ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING:

COI MODEL AND FREIRE'S CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

BY

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A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

ATHABASCA, ALBERTA

APRIL 19, 2023

Athabasca University
Faculty of Graduate Studies

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CRITICAL THINKING IN ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING:
COI MODEL AND FREIRE'S CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Distance Education

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Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη· οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον ἀλλ᾽ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ.

Ματθαίος 5: 14-15

Vosotros sois la luz del mundo. No puede esconderse una ciudad situada sobre una montaña. Y no se enciende una candela para ponerla debajo del celemín, sino sobre el candelabro, y así alumbra a todos los que están en la casa.

Mateo 5: 14-15

Ye are the light of the world. A city situated on a mountain cannot be hid. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the corn measure, but upon the lampstand; and it shines for all who are in the house.

Matthew 5: 14-15

Dedication

To the memory of José Roberto and Carmen María, my parents, who always believed in what love and hard work could achieve and who lit the way by setting a shining example.

Acknowledgements

To Gregorio, Ignacio, and Karina, who have supported me and trusted me through my doctoral studies.

To Dr. Martha Cleveland-Innes, from whom I have learned more than I could ever thank her for.

To my Committee members: Dr. Allen Quesada, Dr. Michael Gismondi, Dr. Peter Shea, and Dr. Albert Sangrà, who have contributed enormously to making my work deeper and richer.

To the State Distance University of Costa Rica (UNED) for their support, in particular to the authorities, teachers, and students at the Teaching of English Program at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities for their generous help.

To all the people, academicians, and partners at Athabasca University, the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and the Doctor of Education in Distance Education Program, who have turned my doctoral studies into an unforgettable, stimulating, and very enjoyable experience. I am very proud to be the first Latin American to have reached this landmark at Athabasca University.

To my teachers, students, and all those who have contributed, willingly or unwillingly, to make me who I am today. ¡Muchas gracias! Thank you all!

Abstract

This case study explored the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills within a preservice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher training program at a public distance university in Costa Rica. A theoretical framework with the interaction of the Community of Inquiry model (CoI), Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP), and collaborative leadership (CL), understood as "leading collaboratively" (Garrison, 2016), was presented as an original Convergent Theoretical model. The research question was answered by means of interviews with preservice teacher students, a teacher mentor, and administrative authorities; online questionnaires; non-participatory class observation; and artifact analysis during one term. Data was analyzed applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Critical Case Study (CCS) methods. As main results, critical thinking skills were taught and learned in the classroom, and the three theoretical spheres were present in class activities as democratic dialogue, problem posing, problem solving, role switching, and the belief of teachers as agents of social change. However, FCP was incomplete because participants were not aware of Freire's ideas. Thus, the Convergent model was modified to propose a post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy (pFCP) instead, which is introduced as a meta-tool for learning, teaching, and applying critical thinking skills for freedom, and the teacher-students' own reflective professional practice (Quesada, 2005).

Keywords: critical thinking, free thinking, community of inquiry model, Freire's critical pedagogy, post-Freirean critical pedagogy, collaborative leadership, leading collaboratively, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), preservice teacher training, distance education, State Distance University of Costa Rica (UNED), Costa Rica

Preface

In these few pages I would like to be clear and concise to my reader, so that my intentions as a researcher will not be misinterpreted regarding the importance of critical thinking and the public role of universities today. I trust you, my generous reader, to bear with me for a few lines, and for illustrating my point with a couple of examples from the classics. Hopefully, you will find this enriching and even humorous.

For several centuries, since Medieval times, we have associated education and universities with knowledge and the improvement of society. It has been documented, in Europe and the American continent, for example, how universities have advanced the conditions of living of people by means of better agriculture, engineering, medicine, and education, among other fields. At times, however, knowledge, science, and higher education have been put to the use of totalitarian regimes, revolts, and dictatorships.

In those cases, when science and universities continue to exist as such, but have been twisted in their nature to serve political aims, or worse, have sold themselves to spurious interests or even self-gratifying pursuits (careering, grant-hunting, or politically hierophanting academicians and researchers), freedom, truth, and democracy have been endangered. In the last few years, we have seen an increasing worldwide tendency in universities and certain disciplines to submit to the dominant discourse and the powers that be in their wish to push particular agendas at all costs. Any curious reader can verify this by following the news headlines since 2020.

In such dire moments of history, it is the dissident minds who are still willing to exert critical thinking who give hope to the rest of society. As the Cuban patriot José Martí said, "When there are many men without decorum, there are always others who have in themselves the decorum of many men... (They) rebel with terrible force against those who rob peoples of their freedom, which is robbing men of their dignity" (1889, par.3, my translation).

Critical thinking and free thinking are the tools of those who dare question tyranny, mendacity, and compliance. In the case of universities and academicians, these are the weapons that we must wield if we are willing to fight against fear and injustice. That is the hard and long road to be chosen and indeed, only a few will tread on that path, because the price to pay is high: stifling, ridicule, ostracism.

Otherwise, a wide way opens to those who submit: obedience and complicit silence are rewarded generously with material comfort. Thus, the pillars of higher education, that is, teaching, research, and social action lose all meaning and transcendence and may easily transform into what Jonathan Swift provocatively described *ad absurdum*:

> We crossed a walk to the other part of the academy, where, as I have already said, the projector in speculative learning resided.
>
> The first professor I saw was in a very large room, with forty pupils about him. After salutation, observing me to look earnestly upon a frame, which took up the greatest part of both the length and breadth of the room, he said perhaps I might wonder to see him employed in a project for improving speculative knowledge by practical and

mechanical operations. But the world would soon be sensible of its usefulness, and he flattered himself that a more noble exalted thought never sprang in any other man's head. Every one knew how laborious the usual method is of attaining to arts and sciences; whereas by his contrivance the most ignorant person, at a reasonable charge, and with a little bodily labor, may write books in philosophy, poetry, politics, law, mathematics, and theology, without the least assistance from genius or study. He then led me to the frame, about the sides whereof all his pupils stood in ranks. It was twenty feet square, placed in the middle of the room. The superficies was composed of several bits of wood, about the bigness of a die, but some larger than others. They were all linked together by slender wires. These bits of wood were covered on every square with paper pasted on them; and on these papers were written all the words of their language in their several moods, tenses, and declensions, but without any order. The professor then desired me to observe, for he was going to set his engine at work. The pupils, at his command, took each of them hold of an iron handle, whereof there were forty fixed round the edges of the frame, and giving them a sudden turn, the whole disposition of the words was entirely changed. He then commanded six-and-thirty of the lads to read the several lines softly as they appeared upon the frame; and where they found three or four words together that might make part of a sentence, they dictated to the four remaining boys, who were scribes. This work was repeated three or four times; and at every turn the engine was so contrived, that the words shifted into new places, as the square bits of wood moved upside down.

Six hours a day the young students were employed in this labor; and the professor showed me several volumes in large folio, already collected, of broken sentences, which he intended to piece together, and out of those rich materials to give the world a complete body of all arts and sciences; which, however, might be still improved, and much expedited, if the public would raise a fund for making and employing five hundred such frames in Lagado, and oblige the managers to contribute in common their several collections.

He assured me that this invention had employed all his thoughts from his youth; that he had employed the whole vocabulary into his frame, and made the strictest computation of the general proportion there is in books between the numbers of particles, nouns, and verbs, and other parts of speech. (2021, pp. 204-205)

Although many may consider such extremes far-fetched, there is always the risk of falling into ridiculous academic ruts if we are neither critical nor honest, something that can be seen today in plenty of research topics, sponsored studies, and published articles. On the bright side, however, let us point out that humour and satire will always remain powerful swords against tyrants, as Chaplin also showed in "The Great Dictator".

To close, accountability as social actors is unavoidable for all of us who teach and undertake research and extension at the university level. Contrary to what some would love to believe, there are no neutral grounds regarding the responsibility bestowed upon us. As a result, the choice remains open for present and future generations of academicians, teachers, and researchers: contribute to society in a critical manner, or follow useless meanderings. Either way, we will have to answer for our actions one day, sooner than we think.

Thank you.

(Excerpt from "Gulliver's Travels" by Jonathan Swift in the public domain and reproduced from www.gutenberg.org as per Fair Use.)

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CRITICAL THINKING, COI MODEL, AND FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY

List of Symbols, Nomenclature, or Abbreviations

CCS: Critical Case Study analysis

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CMC: Computer Mediated Communication

CoI: Community of Inquiry model

CL: Collaborative Leadership

CONARE: National Commission of State University Presidents

CT: Critical Thinking

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

FCP: Freire's Critical Pedagogy

FEES: Special Fund for Higher Education

ICT: Information and Communication Technology (normally in plural)

ITCR: Technological Institute of Costa Rica

LMS: Learning Management System

PFCP: Post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy

PI: Practical Inquiry model

UCR: University of Costa Rica

UNA: National University of Costa Rica

UNED: State Distance University of Costa Rica

Chapter 1. Higher Education in Neoliberal Times

Introduction

Since the 1980's, when humanity saw the end of the Cold War, and thus, that of the

struggle between Capitalism and "Real" Socialism, the world has been taken by storm under the

rule of Neoliberalism. As a political ideology disguised as a managerial approach to public

administration, or even as an "apolitical" set of policies focused on "efficiency", Neoliberalism

has run amok throughout the globe. Analogous to globalization or the "Washington consensus",

Neoliberalism "called essentially for the opening of all frontiers to the free flow of goods and

capital (but not of labor)" (Wallerstein, 2004, p.86). Claiming to be the heir to the "end of

History" foretold by Fukuyama, Neoliberalism has permeated all spheres of public life:

education, health, security, infrastructure, even down to the administration of justice (as in

private international trade courts), or jail systems.

