students learn the conventions of academic discourse that are often unfamiliar to marginalized students (Wong, 2006). The literature supports the implementation of learning the value of everyday practices together with the pattern-recognition and production imposed by schools (Matusov, 2020).

Second language learning requires engagement and will on the part of learners to communicate (Wong, 2006). This approach can help empower students to establish an intersubjectivity between authority and themselves as the audience. Once students become willing subjects, they will acquire productive skills such as speaking and writing. They will reciprocally practice the receptive skills of listening and reading. Three facets are recommended for a successful implementation of a dialogic approach.

- 1) A dialogic approach requires both simple and complex models to enhance students' critical thinking. A predetermined conclusion of what is being learned should not initially be given. Students should be encouraged to seek answers to given problems and relate possible solutions to the knowledge and experience they carry with them to class.
- 2) Teachers should help students metacognitively be aware of these learning strategies. Motivation will emerge from the teacher's guidance offering multiple ways to achieve an outcome, such as searching information, brainstorming, assistance of peers, or keeping journal entries.
- 3) Teachers should begin creating dialogue from students' interests and needs. Also, they should always be aware of

open-ended questions which can lead to controversy. As a result, teachers can create a safe space for students to secure their sense of freedom in expressing their opinions critically, responsibly, and respectfully (Andreotti, 2005).

Problem-Posing Education

Problem-posing education is a critical pedagogical approach in constructing knowledge learned from real-life problems. Questions should be posed from the students' interests and needs to examine different angles and perspectives of various dilemmas. To illustrate, teachers could implement problem-posing education in the following ways: first, teachers should identify appropriate issues relating to students' concerns. Second, students are guided to clearly define these issues, examine them with multiple lenses, and reflect on what has been learned about the real world and their own experiences. Finally, students further analyze the issues and perform problem-solving tasks (Lewison et al., 2002; Schleppegrell and Bowman, 1995).

The teacher's role in problem-posing education is to facilitate critical discussion for developing literacy skills and forming logical discourse. As can be seen, a non-authoritarian classroom environment can help trigger the mechanism of critical thinking. When students find possible solutions to a problem, they should gradually begin to transform their lives, which is a central goal of critical pedagogy. Marginalized students should not be limited to cognitive or psychological development (Cummins, 2009) but should be extended to improving their current status quo and helping them question themselves to attain their life achievements and satisfaction.

The use of dialogue is a method of problem-posing education which is rooted in deriving meaning from the real world through critical scrutiny and cultural integration (Freire, 2005). Identifying problems in daily life can serve as the genesis to create a link between the causes of problems and the will to transform them. This causal link is crucial for a critical consciousness of how to better their lives. Hence, any literacy for nurturing critical questions should relate to the students' reality and

foster their ability to understand these causal links. Problem-posing education achieves a greater dimension of intellectual curiosity, with thought-provoking questions that address the empowerment to correct unjust situations surrounding the students.

Funds of Knowledge

Marginalized students are also disadvantaged from mainstream education due to their under-resourced school conditions and unfamiliarity with foreign discourse (Boriboon, 2004; Kaur et al., 2016). The value of local knowledge and student identity are complementary key concepts that share a core principle with critical pedagogy. Teachers should become aware of their rights to exercise power and freedom to redesign and create alternative teaching materials and classroom instruction for students. The form of knowledge is called 'Funds of Knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992). It includes household knowledge, skills, and community social networks. Teachers can benefit from making use of these available resources, including knowledge that has been abandoned or perceived as worthless, outdated, or dangerous (Moll, 1992). Funds of knowledge are said to fill the gap in accessibility caused by limited learning resources, especially among marginalized students in remote areas.

Funds of knowledge are characterized as flexible, adaptive, and active. To illustrate, Moll collected data on Mexican students' diverse cultural values and integrated these resources into a formal curriculum (Moll et al., 1992). Personal visits to students' houses appear to be an important means of collecting their funds of knowledge. Teachers become field researchers, trained to observe, conduct interviews, and reflect on their experiences at these households. Teachers must define multiple dimensions of knowledge for pedagogical development. Data comprising historical and cultural values can be processed as bodies of knowledge and skills and be classified into a variety of knowledge fields. For example, in the study of Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) they classified the collected funds of knowledge from their students' households into mining, construction, railroads, and industrial forms of agriculture.

The concept of funds of knowledge encourages teachers to learn about each of their students as a whole person, as well as to become aware of their world outside the classroom walls. Integrating funds of knowledge into learning content can help accommodate marginalized students, who are at risk of underachieving in the use of mainstream language and literacy education, by relating their historical and cultural contexts to academic content. At the same time, teachers are empowered to shift their roles to become active researchers as well as creative curriculum developers.

Applying Critical Pedagogy in a Borderland Context

Critical pedagogy is proposed as an empowering notion to alleviate critical issues prevalent in the borderland context that are customarily taken for granted. These issues should be voiced to sound an alert on crucial conditions within English literacy education in this area. To maximize the implementation of its pedagogical approach, an understanding of the borderland educational situations is also essential. From the informal conversations with the two local teachers who teach English and Thai literacy subjects at the site, we proposed that three fundamental conditions should be taken into account prior to the implementation of critical pedagogy for the transformation of pedagogical practices.

