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# What 'gives life' to critical pedagogy in the Lifelong Learning sector?

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## **Abstract**

Critical pedagogy in the UK has traditionally been practised in the Lifelong Learning sector. However, the sector has become constrained by funding cuts, instrumental curricula and accountability measures, and teachers can feel that they have little room for professional autonomy and therefore the practice of critical pedagogy. Yet some do continue to do practice, often in relatively isolated circumstances, by working within the system but drawing upon their personal and professional identities. This paper presents the rationale and methodology, together with some very early findings, of a study examining what inspires, motivates and sustains practitioners of critical pedagogy in the face of constraints, the teaching strategies they consider to be successful, and how these stories could be harnessed and mobilised to enable critical pedagogy to flourish. The research draws on the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry to capture these stories of success. This contrasts with the well documented difficulties of using critical pedagogy in the current educational climate. A qualitative research strategy is used, comprising fifteen in depth, semi-structured interviews with practitioners of critical pedagogy in the Lifelong Learning sector in the West Midlands.

**Keywords:** Critical pedagogy, Freire, social justice, Lifelong Learning, post-compulsory education

## **Brief summary of the research**

Critical pedagogy is an educational philosophy and approach to teaching and learning whereby teachers and students co-create knowledge in order to facilitate the development of an awareness of the oppressive structures and forces at work in their own lives and in the wider world. Traditional pedagogies are relatively silent regarding social and political hierarchies and questions of power, whereas critical pedagogy challenges these by teaching people to critique such structures and exercise agency. It can be argued that this is crucial if we are to progress morally,

socially, politically, economically and ecologically, and for the development of democracy. We need to educate students to lead a meaningful life, to hold power and authority accountable and to be willing to work for a more socially just world (Giroux 2011).

In the UK, critical pedagogy has traditionally been practised in the Lifelong Learning sector. However, the work of practitioners in this sector has become constrained by funding cuts (Association of Colleges 2016), instrumental curricula and accountability measures and teachers can feel that they have little room for professional autonomy and thus the practice of critical pedagogy (Daley, Orr, and Petrie 2015). Yet there are practitioners who do continue to work from a critical pedagogical stance, often in relatively isolated circumstances, by working within the system but drawing upon their professional identity to deliver alternative pedagogies.

This paper outlines the rationale, methodology, and some very early findings of a piece of research which examines what inspires, motivates and sustains practitioners of critical pedagogy in the face of constraints, the teaching strategies they consider to be successful, and how what 'gives life' to critical pedagogy might be harnessed and mobilised across the Lifelong Learning sector, creating a space in which critical pedagogy may flourish.

The research uses a 'positive lens' approach (Golden-Biddle and Dutton 2012, 5), drawing on the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), in order to capture practitioners' positive stories of inspiration and success, with a view to inspiring other practitioners. AI demonstrates that when we relate stories of success in our work, we develop these further for positive change (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005). This will result in new questions and answers about the current practice of critical pedagogy in the post-compulsory sector in the UK, which contrasts with the well documented difficulties of using critical pedagogy in the current educational climate (Cowden and Singh 2014; Daley, Orr, and Petrie 2015), thus addressing a gap in the literature and providing an original contribution to knowledge.

A qualitative research strategy, with a case study design is used. Fifteen semi-structured interviews with practitioners of critical pedagogy in the Lifelong Learning sector in the West Midlands, have been conducted.

An initial analysis of themes has discovered that life history influences which led practitioners to a critical pedagogical orientation include family values and influences, experiences of inequality, political activism, and academic reading and stud. Motivations to practice include a drive to challenge asymmetries of power, dissatisfaction with the current instrumental education system, a commitment to enacting one's values of social justice, and a belief in human flourishing and growth. Inspiration derives from witnessing student growth, and sources of sustenance in practising critical pedagogy are derived from connections with congruent others, with the support from such connections being seen as critical in enabling critical pedagogy to flourish in the current educational climate.