Neoliberal governments, in both industrialized and developing countries, have followed

the dogma discussed by Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman among others, such

as the "free market" with its "invisible hand" which "self-regulates". Indeed, history in the last

century has proven quite the opposite: the market is not free by any means, but rather a

conglomerate of trusts who impose their will and interests both nationally and internationally. As

Hinkelammert (2005) puts it, Neoliberal fundamentalism has become "the religion of the myth of

infinite growth" (p.368). This is a myth, in fact, as concentration of wealth is unsustainable and

will eventually lead to economic depression (Dierckxsens, 1994), something that the aftermath of

COVID-19 worldwide and official international economic policies seem to suggest. In the case of education, the COVID-19 event allowed big companies the chance to pursue an "experiment in remote learning" and sweep out democratic engagement (Klein, 2020).

However, up to this moment in history, the "invisible hand" has actually been seen taking the most brutal expressions, like the illegal invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 among many others, wherever and whenever power struggles over natural resources have come into play: be it oil, mineral gas, ores, precious metals, or strategic geographical locations. The results have been, as we all know, the death of hundreds of thousands of people as direct casualties of the military attacks, hundreds of thousands of refugees, malnutrition, and scores of deaths from preventable diseases as a consequence of economic inequality. Finally, the market has been able to "self-regulate" by means of concentration of resources into conglomerates, bail-outs, merges, and the strangling of competitors by all kinds of means. As Giroux (2014) and Hinkelammert (2005) denounce, Neoliberalism has declared a war against democracy, education, nature, and humanity itself. Moreover, it exploits the whole human being (Han, 2020).

In the sphere of higher education, the actual reckoning has not been very different. In Chomsky's (2014) words, "the Neoliberal assault on universities" has resulted in the generalized reduction of benefits, stability, and funding to both academics and students. Teachers have become part of an army of precarious workers or the *precariat*: paired up with the employed or semi-employed in other fields, educators now find themselves chewed between the need to claim their rights and the spectre of unemployment. In other words, the condition of temporary workers ("temps"), hired for short academic periods, without guarantees of being engaged again,

smothered with abusive loads of work and reduced wages and perks, all lead to a generalized conclusion: it is better to have a job than not. Naturally, this implies that only submissive and silent academics may aspire to a stable position, or eventually, pursue the ever-evasive dream of holding a tenure.

In addition to this grim reality, students have found themselves in the new role of customers and potential employees, as universities have been reduced to places where "human capital" is produced (Hinkelammert, 2005). As fees rise, education becomes more restrictive for the middle and poor-class youth. Thus, the options available are few: falling into the bottomless pit of astronomical debt in order to pay for their major, or, in most cases, white-knuckle renouncing to their right of having an education that could contribute to their social and economic progress. This has been implemented as the reduction of budget for scholarships, grants, and other student benefits. On the other hand, enrolled students must learn as part of the hidden curriculum to be acritical, compliant, and multi-tasking: these are precious qualities that employers covet in an entrepreneurial environment. Almost a hundred years after their filming, the images of Charles Chaplin's "Modern Times" (1936) come to mind: the young are slaves to the grind of the assembly line, or part of redundant workforce reservoirs who might easily slide into criminal behaviors and end up in prison.

In short, what is left then of the role of universities and academics as critical elements in society, as actors and strivers for a society that is just and inclusive? Should academics and even students renounce to their moral duty as part of the transforming forces of society? What can present and future generations expect if those gifted with intellectual and ethical authority

bequeath their legacy and commit to political acquiescence and complicity? Is there any hope for

a truly critical academic and professional practice? Can we still believe in the role of pedagogy

as a force that pushes society forward while instilling democratic values and collaborative

leadership into the new generations of teachers and learners? These are all non-renounceable

issues that this research considered.

For contemporary critics of Neoliberalism and its war against the youth and higher

education, such as Giroux, the role of academics is one of public intellectuals. Moreover,

academics need to take part in a social debate regarding not only what universities are and should

be, but also focus on what democracy and a just society mean. In this sense, pedagogy must

assume a critical stance, what he labels "a public pedagogy of wakefulness" (2014). That is,

critical pedagogical practice should be inspired on the contributions of educators like John

Dewey and Paulo Freire. A passive attitude in the academia is no longer acceptable since in the

face of today's problems and challenges, as Keller (2008) suggested, change in higher education

should be "fundamental and structural" (p.xii).

Thus, Giroux (2014) claims that far from removing themselves from political and social

concerns, faculty members, playing their rightful role as public intellectuals, must take an active

role as part of their practice: "a pedagogy in which [they are] neither afraid of controversy, or the

willingness to make connections that are otherwise hidden" (p.148). In other words, the civil

responsibility we academics hold as public intellectuals is that of denouncing, critiquing,

proposing, and opening spaces for democratic debate and deliberation. Furthermore, as public

intellectuals, educators must challenge the Neoliberals' agenda of reducing democracy to "the imperatives and freedoms of the marketplace" (Giroux, 2011, p.77).

A possible lens to do this is through Freire's critical pedagogy, as it fosters communities of learning where critical thinking takes place while learners find their own voice and are able to de-construct the official curriculum and hidden curriculum, that is, the hidden power relationships between teachers and students. This is achieved by means of dialectical modes of inquiry that regard schools as places of both domination and liberation (McLaren, 2009). Freire, who preached a dialectical approach to education, thought that problem-posing education "enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism" (2009, p.60). In short, by focusing on bringing these covert elements into the light, Freire's liberating pedagogy can empower both teachers and students, creating new forms of interaction based on respect, dialogue, democratic deliberation, and mutual assistance.

Such empowerment of education, universities, teachers, and students in order to engender attitudes and leadership that can face the Neoliberal assault on universities and aspire to transform society towards more human and democratic values is the new mission of higher education. This mission, however, does not abide to any prescribed recipe or method, as it is a process of constant transformation and discovery, subjected to the circumstances of time and place. Each generation has its own challenges to meet. This is what Dussel (2011) calls "pedagogical liberation"; Evola (1969), "getting up on your feet"; Freire (2005b), "education as

a practice for freedom"; Grain and Lund (2016), "critical hope"; Giroux (2011), "Freire's pedagogy of hope"; and Hinkelammert (2005), "culture of responsibility".

To conclude, pursuing the noble ideal that knowledge and education based on critical thinking can open up the doors to the possibilities for human growth, and therefore, the doors to real liberty, democracy, and hope for the 21st century in the context of teacher training in a public distance university in Costa Rica was explored in this document. In the face of Neoliberal counter-reforms, will future teachers acquire critical thinking skills and attitudes that will inspire them to become agents of social change? With this in mind, this dissertation project was undertaken by the researcher.

To understand more clearly where public higher education in Costa Rica comes from, and where it is heading, in this chapter we will expand on the history of the effects of Neoliberal counter-reforms in higher education, in addition to the evolution of public universities in Costa Rica. After that, we will focus on UNED, the university where this research will take place. All these elements will help the reader understand under a pristine light, the need and value of fostering critical thinking skills (and attitudes) in preservice English teachers as future agents of change.

Higher education in Costa Rica, the golden era: 1948-1979

With the foundation of the University of Costa Rica in 1940, the young and talented were able to find new doors open to develop their skills and the country (Monge-Alfaro, 1980). The University of Costa Rica (UCR) initiated the road of high-quality public universities in

Costa Rica, the Technological Institute of Costa Rica (ITCR), the National University (UNA), and the State Distance University (UNED) in the 20th century, and later, the National Technical University (UTN) in the current century. Thus, in a few decades, thousands of young Costa Ricans, many of peasant and working-class origins, were able to get a degree in Arts, Sciences, Humanities, and other fields, enriching the national project of development, as planned by the generation that suffered and overcame the short Civil War in 1948.

This long, historical project fulfilled the dream of free public education for the generations to come, as forged by the liberals of the 19th century, when President José María Castro Madriz declared in 1869 that public primary education in Costa Rica would be from then on "free of charge, compulsory, and paid by the state" (Zeledón, 2014). This was later expanded by the Minister of Education, Mauro Fernández, when he pushed literacy campaigns, abolished religious education, and promoted civic values with the educational reforms of the mid 1880's (Martinez & Pozuelo, 2017).

However, to have a clearer picture of the context in which higher education has flourished in Costa Rica, it is necessary to have a look at the period 1950-1980. Once the Civil War concluded in 1948 and the Army was abolished in 1949, the Social Democratic project of the Second Republic, represented a "golden era" of social and economic transformation in Costa Rica. The country began to tread on a path that would increase all social indicators and improve the conditions of the majority of the population, in stark contrast with the rest of Central America. Poverty decreased as the peasant social class started to dwindle and become urbanized, while the middle class became the main receiver of the benefits of education, improving health

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and work conditions, heavy public investment in infrastructure and telecommunications, and a continuous rise in the Gross Domestic Product.

As Sojo (2013) points out, this was the result of a "deliberate effort to redefine the social structure by means of public administration" (p.68). This national project of the ruling National Liberation Party (PLN), focused on two main tenets: the solving of social problems by peaceful means in the years to come (after the Abolition of the Army), and the nationalization of public services. As an example of this successful strategy, poverty indexes fell from 50% in 1961, to a historical low of 18.7% in 1977 (Sojo, 2013).

After its foundation, the University of Costa Rica (UCR) remained the only university in Costa Rica for three decades, opened new majors, invested in facilities, and increased the number of enrolled students from 1,539 in 1950, to 12, 913 in 1970 (Molina, 2016). During the 1970's three new state universities were founded: Technological Institute of Costa Rica (ITCR, in 1971), National University (UNA, in 1973), State Distance University (UNED, in 1977), and held campuses in the capital, San José, and in the provinces (Cartago, Heredia, Alajuela, Guanacaste, and Limón), which allowed students of rural areas to access higher education as well. Rural students accounted for 14% of the total enrolled by 1979 (Molina, 2016).

