1 Prologue

Ameliorating (or restoring) “the world aright” from oppressions is one of humans’ desires. The question is how. If we believe in the role of education as a means of answering the question, then the next question is what kind of education. Herschok (2007), for instance, in line with Illich (1971), has really disapproved of traditional schooling worldwide as an effective way for educating people because it is “competence-biased” and the culprit of the bias is its insistence on sticking to “market dynamics” (p. 128). In turn, traditional schooling only “impoverishes” the diversity of people’s skills (or, more strongly, virtuosities) because they are marginalized by a set of more acceptable, profitable, marketable, or money-generating competences which are standardized and endorsed by the schooling system. Education should therefore be intended for claiming back time, attention, and resources by any individual to develop virtuosities that have been or are still being dampened by the impoverishing force of competence-biased market dynamics through schooling in ever-expanding capitalistic societies internationally.

The very virtuosity that constitutes the focal point in this book is how to think, reflect, theorize, and act critically, i.e., to do praxes in own and/or foreign languages. My attempts to personalize the theorizing and practicing of Critical Pedagogies1 (henceforth CPs) here, especially in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)2,

---

1 Pedagogy, according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2001), is defined as “the practice of teaching or the study of teaching” (p. 1043). Peter McLaren (2001) provides a different definition: Pedagogy is distinct from teaching in that it situates the teacher/learner encounter in a wider context of historical and sociopolitical forces, in which the act of knowing recognizes and takes into account the differentiated politics of reception surrounding the object of knowledge by the students. (p. 121)

To some extent, this definition transpires in my (and my learning participants’) thematic investigations, following that of Freire (1990), which I include in this book at length in chapter 4. That is, a literal reading on a certain theme (e.g., food) can be transcended by learners’ awareness of its wider context. Socio-economically, for instance, many poor people are deprived of the luxury to taste foods consumed by upper-class people.

2 The term EFL traditionally refers to the context where teachers and students learn English as a non-official language in their countries like China, Japan, and Indonesia (see McKay, 2002).
are to hone my virtuosity in doing praxes although students involved in this praxical journey together with me are still embedded in traditional schooling.

In an attempt to situate CPs in traditional schooling, whether it is in the form of formal or non-formal schooling, the first part of this book will be devoted to conceptualizing the notions of CPs (chapter 2), and positioning CPs as an alternative curriculum paradigm that challenges the dominant paradigm in current EFL teaching and learning that is “competence-biased”, too much market-driven, and government-mandated (chapter 3).

In order for the CPs to exert some substantial influences on our education, we need to find opportunities within our own teaching and learning contexts, and figure out whatever it is to be reflected upon and changed. The changes expected to happen do not have to be (and probably are not in any way) grandiose actions of charity works that instantly free marginalized people from poverty or oppression. Instead, the changes are scaffolded through the actions of reflections (i.e., praxes) on oppressive realities. Such praxes revolve around a variety of themes, which constitute the contents of CPs, which can be done by way of different approaches. Some of the contents and approaches are exemplified in part 2. The first approach in chapter 4 of this book is collaborative through thematic investigations. I involved senior high school, university students, and me myself in Freirean praxes. The next approach in chapter 5 is a personal one. That is, I mull over some gender and development issues that can be identified from literary works (i.e., three Indonesian short stories). More specifically, gender inequalities and/or discriminations emerge in marital life, education, and economics, despite modernistic optimism of development. Addressing CPs is not merely about dealing with what (the contents) and how (the approaches) to teach and learn, but also about assessing students’ artifacts of learning. Thus in chapter 6 of this book, some interesting products of students’ reflections (two journals and one speech) are included. Some ways of assessing these critical artifacts are also suggested.

In the final (third) part, I envision the implementations of CPs in foreign language education that occur beyond traditional language
classrooms (chapter 7) and beyond non-spiritual endeavors of doing CPs (chapter 8). Some examples of this chapter stem from my personalized Christian worldview. Nevertheless, they are not intended to proselytize non-Christians, although I do not close off the possibility that non-Christians can appreciate the way CPs are made sense of and carried out through the Christian lens. Implied in this chapter is actually how my Christian-based praxes can be transcended by Christians and non-Christians alike.