### **Critical Pedagogy: Theory and Practice**

Critical pedagogy's early roots lie in Marxism and in critical theory as developed by The Frankfurt School in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Darder, Torres, and Baltodano 2009). It is often associated with the work of Paulo Freire (Paulo Freire 1996), who developed it as a method for teaching people without literacy skills in Brazil in the 1970s, to enable them to become cognisant of the forces oppressing them and to develop a 'critical consciousness' ('conscientisation') in order to take action for liberation (praxis). Freire saw the life purpose or vocation of human beings as that of 'humanisation'; of becoming fully human social and cultural agents, which necessitates liberation from oppression through a dialectical process of critical consciousness and praxis. He believed that students bring knowledge to the learning situation which results from their socio-economic and historic material realities, and that the teacher's role is to both validate and challenge this knowledge, This contrasts with the 'banking' method of education, which Freire conceived of, whereby the teacher 'expert' fills the 'empty vessel' student with knowledge. In his 'problem posing' education, through dialogue, the teacher and students both teach and are taught, with teachers assuming the authority of a mature facilitator of student enquiry (J. Kincheloe et al. 2018). From the late 1970s and 1980s scholars in the USA also developed critical pedagogy, with Giroux, Apple, and McLaren studying the role of

schools in the transmission of normative messages about political, social, and economic life, and the reproduction of the dominant culture, including asymmetrical relations of power. Students are socialised into a consensus of norms, expectations and behaviours, creating an ideological hegemony which reproduces cultural and economic domination within society (Darder, Torres, and Baltodano 2009). Giroux (2011) also asserts that neoliberalism is now stripping education of its public values, critical content and civic responsibilities, by seeing education as related only to economic growth, rather than to the production of engaged citizens and the realisation of social action and democracy.

hooks (1994) developed critical pedagogy theory and classroom practice in relation to race and gender, while Shor (1992) brought it into the post-compulsory classroom through practice based studies. Like Freire, Shor asserts that the curriculum can never be neutral and that the contents are political choices.

Critics of critical pedagogy see it as being predicated on male, white experience, theorised by those in positions of power (Ellsworth 1989; hooks 1994), and as using oppressively theoretical language (Darder, Torres, and Baltodano 2009). Ellsworth criticises the rationalist assumption underpinning critical pedagogy, and challenges the underpinning concepts in practice-based critical pedagogy, including the belief that social justice can be achieved through classroom based activities, that equal and transparent dialogue can be facilitated in the classroom, the unproblematised power dynamic existing between the teacher and students, and the unquestioned assumption that the teacher's knowledge and position endows them with the right, insight, knowledge, and ability to facilitate 'empowerment' among students. She also highlights the intersectionality of students and challenges the notion of homogenous groups of marginalised students who share common experiences and desire the same outcomes. While scholars critiquing critical pedagogy have raised issues relating to race, gender, indigenous knowledge, homophobia, and physical disability, learning disability appears to be absent from the discourse, and as such critical pedagogy is still arguably predicated on the abilities and experiences of only some members of the population.

### **Context of the research**

In an increasingly complex, fragmented, and global world, it can be argued that people now, as much as ever, need a critical consciousness in order to address the issues we are facing. The gap between rich and poor is widening (OECD 2015) and we face new threats and crises related to ecological destruction, global terrorism and the impact of neoliberalism.

Alongside these, it can also be argued that, akin to Freire's (1996) concept of 'humanisation,' our task as humans is to grow and develop, becoming more fully human, in a move towards self-actualisation (Maslow 1968). Self-actualisation refers to the need for personal growth, discovery and human flourishing, which is present throughout a person's life. It can be argued that critical pedagogical practices can facilitate this through experiences of thinking, reflection, voice and praxis. As hooks (1994, 12) posits,

the classroom remains the most radical place of possibility in the academy... I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.

Yet at a national level, our citizens of tomorrow are suffering from epidemic levels of mental ill health resulting from the social pressure to consume, the ongoing intrusiveness of social media and its requirement for self-marketing (Cramer and Inkster 2017), and the enormous pressures exerted by an education system based on achievement related metrics (Hutchings 2015). Many young people who are unable to flourish and reach their potential in this system turn to the post-compulsory education sector as a second chance learning opportunity. However, we are also experiencing an increasingly instrumental, top down approach to post-compulsory education and Lifelong Learning, evidenced by prescriptive learning outcomes, units of content, quantitative measures of 'success' to meet accountability data requirements, surveillance, and an increased neoliberalism and marketisation of education (Cowden and Singh 2013; Daley, Orr and Petrie 2015; Bennett and Smith 2018). These are coupled with changes in Lifelong Learning policy over the past two decades, where its purpose has moved from the dual aim of social justice and economic prosperity in the early days of New Labour, to a narrow focus on skills for economic growth, albeit with some retained support for Adult and Community

Learning. This context can make it difficult for practitioners to exercise professional autonomy and constrain their ability to teach from a critical pedagogical stance. Those practitioners who do continue to work in this way often operate in isolation and use a range of covert and subversive methods, particularly in the Further Education sector (Daley, Orr and Petrie 2015), although there may be more room for alternative pedagogies to be practised in certain contexts such as Adult and Community Learning, where funding is not necessarily attached to pre-determined qualification criteria, and in areas such as Trades Union Education, which have a more radical agenda.