By 1970, nevertheless, university students had become an influential force in society, in particular in the fight against the signing of the governmental contract to the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), which ended in street fights and repression against university and high school students, and which is considered the most influential student movement in the second half of the 20th century, comparable in Costa Rica to the movements of May '68 in

France, and October '68 in Mexico among others. Such political and social awareness, which had started within the UCR at the time, was the fruition of the influence of Marxist and nationalist ideologies, as well as the important presence of working-class students, which were 21% of the total registered by 1973 (Molina, 2016).

The first private university was the Autonomous University of Central America (UACA), founded in 1975. It proposed four-month terms instead of semesters, which in addition to a vertical structure and the absence of an entry exam, made it attractive to students who failed to enter public universities, or to those who although having entered, could not enroll in their desired major. Thus, UACA supplied the demand for those who wanted to conclude their studies in a shorter time. In addition, the investment on faculty was minimized, as UACA paid lower wages, equivalent to those of secondary education teachers. As a result, by 1979, UACA had a total registration slightly bigger than the ITCR (Molina, 2016). We will expand on private universities below as we talk about Neoliberal policies and privatization tendencies in higher education.

Regarding the participation of women in public education during this period, while female students amounted to an average of 35% of total students between 1953 and 1970, by 1979 they were already 47% of total students, varying from the mostly-male ITCR to the "feminized" UNA, according to Molina (2016). In general, in the 1970's education became more and more democratic. In fact, by the end of the decade, women were already graduating in higher numbers than men, eespecially in majors related to education, arts, social sciences, pharmacy, and nursing (Molina, 2016). This increase has become even more evident in the last 40 years,

when Costa Rica has followed the world tendency to having more and more female students, reaching a majority of female graduates as it will be described below.

Furthermore, the period 1950-1979 saw the diversification of university activities and influence: there was a blooming of participation in sports and teams; cultural initiatives like dance, music, and cinema groups were born; UCR launched its own radio station and newspaper. In terms of higher education, the contact with international institutions also expanded: foreign professors were hired (including those who fled from South American military dictatorships), research facilities and journals appeared and established exchanges; students and faculty obtained graduate degrees abroad; and master's degree programs were opened.

In addition, important Central American publishing houses like the Central American University Press (EDUCA) were supported by Costa Rican universities, and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), founded by UNESCO in 1957, moved from Santiago, Chile, to San José, Costa Rica in 1978. All of this represented a growing influence and increasing complexity in the quality and quantity of higher education, research, publications, and autochthonous thought which enriched and helped mature higher education in Costa Rica. These processes were also accompanied by the increasing organization and mobilization of student associations, as well as university unions, which resulted in better wages for professors, and in particular administrative staff (Molina, 2016).

Neoliberal policies in education in Costa Rica 1980-1990

Once this golden era came to an end, the crisis of the late seventies and the arrival of Neoliberal policies changed the conditions of higher education in Costa Rica and the rest of Latin America. As Lambie (2010) summarizes the global context, rising repayments to international bank creditors, expensive oil exports and decreasing prices in the export of commodities, led international agencies like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), to work as "debt collectors" and pursue an agenda of restructuring debtor economies. In the practice, this meant the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs or SAPs (known as "PAEs" in Costa Rica) seeking to pave the way to severe free-market principle implementation, privatization of state assets, and dismantling state-run welfare programs. These measures included currency devaluations and changes in trade policies to benefit imports over exports, which generated fresh funds to pay off external debt which would end up in the private finance market. In this manner, between 1978 and 1992, nearly 70 countries undertook 566 SAPs (Lambie, 2010). In the particular case of Costa Rica, the Neoliberal counter-reform started during President Luis Alberto Monge's administration in 1982 (Montero-Mejía, 2007). In fact, three SAPs were implemented by different PLN governments in 1985, 1989, and 1995, which affected all spheres of public administration, economic life, down to social security programs, education, pension plans, and social indicators, among others. Such implementation, however, was gradual and less demanding than other in other countries, in terms of expected macroeconomic indicators and results (Hidalgo, 2000).

The world economic crisis affected Costa Rica during the 1980's, resulting in what many consider "the lost decade". According to Quesada (2008), between 1980 and 1982, the Gross Domestic Product contracted by 9.4%, unemployment doubled, and real wages decreased by 30%. In addition to the gradual implementation of SAPs, the strategical use of Costa Rica as an unofficial ally for the war against the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, meant that continuous funds were injected into the economy by means of the Agency for International Development (AID) while Neoliberal measures secured the payment of the external debt. During that period, the declaration of the "Perpetual Neutrality" of Costa Rica invoked by President Luis Alberto Monge in 1983 prevented the occupation of the northern region of Costa Rica by U.S. troops (Montero-Mejía, 2007).

In reality, however, there was intense counter-insurgent activity in the northern region of Costa Rica (near the Nicaraguan border), in addition to illegal activities such as cocaine traffic to the U.S.A. as part of the Iran-Contras affair where the "farmer" and CIA agent John Hull played a key role in Costa Rica (Anderson, 2020). In the period 1986-1990, Costa Rica's political cooperation with the Reagan administration turned into an open diplomatic confrontation due to president Oscar Arias' impulse of his own Peace Plan for Central America. This resulted in the signing of the Esquipulas Peace Agreements and the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize to Arias in 1987.

From the Neoliberal point of view, education must be evaluated based on its relation to efficiency, efficacy, and quality (Cuevas-Molina, 2012), which extends managerial logic to public schools and universities. Thus, the educational economic crisis caused by Neoliberal

policies meant that state investment in public secondary educational infrastructure plummeted from 23.4% to 1% between 1980 and 1990 (Molina, 2016). Although not so dramatically, faculty salaries and investment in materials were affected as well. Regarding higher education, universities fared a bit better as a result of joining efforts: in 1981 the public universities' budget in the shape of the Special Fund for Higher Education (FEES) became a constitutional right with fixed percentages for each institution. In fact, the FEES would be established as a percentage of the NGP, and guaranteed by the Constitution, Articles 85 and 86, where the financing of public universities in the FEES allocated by the government "cannot be abolished nor decreased" (Constitution of Costa Rica).

Public universities were also granted the possibility of selling services by means of foundations, which allowed a semi-private character to many initiatives and offered an extra income to cope with the crisis. Also, universities paid more attention to academic programs with increasing demand, such as technical majors, administration, and engineering (Garnier, 2004), in addition to education, dentistry, psychology, and medicine. However, continuous conflicts with the government, as well as mobilization of students, faculty, and administrative staff came to fruition in the negotiation of five-year budget plans starting in 1988.

Despite these conflicts, universities made important advances in this decade such as the opening of a TV station in 1982 ("Canal 15"), as well as the expansion of university publishing houses, publications of books and theses, and the tripling of the number of graduate students (Molina, 2016). In addition, female students had equaled male students by 1990 (Molina, 2016). Moreover, the number of graduates of Arts and Natural Sciences started to descend in

comparison to moderate rises in Social Sciences and engineering, while numbers in Education

rocketed, in particular due to the role of UNED (Molina, 2016). Nevertheless, falling wages for

faculty made instructors take two or more jobs in both public and private universities, work for

university foundations, or take an early pension, as part of the IMF-suggested policies to

decrease the state payroll (Molina, 2016). This, in turn, allowed public universities to cope with

smaller budgets by hiring inexperienced teachers instead.

The generalized crisis also provoked a "scientific diaspora" (Molina, 2016), as many

young students, scientists, and researchers fled to developed countries. Having migrated in the

1970's, however, the most famous of these scientists is Franklin Chang-Díaz, who would

become the first Latin American NASA astronaut. In contrast, during the 1980's, the period

where Central American guerrilla movements and state terrorism of U.S.-backed governments

were at their peak, Costa Rica became a haven for Central American intellectuals and academics,

which meant that 66% of Central American research was carried out in Costa Rica, 84% of

which was conducted by Costa Rican public universities (Cuevas-Molina, 2012).

In the case of private higher education, retired professors from public institutions

decided to take teaching jobs for minimal wages as well, which increased the private universities'

academic prestige (Molina, 2016). This, in addition to lax state regulations, increasing demand

for shorter academic majors, and state-granted loans (issued by CONAPE) benefited private

universities. UACA, for example, suffered internal tensions that resulted in the defection of

colleges and schools, which later became new universities, such as the International University

of the Americas (UIA), the Panamerican University, and the Latin University (ULatina). Others

sprouted from commercial schools, such as the Latin American University of Science and Technology (ULACIT). Many of them, however, neglected research and social action, as well as educational infrastructure such as laboratories and libraries, since they were aimed at attracting students to majors that required minimal investment, and maximizing profit (Molina, 2016).

The geopolitical conditions of the 1980's also favored the flourishing of existing academic institutions such as FLACSO, the Central American Institute of Public Administration (ICAP), and the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) (Molina, 2016). The Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE), which is independent but follows Harvard's case-study method and syllabus, moved its MBA program from Nicaragua to Costa Rica in 1984 (INCAE, 2019). Besides, this decade witnessed the appearance of new foreign-sponsored universities, such as the University for Peace, established by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 35/55 in 1980 under the leadership of president Rodrigo Carazo (UPEACE, 2020), and the EARTH University in 1986, financed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (EARTH University, 2020).

Neoliberal policies at the turn of the century and the 21st century: 1991-2020

Having covered the period of heaviest Neoliberal counter-reforms in Costa Rica, we will look now at the continuation and consequences of such policies at the turn of the century and the last two decades. For this, we will follow Molina (2016) as he summarizes the main social, economic, and political events in higher education. Here, we can highlight the interests of the

U.S. governments to create the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), originally proposed in 1994, but which failed to crystalize due to the resistance of Latin American peoples and governments. In addition, the World Trade Organization (WTO) was launched in 1995, and since then it has had an important influence over trade agreements and international affairs in Latin America.