1. Students' family and community backgrounds

Students' difficulties in learning can be rooted in their families' economic and community backgrounds. Most students in rural areas are sometimes referred to as 'leftover' from other bigger schools in urbanized areas. Since earning a living in these rural areas make demands on the workforce, some students are inevitably required to help their family work on farms or rice fields which overrides their education. Consequently, students are often absent or come to school late. Traditional work burdens and economic constraints are challenging factors for achieving educational engagement (Draper, 2012; Toomthong et al., 2014). Education can even be seen as pointless to pursuing their

life goals. Attention to individual schooling, especially learning English literacy, is not what some of these students set as their priority.

Another crucial issue of marginalized students living by the Northeastern borders of Thailand is drug use among local youth in the community (Sunthornkajit et al., 2002). This borderland area is well known as drug transportation routes. Some families are involved in illicit drug activities, and this can negatively impact students as they may decide to follow their family's practice. Meanwhile, drug use has become the cultural norm among certain groups and therefore deteriorated physical and mental health. These effects of family and community issues on education are comparably witnessed in many other marginalized cultural groups around the world, such as African and Hispanic Americans, Mexicans, and other immigrant cultural minorities (Cohen, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

2. Teachers' experience

Richards and Lockhard (1994) emphasize that varying personal experiences can have a significant effect on teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices. The primary factors include personal demographic backgrounds and different experiences in learning and working. Another factor in the learning experience is the importance of role models, such as previous teachers or advisors from their own schools or colleges. For example, the two local teachers had a positive experience and a fond memory of their language teachers. The experience influences their preference for choices of their teaching methods since they have personally found effective in their own learning. In this regard, teachers need to reflect and critically analyze what and how their current pedagogical beliefs and practices have been shaped to understand their function in different teaching paradigms.

3. Institutional restrictions

Institutional influences and school restrictions have also played a considerable role in teaching standards. In Thailand, the Ministry of Education hands down a policy to 'decentralize power in educational administration and management regarding academic matters and local community participation (Section 6 National Education Plan,

2017-2036). By following traditional teaching norms, however, teachers do not acknowledge their rights to creatively redesign pertinent learning materials for students in a local community. Teachers may also have limited freedom in designing their lessons as they must rigorously comply with the mandated core curriculum. In short, the core curriculum, the prescribed textbooks, the subject tests, and the annual national test restrict teachers from creatively inventing learning content and materials that are related to their students' lives. It has been evident in different educational contexts that conflicts between teachers' or students' static ideological stances and pedagogical practices can become an obstacle in transforming the educational paradigm (Yoon, 2015).

To conclude, varying conditions of students, teachers, and institutions serve to highlight the crucial and worthwhile need to examine specific problems in each educational context and to create solutions in response. This information from the specific context of marginalized students living in the Northeastern borderland area yields more insights into the relationships among family and community backgrounds, teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, and institutional restrictions which have been addressed as a direct response to students' learning difficulties and educational inequity generated by their living conditions (Cohen, 1982; Draper, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Toomthong et al., 2014).

Critical Pedagogy as a Pedagogical Alternative Approach

Freire (2000) explains that the most powerful means to make marginalized students learn is to assimilate their own experiences into their learning processes. Engaging students in critical dialogue can allow them to become active learners. Critical pedagogy greatly benefits those on the margins of the society. There should be an urgent call to re-examine teaching approaches for mainstream literacy that have excluded marginalized students' real-life experiences. The social issues surrounding their lives have greatly affected their academic language learning. The situation demands that teachers reconsider their pedagogical beliefs and practices in the context of their actual

classrooms. Hence, the followings are suggestions for implementing critical pedagogy for marginalized students.

1. Deconstructing the oppression of students' marginal backgrounds

Critical issues within pedagogical practices are limited by teachers' static ideological stances (Yoon, 2015). It is a vital factor in transforming the curriculum. Therefore, teachers must be aware that all knowledge is partial and can be complementary. In this sense, teachers can utilize concepts of critical pedagogy to analyze and make sense of oppression in the students' lives and become critically conscious of their status quo especially those who are marginalized, underprivileged, and disadvantaged from the mainstream literacy education and from shared resources in the community. Teachers who practice critical pedagogy should treat their students in a more equitable manner, respect all races, classes, genders, languages, and cultures (Cohen, 1982).