Student resistance to critical pedagogy, previously explicated by Freire (1996) and hooks (1994), can also constrain critical pedagogy in a neoliberal educational culture (Boorman 2011). In Higher Education, such resistance can result from the 'customer' status of students in a high fees system, where some wish to pass through their modules and their degree with the minimum intellectual disruption. Cowden and Singh (2013) have termed the Higher Education system as 'satnav' education, characterised by material poverty resulting from student debt and pedagogical poverty resulting from an instrumentalised pedagogy, in which students are not given the opportunity to be intellectually provoked and challenged, with students as consumers and universities as providers. However, research by Universities UK shows that although 50% of students see themselves as customers, they wish for a personal, collaborative relationship with their university rather a consumer transaction (Universities UK 2017). Therefore, regardless of the obstacles facing teachers, critical pedagogy is still possible. As hooks argues, 'the classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom' (hooks 1994, 207). Critical pedagogues and receptive students can challenge hegemony with a view to social justice. However, the desire for a socially just world, critical pedagogy's role in this, and its appropriateness as a pedagogy in the Lifelong Learning sector, cannot be viewed as a normative position or assumption. The literature of critical pedagogy is predicated on the assumption that democracy and social justice are normative aspirations in 'Western' nations. While this may be largely correct, what constitutes social justice and the appropriate means to achieve this differs widely across the political spectrum.

## **Rationale for the research**

The purpose of the research is to discover why and how practitioners of critical pedagogy practice it in the current educational climate, in order to shine a light into the spaces and cracks where resistance to the current system occurs, thus extending our knowledge. The rationale for this is predicated on critical theory's view of humans as agentic subjects existing on a historic continuum, where power is dialectical and thus has the potential for resistance, possibility and hope. Foucault (1980,142) hypothesises that 'there are no relations of power without resistances,' which can be extrapolated to theorise that teachers have the potential to resist the totalising effects of the current educational climate and find ways to use alternative pedagogies. While this represents a significant challenge to educators, particularly in the FE sector, Daley, Orr and Petrie (2015) demonstrate that resistance, however small, may be possible. Goodson (2008) advocates that studying teachers' life and work moves us from the commentary on 'what is' to an understanding of 'what might be,' and allows us to see the individual teacher in relation to the history of their time, thus illuminating the choices and options open to them, and exposing the shallowness of the managerialist, prescriptive system. The purpose of the research is to illuminate the teacher voice behind the prescribed curriculum. Goodson (2008, 19) cites Dollard (1949), who affirms that life history research lets us clearly see the pressure of a formal situation and the force of the inner, private definition of the situation.

The intention of the research is to capture the sources of inspiration, motivation and support which sustain those who practice critical pedagogy, to enable others to reflect upon their own experiences and practices in relation to these stories and draw inspiration and sustenance from this. Such inspiration might involve the 'transcendence of the ordinary preoccupations or limitations of human agency' (Thrash and Elliot 2003, 871) plus motivation and the energisation and direction of behaviour.

A further rationale for the research relates to the issue of agency among adults with learning disabilities, who have been largely excluded from the arena of critical pedagogy, as evidenced in the literature. This research aims to address the gap by instigating discussion around potentially different ways of developing and exercising agency and praxis among people with learning disabilities and autistic spectrum



disorders. Both Ellsworth (1989) and Kincheloe (2011) call for a critical pedagogy which includes the dynamics of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, indigenous experience and physical ability, but notably omit any reference to people with learning disabilities or non-verbal autistic spectrum disorders, who are some of the most disenfranchised people in society, with little power over their social, economic, political and health circumstances. The gap in the literature may be based on an assumption that they lack the requisite ability to critique asymmetries of power, but in the researcher's experience of teaching students with learning disabilities, an experiential, embodied awareness of oppressive systemic forces, and a desire for praxis clearly exists and finds expression in a critical pedagogical environment. This research explores critical pedagogy among adults with learning disabilities, through the method of Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE), a pedagogy developed by a group of National Specialist Colleges who work with young people with learning disabilities. Each student is apprenticed to a deep craft, drawing upon the apprenticeship model of the Arts and Crafts movement. The rationale behind PSTE is, 'if I can change matter, I matter' (Payne 2012). The process develops skills such as resilience in working with resistant materials, attention to detail, sustained perseverance, concentration and agency. This process reverses Marx's concept of the alienation of post-industrial workers, whereby people are divorced from the design and creation of their product. It reinstates the worker's human agency through their being responsible for concept through to completion. People who are disempowered, disenfranchised and marginalised from any meaningful agency in every area of their life are now able to exercise genuine agency in the practical realm. The purpose of investigating PSTE is to question how people whose cognitive abilities may preclude them from a discursive and rationalist critical pedagogy, might also experience agency and praxis, and whether PSTE can potentially constitute a form of critical pedagogical practice for people who are unable to develop 'voice', both literally and metaphorically.