In terms of Costa Rican affairs, the main social phenomena were popular movements and mobilizations, conducted by students, workers' unions, peasants, and public servants, like those against the teacher pension plan reforms in 1995 during José María Figueres Olsen's administration, which ended up in unprecedented governmental repression, comparable to the short-lived Tinoco Brothers' dictatorship of 1917-1919, and the teachers and students' strikes in 1947 against Teodoro Picado's government, which was overthrown by the Civil War of 1948. Besides, we can mention the referential struggle against the privatization of the state telecommunications and energy company (ICE) by means of a series of laws approved in Congress (the so-called "Combo ICE"). This movement did in fact paralyze Costa Rica for a few weeks in 2000, to the point that president Miguel Angel Rodríguez' administration had to accept the popular rejection of such counter-reforms. The most recent movement was the fight against the signing of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2006-2007, which was finally approved in Costa Rica by means of the first and only National Referendum, by a narrow margin of 1% of votes against those who opposed it, during president Oscar Arias's second administration (which had also been hotly disputed as presidential reelection in Costa Rica is forbidden by the Constitution). For Quesada (2012), the CAFTA Referendum not only evidenced

that Costa Rican society had divided into two opposing groups, but also showed that the local bourgeoisie was willing to use irregular and questionable methods in order to push their economic interests linked to international capitalists.

Other socio-economic circumstances to be taken into consideration have been the still undiscussed decrease in birth rates (2.9% between 1980-1989; 2.6% in 1990-1999; 1.4% in 2000-2013) (Molina, 2016), the increasing longevity of the population due to a successful social security system (Costa Rica hosts one of the few Blue Zones in the world), the influence of U.S. culture by means of cable TV and Internet (English as a subject in public primary schools was introduced in 1995), the increased precarity of jobs as the result of the expansion of transnational companies such as "maquilas" (textile factories), call centers, banana and pineapple plantations. Furthermore, we have witnessed other social problems such as growing uncontrolled immigration (especially from Nicaragua and Colombia, more recently from Venezuela, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti), unprecedented drug use and trafficking, mounting levels of social violence and crime, and the appearance of novel political agendas such as radical feminism and gay rights. Meanwhile, poverty has remained stagnant at 20% with a slight increase to 21.1% in 2018 (Córdoba & Valverde, 2019).

Regarding investment in higher education, as part of the crisis of the eighties and nineties stalled, with actual decreases (in terms of total national expenditure in education) of 33.5% to 25.2% between 1990-1997; down to 21.7% in 1999; and remaining at 21.3% between 2000 and 2014 (Molina, 2016). This is shown in Figure 1, where total investment in education is contrasted in the period 1980-2014. Here, despite constant growth in investment in education, the

historical low of the 1990's (decade of hardest Neoliberal reductions) has evidenced a slow

recovery.

Figure 1

Public Investment, University Expenditure, and Transferences, from 1980 to 2014
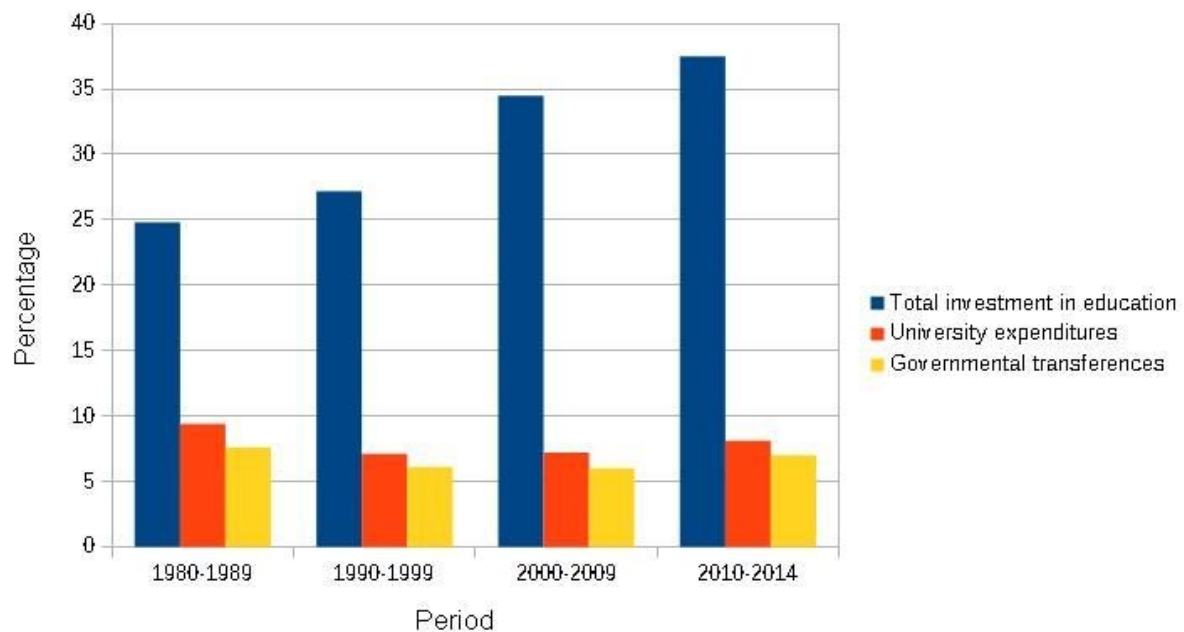
Reductions in investment were due to the agreements signed between the National

Commission of State University Presidents (CONARE) and the government, while accepting to

adjust the FEES according to the Consumer Price Index (Molina, 2016). This meant, in fact,

going back to the levels of public investment prior to 1979 (Molina, 2016). In the meanwhile,

such circumstances pushed universities to start generating as much income as possible from the

sales of services and products, as mentioned above. Both in 1991 and in 2010, in the face of

Neoliberal politicians' interests to decrease the FEES, university students rallied in order to

defend the budget agreed in advance. Cuevas-Molina (2012) states that these policies respond to the Neoliberal agenda of "budget based on performance", where university financing depends on the observable results obtained according to "consumers", that is, students whose demands must be met in market terms.

In addition to economic pressure, political influence was exerted upon public universities as Neoliberal policies changed the traditional focus of education from a means for creating active citizens towards a focus on producing "human capital". This shift implied that corporate capitalism had its say and its way all over the educational spectrum, as the production of human capital should be profitable for society in economic terms (Cuevas-Molina, 2012). Such reinterpretation of education in terms of capitalist interests was made public in a document authored by the Inter-American Development Bank in 1997 which was eventually used as a point of reference for the following administrations (Molina, 2016). The shift is reflected in Figure 2, where the percentage of total investment in education as a percentage of total government expenditure is evidenced as a process of increasing public expenditure in the present century according to the World Bank (2020). Particularly noteworthy is the historical high of 2017 and 2018, indicating an increasing political interest in education. So far, results in education are significant: Costa Rica has the lowest illiteracy rate in Central America (7% nationwide) as of 2014 (Dengo, 2018).

Figure 2

Total Public Investment in Education in the 21st Century
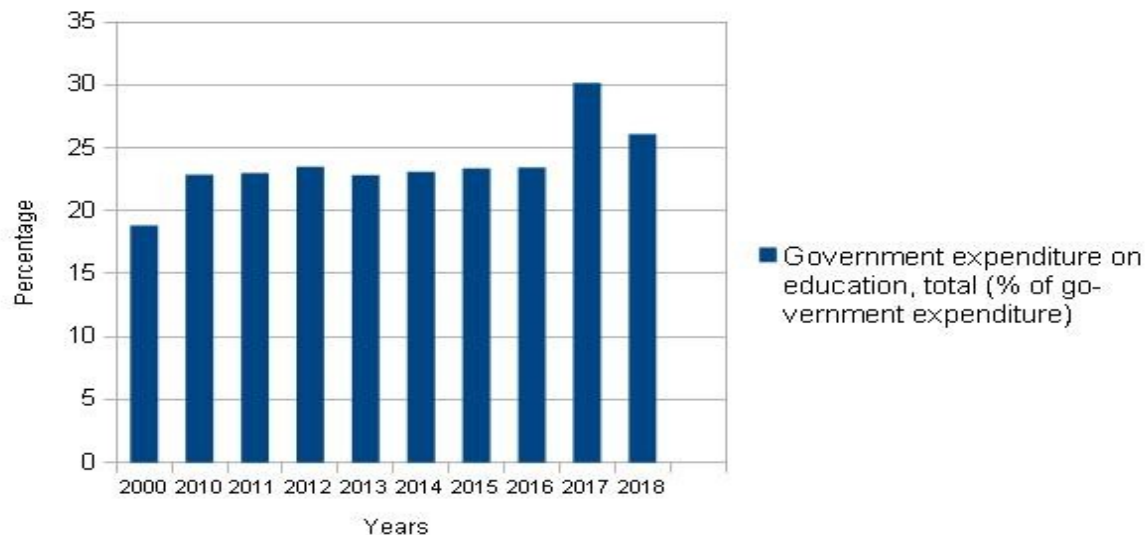
Private higher education

We have established those Neoliberal policies oriented towards a "free market" where higher education was seen as a profitable business, allowed the appearance of private universities "without any measure nor control" (Martínez-Gutiérrez, 2016, p.33), to the point that they are known in Costa Rica as "garage universities". It seemed that any space big enough to hold desks and a whiteboard could be turned into a university easily. Thus, reaching a number of almost 50, which for Costa Rican terms was excessive in relation to its small young population. The effects have been the abundant graduation (or production) of lawyers, doctors, engineers, dentists, business managers, pre-school, primary, and secondary teachers among others. This, in turn, has

pushed wages to new lows, due to an excess of a professional workforce, whose members have in many cases been criticized publicly because of deficient preparation, in particular English and Math teachers, dentists, and doctors (Barrantes, 2017; Haba, 2002; Molina, 2016).