In the borderland school context, marginalized students' diverse conditions can cause difficulties in learning, including the economic status of their families and the students' own backgrounds. However, students' life problems should not be treated as a hindrance. Instead, teachers should employ critical pedagogy as a tool to convert 'common culture' into 'uncommon culture'. For example, a drug issue can be a controversial topic in most communities. Teachers implementing a critical pedagogical approach may develop literacy lessons from common issues about drugs. At the same time, teachers need to treat 'drugs' as a sensitive topic to the status quo of their students and avoid humiliation. A critical discussion may center around the procedures of drug smuggling across borders, the negative effects of drug use, as well as solutions to problems which could benefit everyone in the community. Posing problems about the issue, sharing different experiences, and exchanging opinions can encourage students to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving processes. This type of education is emancipatory and helps liberate the students from self-depreciation and human suffering (Freire, 2000).

2. Turning real-life experiences into knowledge

Although marginalized students may have no extravagant learning resources, they still have their own native language and life knowledge. Teachers can transform students' subordinate cultural backgrounds into rich resources for learning. This can be done by bridging students' real-life experiences (their funds of knowledge) with school knowledge. From these two sources, teachers can develop more culturally relevant learning materials with students being the center of interest (Moll, 1992; Scherff and Spector, 2011). It is suggested that household knowledge and its interconnection with the social environment can help facilitate an exchange of knowledge between culturally available sources and those within the official curriculum.

One way that teachers may expand their pedagogical experience is by visiting their students' homes. The practice of home visits can help teachers acquire students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). The collection of students' household experience can compensate for irrelevant cultural content currently appearing in commercial textbooks widely used in classrooms (Baker, 2008; Kaur et al., 2016). Home visits also provide a great opportunity for teachers to collaborate with parents and the community network. Funds of knowledge can be a new domain of content integrated into the formal curriculum and can serve as rich resources for supplementary learning materials.

Students' funds of knowledge can be developed into a knowledge bank: teachers can help enlarge students' repertoire of knowledge and motivate students to investigate issues relevant to them. Topics can be diverse, including local occupations, cross-border trading, local literature, or the use of local dialects, to name a few. Students can then use these relevant topics for meaningful dialogue, which will help these marginalized students develop their literacy learning in L1 and local dialects (the native languages), L2 (the standardized Thai language), and L3 (the English language).

Another learning resource worth mentioning is collaboration among people living in the community. Teachers can begin building the community network to enhance learning between the local community

and school. To illustrate, some parents can be invited to give a talk or demonstration in class showcasing their skills in a specific job area. A strong bond between the community and school should strengthen the students' sense of pride for their community and encourage them to improve their quality of life, both for themselves and their community (Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992).

3. Negotiating between transformative theory and mandated reality

Although institutional constraints inevitably obstruct the implementation of the democratic classroom and critical pedagogy, teachers should allow themselves to find a channel to exercise their power in pedagogical instruction and selection of learning materials. Language teachers are encouraged to employ an additional dialogic approach as a tool to question and construct new perspectives on knowledge as presented through the language and content in the mainstream curriculum (Freire, 2000; Matusov, 2020). Problem-posing education should be implemented to challenge students and promote critical discussion. For example, to complement students' comprehension skills when studying a reading text, students can discuss what its purposes are, the target audience, whether the author has any bias, and whether there are any unheard voices in the text (Adunyarittigun, 2017; Lewison et al., 2002).

Teachers must provide a democratic platform or a free space for students to feel safe when they share real-life experiences with their teacher and peers, including life problems, knowledge and skills from their household and their community, as well as when they need to question or raise controversial issues in classrooms (Andreotti, 2005; Yoon, 2015). Students may lose their sense of self-confidence and motivation, especially in second language learning, when they are labeled as deficient in language acquisition (Adunyarittigun, 1993). It is necessary that teachers ensure students' sense of security and achievement when conducting a free discussion using the target language.

Conclusion

Students' family and community backgrounds, teachers' experiences, and institutional restrictions are crucial conditions affecting teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices. It is worth listening to both teachers and students from a bottom-up perspective. Teachers' understanding of critical pedagogy can help to accommodate marginalized students in English literacy education. Accordingly, suggestions for implementing critical pedagogy in the context of borderland schools are proposed. First, deconstructing the oppression of students' marginal backgrounds by developing views and understanding of the school's oppressive culture which students encounter due to their diverse backgrounds. Second, turning real-life experiences into knowledge by valuing and applying students' real-life experiences to a formal classroom setting. Lastly, negotiating between transformative theory and mandated reality by exercising their power in redesigning alternative teaching materials and instructions as complementary resources to the existing mandated curriculum.

To accommodate the linguistic and cultural diversity, both the English language and local languages can be utilized simultaneously to create a window of opportunity for marginalized students to succeed under difficult cultural and socio-economic circumstances that have been changing rapidly, especially in the designated economic corridors of the Greater Mekong Subregion (Bruthiaux, 2008). Making changes in such classrooms requires that language teachers understand both the local and global forces driving initiatives for multiple language competence (Appleby et al., 2002). Teachers can also undergo micro level self-observation to discover ways of negotiating the restrictions in their pedagogical practices, especially by using critical pedagogical principles with students in need. More importantly, teachers need to be key agents for educational transformation. To achieve real inclusive and more equitable education, teachers must be equipped with critical pedagogy so that they may fight at their students' side (Freire, 2000).

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