### **Aims and objectives of the research**

The aim of the research is to explore the life history events which led practitioners to critical pedagogy, and what inspires, motivates and sustains their practice in the current educational climate.

The research objectives are:

- To critically review and contribute to existing theoretical literature
- To present a case study of a range of Lifelong Learning contexts using semi-structured interviews
- To analyse the data thematically and autoethnographically
- To explore how that which ‘gives life’ to critical pedagogy might be harnessed and mobilised across the sector.

The final report will include recommendations for dissemination of the findings in a manner which inspires practitioners, such as an anthology of practitioner stories and a digital forum for sharing best practice.

### **Research questions**

The research objectives have been operationalised into research questions, and subsequently into specific interview questions. The research questions are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

<b>Overarching research question</b>	<b>What ‘gives life’ to critical pedagogy?</b>
<b>Sub questions</b>	<b>What socio historic life factors, beliefs and values led practitioners to critical pedagogy?</b>
	<b>What inspires, motivates and sustains them in practicing critical pedagogy in the current educational climate?</b>
	<b>How might this be harnessed to inspire and motivate others wishing to use critical pedagogy?</b>
	<b>Which teaching strategies have led to critical awakening amongst students?</b>
	<b>Can PSTE constitute a form of critical pedagogical praxis for students at pre/entry level?</b>

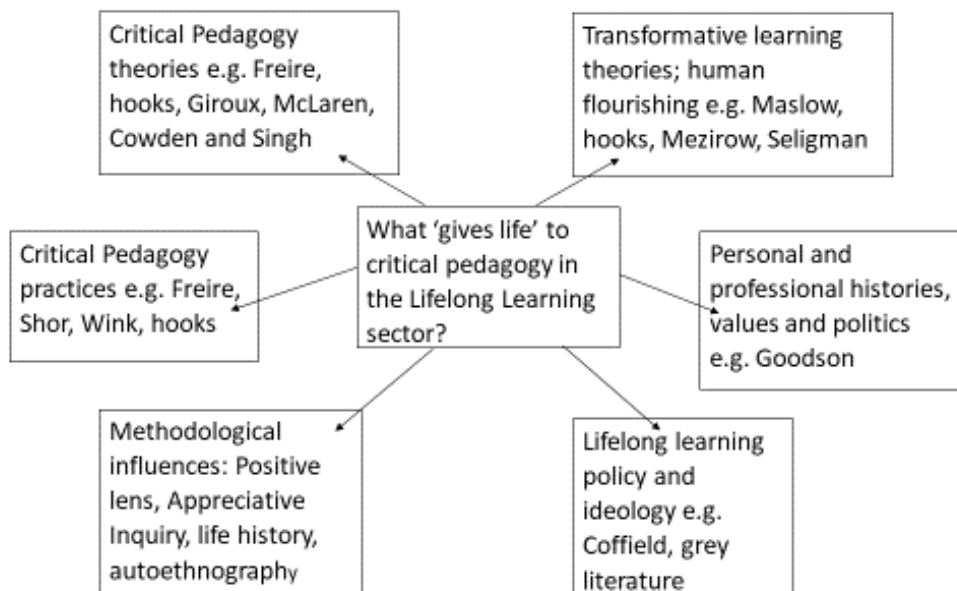
### **Theoretical/conceptual framework**

The theoretical and conceptual framework informing the research derives from critical pedagogy practitioners’ theoretical, pedagogical and personal drivers as indicated in both the current literature, from informal discussions which took place with a range of practitioners in the Lifelong Learning sector prior to design and fieldwork, and a self-

reflexive consideration of the researcher’s personal and professional motivations in practising critical pedagogy. These indicated a wide range of drivers, including commitment to social justice, commitment to democracy, personal experiences of oppression, inspirational teachers and other individuals in people’s biographies, political beliefs, religious and spiritual beliefs, pedagogical efficacy, belief in human growth and transformation, and the need to make a difference in the world (Torres 1998; Connolly 2008; Boorman 2011; Ramirez 2011; Kirlyo 2013; Boudon et al. 2015; Clare 2015). The theoretical/conceptual framework is divided into six broad areas, illustrated in Figure 2.