In the first decade of the new century, private universities took over the training of primary and secondary teachers from public universities. To illustrate, in the particular context of primary and secondary school English teachers, in 1996, only 15.9% graduated from private universities. By 2012, this figure had reached 80.8% (Molina, 2016). Poor training in private universities became evident when in 2008 the Ministry of Education started to require language proficiency certifications of teachers. For this, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) was used, requiring a high intermediate level (or B2+ according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – CEFR). The results were alarming for the authorities: among 3,193 in-service teachers, 38% scored as basic language users, and 48.5% as intermediate (Molina, 2016). A comparison between the graduates of public and private universities can be seen in Figure 3. This indicates the numerical impact of private higher education graduates in contrast to public education graduates, shown by areas of knowledge:

Figure 3

Comparative Number of Graduates Between Public and Private Universities in 2012
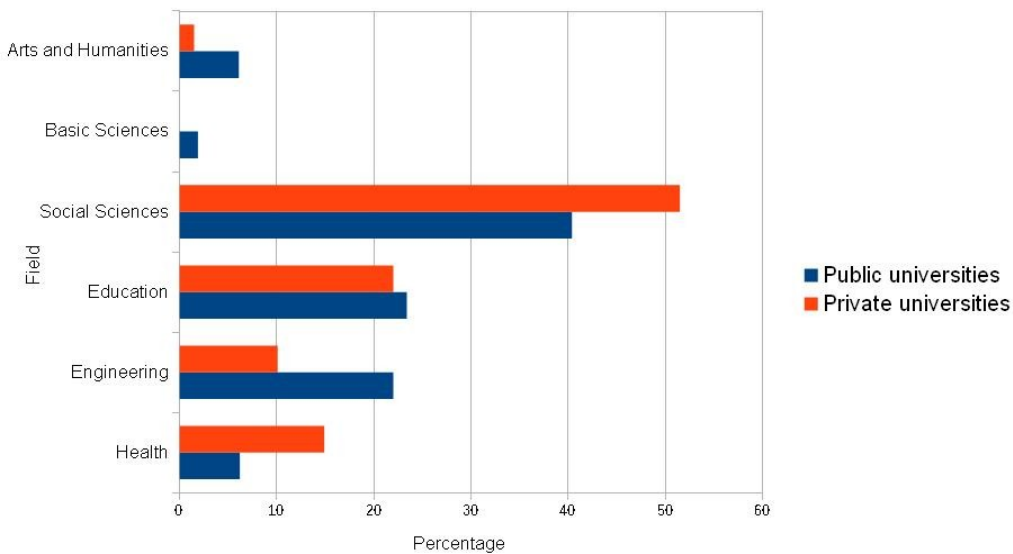
The laxity in control and the low-quality of education went hand-in-glove with the quest for profit of university owners and stockholders (since many of these universities operated as corporations). According to the Minister of Education between 2006 and 2014, Leonardo Garnier (2004), private universities turned into factories where young people graduate in record time as long as they pay: "Basically, they are selling degrees... and, of course, people are buying degrees because education is not just important as a source of knowledge, but as a 'signal' that labor market demands, so people are willing to 'pay for the signal' ". (p.124) In short, this was the implementation of demand and supply principles of education, as preached by Neoliberal tenets to the working force market in general.

Moreover, lack of control over private university graduation rate caused unemployment figures among young professionals to rise, including underemployment, as many of these university students and graduates have taken up positions in more than 150 call centers with official rough estimates of 60,000 jobs in 2017 (Barquero, 2017). The consequences of this economic activity have not been studied fully, although they can be considered a kind of "internal brain-drain", as many young professionals stay in the country but are unable to contribute effectively to Costa Rican economy and development (Díaz-Ducca, 2015). Currently there is a bill (Bill #21,578) being discussed in the Legislative Assembly to reform the law that created the National Council of Private Higher Education (CONESUP, in Spanish) in order to improve the government's supervision and the universities' accountability, considering that as of 2015, there were 105,931 students enrolled in private universities (Ulate, 2021).

State universities: Struggling towards the future

Between 1990 and 2001, Costa Rican state universities focused on investment in research and international agreements by reducing the entry of new students. Such policy was effective but also risky (Molina, 2016), as it "pushed" new high school graduates towards private universities. For example, the UCR restricted entry into majors in order to reduce dropout rates, as it had been a chronic situation having students "hang out" for years while hoping to enter their desired major. Rising demographics and demand of fresh college students meant that quotas were filled across public universities. In fact, by 2014, state universities had received over 31,000 more students than in 2000 (Molina, 2016). Despite such figure, new students accounted

for only 0.33% of the total population of the country, failing to reach the historical high of 1980, which was 0.59%.

In the midst of counter-reforms, a new state university was created. The National Technical University (UTN) opened in 2008 during Oscar Arias' second administration. Originally formed from a collective effort of para-university high-schools and colleges, UTN's main campus was inaugurated in Alajuela. UTN also has regional sites in coastal areas (Puntarenas, Pacific coast), the northern Pacific (Guanacaste), "Occidente" (province of Alajuela), and the northern region (San Carlos). It has also signed cooperation agreements with technical high schools throughout Costa Rica (Rodríguez, 2015).

According to Molina (2016), there was resistance from other public universities against its creation as well as its incorporation into CONARE in 2015. Nevertheless, UTN's budget had not assigned as part of FEES, but directly by the Ministry of Education, causing a particular situation of dependency from the central government (this changed in August 2022, see below). Currently, it offers 33 majors in the areas of agroindustry, education, management, engineering, technology, and the humanities.

Furthermore, although state university enrollment grew 38.4% between 2002 and 2014, only 23.6% were new students. This corroborates the historical tendency of students to take longer and longer to finish their major, in addition to growing demand for graduate programs (reaching a 6.5% of total enrollment by 2013). In other words, there were more students enrolled in global numbers, but this did not necessarily mean that more young people were receiving

higher education than 20 years prior, that is, before Neoliberal policies took effect. Recovery

from the effects of Neoliberal policies although partial, has been slow and painstaking.

Part of overcoming such difficult times was the investment in research and academic

publishing. Thus, between 1990 and 2014, 98 new research units were created focused on STEM

disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) (Molina, 2016). Social sciences

caught up to a lesser degree between 2010 and 2014, particularly as academic observatories

(research and monitoring institutes), which in recent years have gathered strength as centers

aimed towards social, political, and economic analysis mainly, nurturing important initiatives as

the State of the Nation Program (PEN), directed by CONARE.

Resources were also spent on new academic journals, reaching a total of 13 in 2014,

mainly in STEM disciplines, Humanities, education, and health. In addition, authoring and

publishing networks were built, promoting the publication of research and analysis papers both

in Spanish and English, nationally and abroad (Molina, 2016). Research, education, and social

impact were also crowned with the creation of the first planetarium in Central America in 2005,

as a cooperation project between the government of Japan and the University of Costa Rica

(University of Costa Rica, 2020).

As regards female participation, female students represented a majority of the student

body by 2000: 65.7% of total enrollment in UNED; 59.2% in UNA; 51.4% in the UCR; and

26.3% at ITCR. Among faculty, percentages are different: 38.9% of instructors were female at

the UCR (only university with available data) by 2011. According to Molina (2016) such

differences may be explained by traditional values within the academy, in addition to the

tendency first seen in the 1970's and consolidated in the 1980's and 1990's of faculty networks not only based on family ties, social class, friendship, and political affinity, but also on sexual orientation, as gay faculty, school directors, and university representatives promoted the incorporation of new male gay instructors only.

Thus, increasing investment in research, publication, and teacher training (scholarships) in Figure 4 should be contrasted with the actual expenditure on tertiary education for the last 18 years (World Bank, 2020). Here differences are less striking than in Figure 2, but there is evidence of a sustained increase in investment in higher education for the period 2010-2017 and also of political concern for the improvement of higher education and its role in the current century.

Figure 4

Expenditure on Higher Education as a Percentage of Total Public Investment on Education
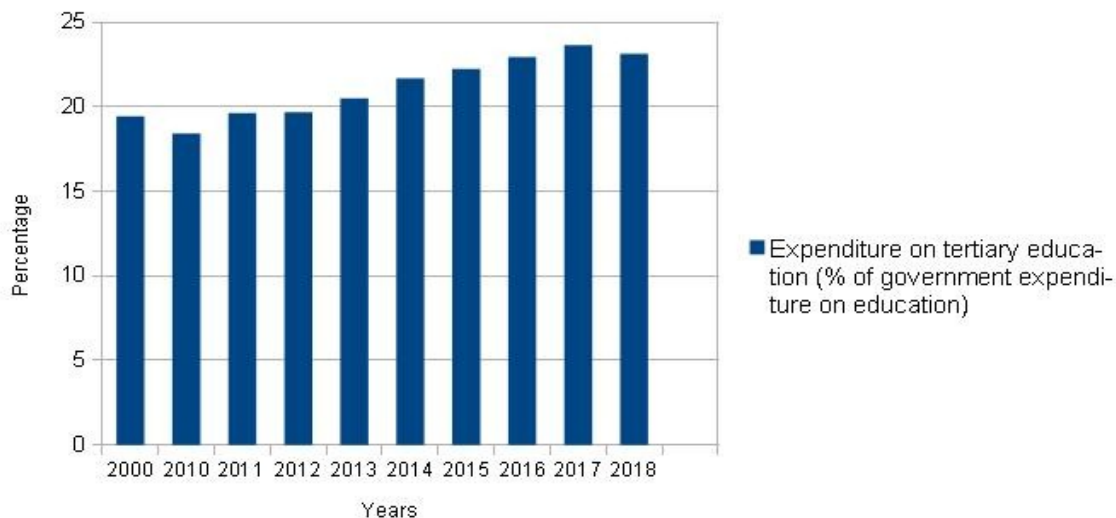
Working conditions of Faculty

In general terms, since the 1990's there has been a process towards precarity in the working conditions of faculty. This is part of both the phenomenon that shrinking favorable retirement conditions have pushed professors to retire as early as possible, in addition to unofficial policies that respond to Neoliberal dictates such as the commodification of education and the restriction of tenure (Chomsky, 2014; Cuevas-Molina, 2012; Giroux, 2014). Such backward tendencies can be observed in the percentages of teachers who held a full-time tenure: 35.2% in 2004, in contrast to 27% in 2011, in short, this equals "down to a third of what it was in 1990" (Molina, 2016, p.549). In fact, only 40% of instructors had a master's degree or a

doctorate by 2011 (Molina, 2016), which may reflect inefficiency and lack of vision in the preparation of new academic cadres.