- Critical pedagogical theories
- Critical pedagogical practices
- Transformative theories of learning and human flourishing
- Teachers’ personal and professional histories, values and politics
- Methodological influences, drawing upon Appreciative Inquiry, life history and autoethnography
- Lifelong Learning ideology and policy

Figure 2



Critical pedagogy is historically situated in the critical theory paradigm (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2009), which is reflected in the importance of harnessing

critical pedagogy across the Lifelong Learning sector to effect social change. The humanist paradigm and positive psychology paradigm are reflected in the choice of a positive lens, human flourishing approach.

### **Methodology**

The underpinning ontological stance of the research is constructionism, whereby realities are multiple and constructed by individuals and social groups. Educational practices such as critical pedagogy exist as real entities, but they are constructed and interpreted by individuals in a variety of ways. The epistemological stance is interpretivist. As discussed previously, the research draws upon the *philosophy* of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). However, AI as a *methodology* was not used in this study because AI is essentially a collaborative process whereby people come together to determine the future, which was not logistically feasible in this study. A positive lens approach was selected for the research because it is arguably more likely to inspire potential practitioners wishing to practice critical pedagogy, as opposed to documenting the current challenges of practising, and this may then have the potential to grow exponentially. Ghaye's (2011) work on teachers' reflective practice is derived from AI and supports the positive lens approach taken, as does the paradigm of Positive Psychology.

This approach determined the nature of the interview questions, which were specifically designed to elicit stories of inspiration, motivation and success. The interviewees inevitably raised some negatives which were acknowledged, before being guided back to the positive. Issues regarding the validity and bias of positive lens methodologies such as AI have been raised by proponents of more traditional methodologies, but it can be argued that all epistemologies and methodologies represent a partial view. Transparency and criticality around these issues, and those of researcher positionality and reflexivity, will be fully explicated in the final research report.

The methodology was chosen to ensure rich, detailed descriptions of what 'gives life' to critical pedagogy and therefore a qualitative research strategy and a case study research design was used.

Semi-structured, in depth interviews were conducted with fourteen practitioners of critical pedagogy in a range of Lifelong Learning contexts in the West Midlands, two of whom were practitioners of Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE). A further unstructured interview took place with an expert in critical pedagogy, in order to discuss the concept of Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE) as a form of critical pedagogy for adults with learning disabilities. Four pilot interviews were carried out to ensure that the research approach and interview questions were fit for purpose. Kvale (1996, 32) sees the purpose of the qualitative research interview as that of understanding the lived world from the subjects' own perspectives, and Lamont and Swidler (2014, 158) propose that interviews allow 'comparison across contexts, situations and kinds of people'. The interviewing technique drew upon the life history approach (Goodson and Sikes 2001), in order to elicit both the personal and the wider social influences which ultimately led participants to critical pedagogy. Bullough cautions that 'to understand educational events, one must confront biography' (Bullough 1998, 24) and Goodson (1980, 69) maintains that 'in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is.' Goodson and Sikes posit that teachers' values, motivations and understandings have considerable influence on professional practice and say that 'when the focus of enquiry is... why they adopt a particular pedagogical style... the potential of life histories is enormous' (Goodson and Sikes 2001, 21). Goodson and Sikes (2001) cite Plummer (1995) who contends that reading life stories and histories of others in similar situations show individuals that they are not alone, and suggest that seeing how someone else has dealt with situations can be extremely empowering and can provide models of ways to proceed. Kincheloe (2011, 21) believes that 'a successful critical pedagogy for the future must be deeply concerned with the relationship between the socio-political domain and the life of the individual.'

The participants were recruited from Higher Education, Further Education, Residential Further Education SENDi, Adult and Community Learning, Residential Adult Education, Adult and Community Learning SENDi, Trades Union Education and Prison Education. The sample was purposively selected through professional networking and incorporated snowball sampling. Although a limitation of purposive and snowball sampling was that the participants were not representative of the whole

population of critical pedagogy practitioners, it was the most pragmatic approach in this study. The professional networking phase took place through online searches for practitioners in publication, and through social media, which resulted in additional links with practitioners and the development of a further network of critical and progressive educators across the country. This was supplemented by attendance at key conferences in 2017. One of the initial meetings led to the specific focus of the research, namely the human stories behind critical pedagogical practice. The PSTE participants were all former colleagues of the researcher.

The data from the interviews will be fully analysed and presented thematically in the final research report. The findings will be discussed in relation to the relevant literature, including literature relating to the drivers of key critical pedagogues. The significance of the themes will be explicated and PSTE as a potential form of critical pedagogy will be discussed.

Autoethnography will be used in the full data analysis and final report, to reflexively discuss the researcher's personal and professional experience in relation to the literature and to the participants' narratives, and to develop themes in the fullest possible way. Epistemologically, interpretation is a product of the researcher and therefore can only be a partial representation of the participants' intended meanings. Autoethnography can 'add life' to these representations and interpretations through the inclusion of the researcher's experiences. Humphreys (2005) posits the use of autoethnography and first person vignettes as a strategy for increasing 'richness, reflexivity, plausibility, and authority.' Unlike the interviewees in this study, the researcher has the space and scope within the full analysis and final report, to be self-reflexive across many dimensions, including personal, psychological, social, political, economic and spiritual aspects of experiences in critical pedagogy and transformative learning. The process of autoethnography is potentially less subject to misinterpretation than the narratives of the interviewees. The ultimate aim of the research is to inspire others wishing to use critical pedagogy and Humphreys (2005) argues that exposing one's own career experience, with its pitfalls and triumphs, encourages others through a transcendence of differences and re-affirmation of common experience. Ellis (2000) tells us that when reading an autoethnography, she wants to be reminded of her own experience through someone else's story. Personal

reflection is also important for the researcher to clarify personal stance and positionality in the research. Goodson and Sikes (2001) advise the researcher to be as reflective and reflexive as possible and to make this explicit to readers. The researcher has continuously reflected on this throughout the research process which has been crucial because her educational experiences, beliefs and values, and passion for critical pedagogy and transformative adult education need to be continuously examined and neutralised in order to minimise bias. Richardson (2000), an advocate of autoethnographic practice, argues that 'self-reflexivity brings to consciousness some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing' (Richardson and Adams St.Pierre 2018, 823).

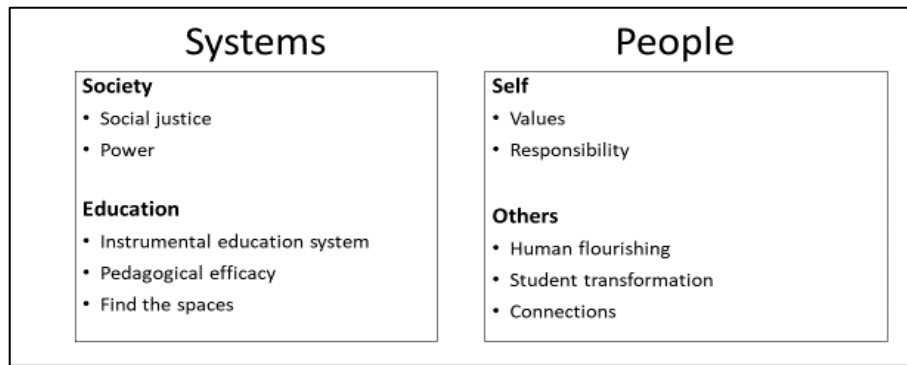
### **Early findings**

The interviews have been transcribed and appraised for broad initial themes relating to life history influences and current sources of inspiration, motivation and sustenance in practicing critical pedagogy. Life history influences which oriented practitioners to critical pedagogy include influential people in the participants' biography, family values, experience of oppression, witnessing inequality, early politicisation and activism, union activism, reading and academic discovery. Sources of inspiration, motivation and sustenance were multiple and to some extent overlapping, but motivations broadly included the need for teachers and students to question hegemony and to challenge asymmetries of power and inequality in the classroom and in wider society, dissatisfaction with the current instrumental and commodified education system, a belief in human potential, flourishing and growth, and a desire to live ones values of social justice. Practitioners' inspiration derived from witnessing transformation in students and the desire for social justice. Sources of sustenance in practising critical pedagogy came largely through connections with like-minded others, which were seen as crucial, and the support derived from such connections was felt to be essential in enabling critical pedagogy to flourish, alongside the need for potential practitioners to take risks and to find and work in the curriculum spaces where it was possible to do so.

The participants' drivers to practise critical pedagogy have been categorised across four dimensions; broader society, the education system, the self, and other people. These four dimensions aggregate to two broad domains; systems and people. These

are illustrated in Figure 3, along with initial broad themes which constitute the early findings.

Figure 3



More detailed responses leading to these initial broad themes are illustrated in Figure 4. These responses will be analysed in depth in order to develop detailed themes within the four dimensions illustrated in Figure 3, and will be presented alongside relevant autoethnographic vignettes in the final report.