Moreover, many instructors who do obtain a doctorate, for example, receive it at an age that is close to their retirement (Molina, 2016). Increased bureaucratization has also taken place in the last decades as a process of diversification of areas (more technicians and professionals, according to Molina, 2016). This also responds to a global tendency towards more control and a focus on administration rather than on the academy (Chomsky, 2014; Keller 2008).

The increasing influence of administrative staff over the fossilization or even involution in the conditions of faculty can be detected also in the pressure put by administrative personnel (by means of unions) on the body of law that regulates the constitution of universities. Thus, in the UCR, for example, there has been an administrative staff movement tugging towards having a deeper influence on the way the president is elected, beyond the current election process which includes votes from faculty, student representatives, and administrative staff. According to Molina (2016) such movement has not been successful yet, but receives the support of radicalized groups within the faculty and the student body.

COVID-19 and its aftermath

Thus, the challenges towards more stability for instructors and researchers remain a pending and urgent matter of attention. Far from representing a "disproportionate expense" that threatens to "eat away" university budget, as the mainstream media have been systematically wailing in recent years (Córdoba, 2019), all investment in research, scholarships, and wages

among others, is vital. In the light of the "Fiscal Plan" (a series of laws aimed at cutting down state expenses and growth across the state, even in education and public health), public universities have been suffering increasing pressure, to the point that state university presidents were forced to visit the Congress in order to "explain" and "justify" university administrative policies (Mora, May 2020). However, according to the university autonomy guaranteed by the Constitution, such decisions are an inalienable right of university administration.

In the last few years, state financing (FEES) has been targeted for cuts, which would put the very functioning of state universities at risk (Mora, 2019). Furthermore, some Congress representatives have accused public universities of becoming "centers for political indoctrination paid by the citizens" and "alignment with the ruling party, PAC" and "left-wing parties" and thus, should be more tightly supervised (Mora, June 2020).

In fact, in August 2020 the board of state university presidents (CONARE) accepted the new 2021 budget (FEES) even if it meant 4.42% less than had been originally negotiated with the Congress as part of the national emergency decreed by the government due to COVID-19. According to Carlos Araya, president of UCR, however, "this agreement guarantees the constitutional order and the normal functioning of our institutions, acknowledging our unquestionable contributions" (Mora, May 2020). This was, perhaps, more ironic than ever, considering the valuable research public universities carried out against COVID-19, including the development, along with the UCR's Clodomiro Picado Institute, of an anti SARS-CoV-2 serum (Jiménez, 2020), as well as an antiviral drug that according to the UCR, "could reduce up to a 30% the advance of the COVID-19 infection" (Barquero, 2020).

Nevertheless, and without an official explanation yet, neither of these projects reported concrete results, but gave way to the experimental vaccines developed by transnational pharmaceutical companies which in Costa Rica were decreed mandatory (against national and international law, lack of scientific evidence and public debate, and including confidential contracts between the government, Astra-Zeneca, and Pfizer) for adults and children, even against their parents' will (Bolaños, 2022; Ministry of Health, 2022).

More recently, in August 2022, CONARE and the government of Costa Rica signed an agreement to increase the resources to be assigned to FEES by 1% in 2023, in addition to including UTN's budget starting 2023 as part of FEES (Ospino, 2022). This was questioned at the University of Costa Rica, whose president signed the agreement "under protest" (Molina, 2022). In addition, the University Council at UCR claimed that the Rodrigo Chaves administration's Bill #23,380 could be unconstitutional as it intends to interfere with university autonomy and CONARE's prerogatives to the distribution of FEES resources among state universities (Siu, 2022).

Even more dramatically, the Union of Costa Rican Educators (SEC) has requested the central government to decree an "educational emergency" due to the decrease from 8% to 6% of the GNP invested in public education, in addition to the delays and problems in student learning caused by the lockdowns and school closures adopted as part of the national COVID-19 policies during 2020 and 2021 (Asenjo, 2022). In the U.S and other countries, there have been reports of learning losses and achievement gaps in students in primary and secondary school, for example, such as difficulties in the development of speech, social skills, math skills, reading sills, and

others, apart from mental health and behavior problems (Grimes, 2021; Miller, 2022), also the result of lockdowns imposed as unyielding recommendations by the World Health Organization through health ministries. In the words of the World Bank Global Director for Education, this situation "might have a devastating impact on future productivity, earnings, and well-being for this generation of children and youth, their families, and the world's economies" (UNICEF, 2021). We can only add that this represents a major disaster for present and future generations, as well as for education at all levels.

Going back to universities in Costa Rica, it is important to point out that independently of budget restrictions and Neoliberal policies, public higher education in Costa Rica today is not free of cost as in other countries. However, the fees students pay are minimal, and as mentioned above, there exists an extensive system of scholarships depending on the socioeconomic profile of students, ranging from discounted fees to actual economic support (Dengo, 2018).

Innovation, on the other hand, remains a pending challenge for public universities in order to adapt to the changing social and economic conditions in Costa Rica, in addition to the evolution of technologies. For example, increasing virtualization of the academic offerings in public universities has been discussed by Rodríguez-Espinoza (2017), Solano (2020), and Vargas (2020). As the Programa Estado de la Nación (2019) suggests, innovation can take place in teaching, textbooks and educational resources, assessment, technology, research, and their link with the productive sectors of society. Such innovation could be weighed as virtual education, improving institutional performance, and financing. However, although innovation is necessary, it is not positive by itself: there should be a goal for actual improvement. In the best of cases,

these goals should be set by universities themselves after listening to the voice of social actors

(communities, unions, the Church, local governments, etc.), and not by intergovernmental

agencies as a one-size-fits-all agenda, or by international financial institutions like the conditions

for loans that Neoliberalism has dictated historically.

To summarize, public universities face times of Neoliberal assault and "austerity" while

contributing to the development of public health, technological innovation, and human

development both within and without our borders. Moreover, since we can already hear multiple

voices announcing the end of Neoliberalism and the advent of the "Great Reset" and the

Globalist agenda (also known as "2030 Agenda"), education for awareness and liberty becomes

quite urgent (Benegas, 2020; Chossudovsky, 2003; Deutsche Bank, 2020; Escobar, 2020; Klein,

2020; Martín-Jiménez, 2020; Mercola & Cummins, 2021; Muñoz-Iturrieta, 2021; Sánchez, 2022;

Schwab & Malleret, 2020; Vidal, 2020).

 As Quesada (2000) puts it, "in the context of globalization, democracy can be

authoritarian" (p.48). Thus, these are demanding times grasping for innovation, organization,

planning, and keeping a critical stance and a clear vision of the three pillars of university action

within society: teaching, research, and extension (social action). In the case of public

universities, this responds to a long tradition of democratization of knowledge, access to quality

higher education, and social mobility.

Next, we will look at the particular case of the State Distance University of Costa Rica

(UNED), both from a historical and academic perspective in order to narrow down the scope of

this paper and offer more elements to contextualize the teaching of critical thinking skills in preservice teachers.

State Distance University of Costa Rica (UNED)

In this section I want to address the institutional setting of this research project. Since it was conducted within the State Distance University of Costa Rica (UNED), the institution where I work, it was very useful to have some elements of reference about the social and historical context of UNED and its mission and impact on Costa Rican society since its foundation. In addition, a short description of some of the pedagogical tenets and recent statistics of students and their uses of technology shed light on the characteristics of UNED and how they frame this dissertation.

A brief history of UNED

The State Distance University of Costa Rica (UNED) was officially created on March 3, 1977 when the Costa Rican President Daniel Oduber signed the bill after been approved in the Congress on February 22, 1977. According to Oscar Aguilar-Bulgarelli (2005), one of its founders, the idea of opening a distance university in Costa Rica was originally proposed by Fernando Volio, Minister of Education at the time, after paying a visit to the Distance University of Spain (UNED), in Madrid in 1976. Some years before, as part of the fight against the ALCOA Contract of 1970 (discussed above), growing political radicalization within the University of Costa Rica (UCR) had triggered the creation of a new public university, the National University (UNA) in 1973, which for a while, remained a haven for professors and academics who had

become uncomfortable with the political situation at UCR (Aguilar-Bulgarelli, 2005). This equilibrium changed quickly, and in addition, there remained a considerable part of Costa Rican youth in rural and coastal areas for whom access to higher education was if not impossible, at least very difficult.