Figure 4

<p><b>What led you to become a CP?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family influences</li> <li>Experiencing oppression</li> <li>Reading and academic discovery</li> <li>Personal politics</li> <li>Unionisation</li> <li>Earlier politicisation and activism</li> </ul>	<p><b>What is CP to you?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A creed</li> <li>Questioning</li> <li>Critical lens</li> <li>Challenging power</li> <li>Challenging status quo</li> <li>Illuminating underlying structures</li> <li>Using students' lived experiences</li> <li>Growth and empowerment</li> <li>Living values of social justice</li> </ul>	<p><b>Why do you think CP is important?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand power</li> <li>Create power</li> <li>Challenge inequality</li> <li>Enable human flourishing</li> <li>Human potential</li> <li>Social responsibility</li> <li>Unfiltered social media</li> </ul>
<p><b>What motivates you to practice CP?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedagogical effectiveness</li> <li>My responsibility</li> <li>My values</li> <li>Students need to challenge power</li> <li>Instrumental education system</li> </ul>	<p><b>What inspires you to practice CP?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student transformation</li> <li>Living one's values</li> </ul>	<p><b>What sustains you in practicing CP?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colleagues</li> <li>Like minded people/networks</li> <li>Student transformation</li> <li>Inner self</li> <li>Taking action</li> </ul>
<p><b>Which strategies?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dialogue</li> <li>Discussion/debate</li> <li>Showing your real self to students</li> <li>Using students' knowledge and experience</li> <li>Role playing 'other'</li> </ul>	<p><b>How to harness?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher Ed</li> <li>CPD</li> <li>Unions</li> <li>Make spaces to come together</li> <li>Connect with others</li> <li>Connect to teachers' feelings/values</li> <li>Know how to work within the system</li> </ul>	<p><b>Message</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be brave</li> <li>Take risks</li> <li>Be inventive</li> <li>Find others</li> <li>Find the spaces where you can</li> <li>Know the rules of the game</li> </ul>

Early indications from the interviews with practitioners of PSTE suggest that they do see it as a potential form of critical pedagogy for those with learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders.

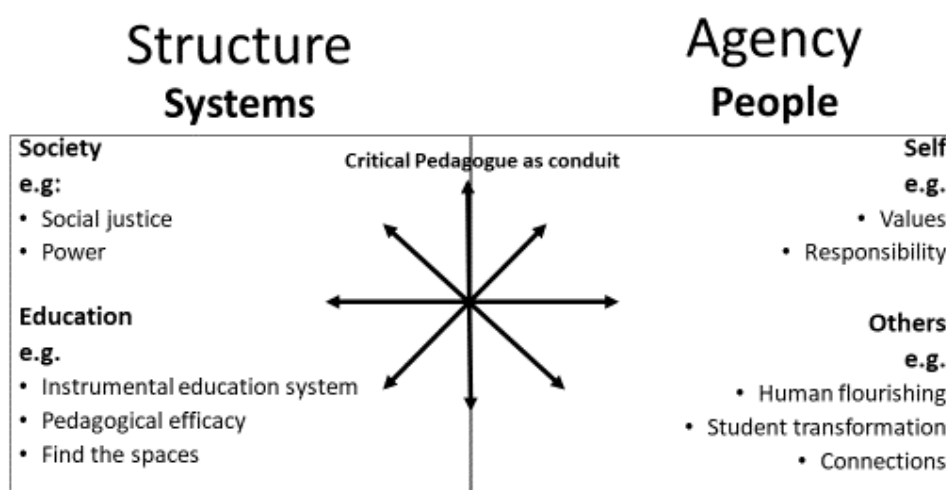


## Discussion

The interviews with practitioners of critical pedagogy revealed that their sources of inspiration, motivation, and sustenance are myriad, multi layered and intensely personal. The two realms of 'systems' and 'people,' derived from the initial analysis can be related to the concepts of structure and agency, as illustrated in Figure 5.

The critical pedagogues themselves can be viewed as a dialectical conduit, illustrated in Figure 5, through which the features of structure and agency interact, both for themselves and their students, and through which critical pedagogy comes to life as a dynamic, emancipatory force. Biesta and Tedder (2007) see agency as something which is achieved rather than an attribute which one possesses, and the practitioners exercise agency through choosing to employ a pedagogy which can be seen as radical and outside of institutional norms, and as such act upon and transform those norms in their specific teaching contexts. They provide the conditions for agency to flourish among students through participatory methods which critique hegemonic social structures and which result in student transformation. The participants reported witnessing transformation in students as a key driver and it is clear that for them, critical pedagogy and transformative learning are closely related. Further research examining the nature of such transformation would enable the extent to which this results in praxis in the form of action for social justice, to be explored.