Thus, the contact of Minister Volio with UNED in Spain made him appoint a team of academics that would take on the mission of designing the bill for the creation of a distance university in Costa Rica, as well as a state-run TV station (which later became the National System of Radio and Television – SINART). The academics included Oscar Aguilar-Bulgarelli (coordinator), Ovidio Pacheco, Enrique Góngora, Arnoldo Herrera, Francisco Gutiérrez, Francisco Quesada, Chéster Zelaya, and Francisco Antonio Pacheco. The committee also drew inspiration from the Open University of London, Fern University in Germany, Allama Igbal University of Pakistan, and Everyman's University in Israel (Molina, 2008). In addition, Athabasca University in Canada had already become a point of reference for distance education in the Americas and the world after its foundation in 1970.

Contrary to what such an innovative initiative may suggest (or perhaps precisely because of that), the project was immediately questioned by the University of Costa Rica and the Congress representative of the Communist Party, Arnoldo Ferreto, as they considered the project of a distance university to be unrealistic, financially onerous, and even "unnecessary" (Aguilar-Bulgarelli, 2005; Molina, 2008). According to Molina (2008), the stated objectives of UNED were making higher education accessible to adults who could not get a degree otherwise; offering an option to rural population who had the "merits" necessary to attend university, but

who because of economic, geographical, or social reasons had not been able to do so; receiving

part of the high school graduates who could not register into a major or even enter a university;

taking higher education to workers in urban a rural areas, allowing them to study without having

to quit their job and therefore, keeping the work force intact while improving their qualifications

(Molina, 2008).

Despite moderate political opposition, different parties joined forces in the Congress in

support, and thus the project led to the creation of the first distance university in Latin America.

According to President Oduber, UNED would offer access to higher education to hundreds of

families, workers, and their children, unchaining a "total revolution" in the field of higher

education in Costa Rica (Arias-Camacho, 2008). The demographic profile of UNED's students

will be detailed below.

UNED, which focused at the time on available technologies (television, printed

materials, and radio) would integrate technologies with local university centers to provide quality

distance education focused on the needs of rural communities. Thus, UNED's founding board

appointed Dr. Francisco Antonio Pacheco as president, and the first academic year was

inaugurated on July 1, 1978. In 1979, UNED joined the National Commission of State

University Presidents (CONARE), which placed the university directly under the autonomy,

financing, and institutional protection granted by the Constitution (as discussed above).

In March 2007, a bill to confer an award of merit ("Benemeritazgo" in Spanish) was

presented in Congress. This award had normally been granted to individuals (and later was

expanded also to institutions or organisms) who have played a role of benefactors to Costa Rican

society in a specific field of knowledge. Among the main arguments of the bill proposers, UNED's contribution to "the development of higher education as well as its contribution to the education of people in the rural areas of Costa Rica" can be mentioned (Molina, 2008, p. 90). A curious coincidence is that the President of the Congress at that time was Dr. Francisco Antonio Pacheco, who had also been UNED's first President in 1977. Furthermore, many of the legislative representatives who discussed the bill had either studied or worked at UNED previously as faculty or administrative staff, or were related to somebody else who had, which reinforced the evident influence of UNED's "multiplying effect on the Costa Rican context" (Molina, 2008, p.97).

Eventually, the law was voted in Congress and officially signed by President Oscar Arias on December 11, 2007, who stated that having acknowledged UNED as a "institution worth of merit for Costa Rican education and culture", meant that "now UNED has the right to demand of us compliance with the fundamental values that have defined it since its inception: work, a quest towards perfection, the interest of adapting to the times, and over all, the intent to improve the quality of life of many" (Molina, 2008, p.110).

UNED today

In this section we will present some of the most relevant statistics and aims, goals, and institutional values as described in the UNED's official mission and vision statements. These elements will allow the reader to have a clearer perspective of UNED in 2022, in the light of

Neoliberal times and policies, diversification of educational offerings, and expansion of technological resources.

Nevertheless, as a sort of introduction, we will recapitulate here the original objectives and principles sought by the founders of UNED, according to the document "Objectives, Methodology, and Constitutive Law" of 1977, included by Aguilar-Bulgarelli in his book (2005). As it can be seen, these tenets are common to other distance education universities to facilitate the learning process, cope with students' needs and limitations, and lower costs while keeping an equivalent academic level of quality:

- UNED, as distance education, does not intend to take the place of face-to-face education, but to provide an alternative to those who cannot attend a brick-and-mortar university, while keeping "the same academic and professional value".

- Education will "individualize" the process of learning in order to respect the personal learning pace and time availability of each student.

- Flexibility will be focused on satisfying students' needs, adjusting to different requisites and possible solutions.

- Development of students' abilities will be pursued as a desired goal on the same level as in other types of higher education.

- Increasing the ratio instructor-student will allow for a real decrease in operative costs.

Mission

In order to have a clear perspective of UNED's mission in the current century, we have transcribed here the official text from the university's webpage:

Its mission is to offer higher education to all the sectors of the population, eespecially to those that for economic, social, geographical, cultural, age, disability or gender reasons, require opportunities for a real and equitable insertion in society. To do this, UNED makes use of various technological media that foster interactivity, independent learning, humanistic, critical, creative training, and commitment to society and the environment. UNED is committed to academic excellence, the development of culture, science, arts, and human rights for the construction of a just society and a culture of peace. (UNED, n.d., my translation)

This way, elements from distance and virtual education models, such as the use of different technologies while fostering interactivity and independence become evident. Besides, humanistic values such as inclusiveness, tolerance, criticality, and commitment to the improvement of society and the environment are also present. Universality of higher education is also considered as a focus on academic excellence in different fields: sciences, arts, and humanities.

Vision

In a similar way, institutional vision offers an open perspective of the task ahead, paying attention to the three main spheres of influence higher education: teaching, research, and

extension, which in the case of UNED, has a deeper impact on Costa Rican society as stated next:

> UNED will be a leader in distance teaching and learning processes that use technologies and other means of social communication in an appropriate and pedagogical way. It will train people to think and act critically, creatively, and autonomously, and thus to perform successfully in the self-instructional context. To do so, it will promote the continuous search for excellence and academic demands in its fundamental tasks: teaching, research, extension, and production of didactic materials, to achieve the desired higher educational levels in conditions of quality, relevance and equity, in accordance with the demands of the various groups in Costa Rican society. Its academic function will be conceptualized, essentially, as a function of creation, reaction, transmission, and democratization of knowledge. UNED will participate in a leading way in the development of the country with the goal of inserting graduates into their social environment so that they may seek forms of solidarity and tolerant coexistence, the strengthening and expansion of democracy, and respect for the environment. (UNED, n.d., my translation)

Once again, emphasis is placed on student autonomy, independence, creativity, and acquisition of critical skills as tools for self-instruction in distance learning. Academically, UNED also contributes to the publishing of printed and audiovisual materials (its publishing house is the most prolific and influential in Central America today), while contributing with research, creation, and transmission of knowledge. Furthermore, by means of extension, UNED

aims at enriching alumni and their communities through social and economic projects, that advance current democratic and environmental values.

These are the goals kept in sight during the development of this project: critical thinking, fostering of student independence and autonomy, democratic leadership, academic excellence, and humanistic approaches to teaching and learning in a distance education context, as they can be acquired and implemented in conjunction with the Community of Inquiry model, Freire's critical pedagogy, and collaborative leadership, the three main theoretical axes of this research, as described below and thoroughly explored in Chapter 2.

Pedagogical paradigm

According to Lobo and Fallas (2008), UNED follows a distance education pedagogical paradigm centering on collaborative learning that guarantees these conditions: students learn in different ways and at their own pace; students learn contents but also skills for becoming autonomous learners for life. Distance classes and complementary face-to-face sessions (not classes in the traditional sense) are aimed at generating learning, problem solving, and assessment and self-assessment experiences. Finally, technological applications, Moodle LMS, educational repository (ReUNED), and social networks allow for collaboration among students, by means of information sharing, problem solving, and democratic decision making.

In this manner, these principles fit with the Community of Inquiry model: synchronous and asynchronous communication, problem posing, problem solving, collaborative leadership and self-regulation of learning. Although not explicitly stated, these conditions also cater for a

cognitive presence, social and emotional presences, and teaching presence (where learners and instructors switch roles), which implies collaborative leadership and critical pedagogy as part of problem posing and problem solving based on democratic deliberation and critical thinking (Freire, 2005b).

In order to extend these ideas and principles, I want to include some general guidelines, which even though they are not stated as official policies as far as I could establish, summarize the main challenges UNED will have to tackle during the third decade of this century, in order to maximize its potential and grow along some of the paths suggested by modern educational and global technological tendencies. These are proposed by Guadamuz (2008) and should be kept in mind in terms of academic, scientific, social, and political goals. This research, though it may have touched upon some of them tangentially, did not aim at addressing them in an extensive manner, as they fell outside our limitations (to be discussed below):

- Linking with the productive sectors of Costa Rican economy

- Focusing on education for science, technology, and innovation

- Research within and along with private and state companies

- Perspective towards an internationalization of education

- Continuing education

- "The struggle towards intelligence" (world academic ranking and leadership)

Academic offer: Undergraduate and graduate programs

The current offer of academic programs reflects UNED's values related to the development of communities and Costa Rican economy, covering areas such as business administration, education, natural sciences, humanities, law, information technologies, health services, and natural resources. According to the university website (UNED, 2022), UNED promotes undergraduate distance education majors (including bachelor's degree and licentiate degree programs). A bachelor's degree (full-time) takes four years, whereas a licentiate degree takes an extra 1.5 years and in UNED requires writing a thesis (in Costa Rica, licentiate is an extension of an undergraduate degree which ranks below a master's degree). As of 2022, the following are the undergraduate programs offered:

- Business Administration: emphasis on Human Resources, Finances, Accounting, Management, Marketing, Production, International Business, Operations

- Education: Administration, Teaching, Educational Computer Technologies, Special Education, Primary School, Preschool, Social Studies and Civic education

- Natural Sciences (and Engineering): Industrial Agriculture Business Administration, Health Services, Teaching of Mathematics, Teaching of Science, Industrial Agriculture Engineering, Agronomy Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Computer Science Engineering, Engineering in Telecommunications, Natural Resource Management, Health Records and Statistics

- Social Sciences and Humanities: Record Management and New Information Technologies; Educational Libraries and Learning Resources, Criminology, Police Sciences,

Teaching of Music, Teaching of French, Teaching of English, General Studies (Humanities), University Studies, Secretarial Management, Sustainable Tourism Management.