Figure 5



The 'life giving' conduit of each practitioner is comprised of a unique blend of life history influences, personal and political beliefs, educational values and a highly

nuanced commitment to an emancipatory ideal, reflective of Freire's original values and goals (Freire 1996). Their passion for social justice and student empowerment is palpable, and they enact this in spite of constraints, at times rendering them vulnerable and isolated. The findings will be fully analysed in relation to a number of themes and theoretical categories. The essence of what 'gives life' to critical pedagogy is a complex amalgam for each practitioner and it is these human stories, the teacher's voice (Goodson 2008), which has the power to inspire others wishing to practice in this way. People are inspired 'by' others, and 'to' actualise the inspiring qualities of these others (Thrash and Elliot 2003; Thrash et al. 2014). The specific qualities which inspire will be determined by the readers of the final research report, and like the participants in the research, these will be unique to each reader.

The participants' responses accord with those of renowned published academics to some extent (Torres 1998; Connolly 2008; Kirlyo 2013; Porfilio and Ford 2015) but these prominent academics discussed their academic and career trajectories and experiences as influencing factors, whereas such experiences featured less for the participants in this research. The participants' responses also accorded to some extent with those of participants in more localised UK and Ireland studies (Connolly 2008; Clare 2015), but these studies were sector specific and as such were greatly informed by this specificity. This piece of research therefore provides an insight into the drivers of critical pedagogues across the lifelong learning sector, illuminating the common themes and experiences of participants operating in different contexts. This will resonate with a wider range of tutors, teachers, lecturers, academics and managers, both extending our knowledge of this phenomenon and providing a springboard from which others may rejuvenate their practice of critical pedagogy. As Coffield (2015) posits in relation to cases of successful resistance to constraints in the FE sector, 'there is a real hunger... for news of colleagues who have struggled and succeeded... success stories that need to be better known throughout the education system' (Coffield 2015, xxiii).

## **Conclusions**

Human lives exist on a continuously evolving and changing historic timeline, and educational policy and practice reflects this. It is therefore necessary for us to challenge hegemonic practices and utilise our agency as education professionals,

reflecting critical theory's tenets regarding the dialectical nature of power. This research examines the multi-layered dimensions of what inspires, motivates and sustains practitioners in their practice of critical pedagogy in the current educational climate, who exercise agency in spite of structural constraints. Goodson and Numan (2002) assert that the lives and work testimonies of teachers expose the inaccuracy and shallowness of the managerial, prescriptive view of change. This paradigm of change is also now rife in Further Education (Daley, Orr 2015 and Petrie 2017; Bennett and Smith 2018) and in Higher Education (Cowden and Singh 2013) and their assertion thus illuminates the importance of this piece of research. Goodson and Numan (2002, 276) say 'life history studies, by their nature, demonstrate that understanding teacher agency is a vital part of educational research and one that we ignore at our peril.'

The research investigates the drivers of critical pedagogues from across the Lifelong Learning sector in the West Midlands, which builds upon previous work, which is sector based, and in other geographical locations. The methodology constitutes a new bricolage, which draws upon the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the methods of life history and autoethnography, resulting in a rich narrative viewed through a positive lens. AI attests that stories of a positive nature orientate our future practice in a similarly positive direction; life history and autoethnography enable readers to reflect upon their own situation in relation to other peoples' stories, and to garner inspiration from this for their own practice.

The final research report will make recommendations as to how the stories and experiences of existing practitioners of critical pedagogy might be harnessed to inspire and mobilise others wishing to use critical pedagogy in the Lifelong Learning sector.

The research also explores a potential form of critical pedagogical practice, Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE), for students with learning disabilities and autistic spectrum disorders, who are unable to develop critical consciousness or 'voice', both literally and metaphorically. Through the apprenticeship to a deep craft, students undergo a transformation which enables them to exercise agency and praxis. This has not been conceived as a form of critical pedagogy before and

therefore potentially extends critical pedagogy to a deeply marginalised and voiceless section of society. Practitioners' of PSTE and the critical pedagogical expert interviewed feel that PSTE can be seen as a form of critical pedagogy for such students, and this will be explored and detailed in the final research report.

What 'gives life' to critical pedagogy in the Lifelong Learning sector is multi-faceted, deeply human and humane, and cannot be reified. Life history, experiences, beliefs and values combine to give rise to a potent and ennobling force which insists upon Freire's conception of 'humanisation,' where human beings' vocation is to become fully emancipated social and cultural agents in this world (Freire 1996). He maintains that 'the educator... has the duty of not being neutral' (Horton 1990, 180) and asserts that 'I must make use of every possibility there is not only to speak about my utopia, but also to engage in practices consistent with it' (Freire 2016, 7). The purpose of this piece of research is to reflect this intention of Freire's.

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