In addition, regarding graduate studies, the Graduate Studies System (SEP) coordinates and offers the following distance education Master's Degrees (both academic and professional):

- Business Administration (professional)

- Governmental Audit (professional)

- Company Audit (professional)

- Sustainable Health Services Management (professional)

- Educational Administration (professional)

- Mass Media Management (professional)

- Criminology (professional)

- Constitutional Law (professional)

- Labor Law and Social Security (professional)

- Economic Law with emphasis on International Trade (professional)

- Human Rights (professional)

- Distance Education (academic)

- Addiction Studies (professional)

- Violence Studies from Gender Perspective and Intersectionality (professional)

- European and Integration Studies (professional)

- Agricultural Extension (professional)

- Management and International Negotiations (professional)

- Natural Resources Management (academic)

- Natural Resources Management (professional)

- Agricultural Marketing (professional)

- Intellectual Property Law (professional)

- Psychopedagogy (professional)

- Educational Technology (professional)

- Valuation and Finance (professional)

Also coordinated by SEP, the following doctoral programs are currently open:

- Doctorate in Law

- Doctorate in Natural Sciences for Development

- Doctorate in Education

- Doctorate in Management Sciences

Local centers, educational materials and technologies, EUNED

As of 2022, UNED has 39 active local university centers throughout Costa Rica, covering rural and urban areas, peasant communities, coastal towns, and indigenous territories. Such centers provide free Internet access, receive and send printed materials, mail, exams, and official paperwork, and include classrooms, video conference rooms, and libraries. Some of them also have computer and science laboratories. In addition, services are extended to prison inmates, and high school has also been included in the form of National High Schools of Distance Education (CONED), covering people 18 years and older who have not been able to get a high school

diploma (now serving 13 communities). The full territorial distribution of local university centers can be seen in Figure 5 (UNED, 2021).

Figure 5

UNED Local University Centers in Costa Rica as of 2022
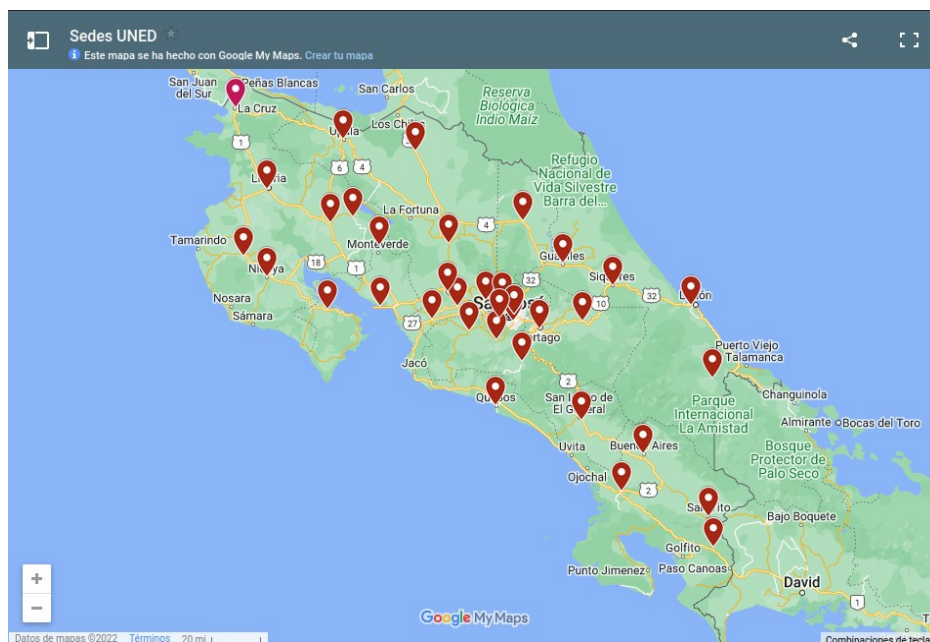
Note. Google Map capture from https://uned.ac.cr/mapa-sedes. Used as Fair Use and following Google's guidelines.

Extension is also promoted, in addition to the local university centers, as online or face-to-face courses and projects that "allow self-realization by means of self-education" (Lobo & Fallas, 2008, p.51) such as technological certifications, courses for the elderly, computer software courses, independent learning skills, music courses, Costa Rican sign language (LESCO), manual arts and handicrafts, business administration and entrepreneurial training. In

addition, modern language open courses for adults and adolescents are available throughout the year (English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Mandarin) coordinated by the Language Center, where the researcher has worked for over 10 years. Language courses used to be face-to-face but have been delivered online since 2020.

Also, the new "UAbierta" (https://uabierta.uned.ac.cr), includes free online courses dealing with technological skills, political education for local initiatives, and pedagogical support for teachers and parents. On the other hand, "Specialization Courses" are focused on ongoing training and professional development skills. Finally, some free downloadable courses are available under "OCW UNED Open Education" (https://ocw.uned.ac.cr).

Among the technologies and materials produced and provided by UNED to its students and target populations, there are printed and digital educational materials, educational audiovisual materials, radio and television shows and documentaries (many of them international award-winners), computer software and applications, video conferences (both live and prerecorded), and also a multimedia repository (ReUned).

Moreover, the university's publishing house (EUNED) was founded in 1978 and is today the most important in terms of variety, scope, and accessible prices in Central America. EUNED releases both printed and electronic books in areas and genres such as law, science, history, biographies, politics, education, humanities, fiction, children's literature, poetry, Costa Rican classics, essays, and course textbooks. In 2019, EUNED reported an increase of 11.3% in the number of titles published, in addition to a 45.1% increase in the number of total copies printed (CIEI, 2020).

Student profile

Regarding regular students' profile, 64.3% of students are female in undergraduate studies according to UNED's CIEI - Centro de Investigación y Evaluación Institucional (2020), while the figure descends to 44.8% for graduate programs. In addition, 61.3% are under 29 years, which reflects a young student population. For 2019, the student population reached 34,611 individuals (CIEI, 2020). In contrast, new student enrollment increased 11% in 2019, when 48.7% registered into General Studies (first-year Humanities courses), 21.8% into Social Sciences, and 13.7% into Education majors (CIEI, 2020).

In more detail, age groups range as follows, 12.8% are 20 years or younger, 48.5% between 20 and 29 years old; 27.7% between 30 and 39 years old; 8.5% between 40 and 49; and 2.5% are 50 or older (CIEI, 2020). Based on this, it is evident that a majority of the student population share the same range as the members of productive work force, and acknowledge UNED as an institution that gives the opportunity to improve their economic conditions by finding a job or climbing up the professional ladder. Their areas of studies can be seen in Figure 6 (as reported by CIEI, 2020):

Figure 6

UNED's Student Enrollment According to Area of Academic Interest in 2019
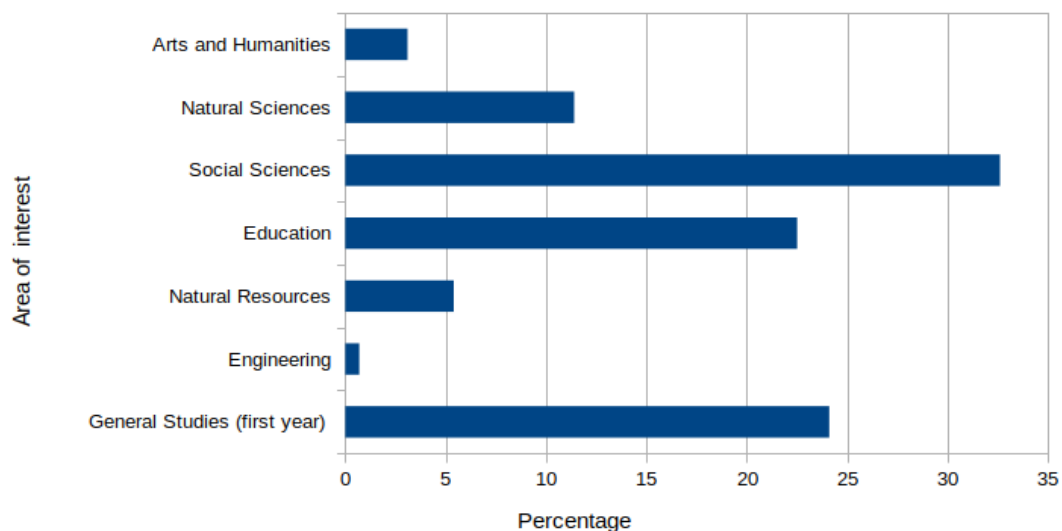
|On the other hand, graduate students can be grouped thus: 11.3% are 20 to 29 years old; 45.4% are between 30 and 39; 29% between 40 and 49; and 14.3% are 50 or older (CIEI, 2020). Graduate students then, belong to a more mature group where a master's degree is regarded as a tool for further progress and diversification, and improving their economic or professional position. Among the main reasons why students had been attracted to UNED as an option for a college degree, they reported the "distance education format", which depending on their circumstances, allows them to work, balance family, and study (72.6%); costs, fees, and scholarships (47.8%), UNED's prestige (38.8%); and having a local university center near their home or workplace (28.2%), as González et al. (2019) found out.

In regards to graduations, 73% of awarded diplomas correspond to undergraduate level (bachelor's degree) with an even distribution among the different Schools and areas (CIEI, 2020). Out of these, 33.8% are awarded by the School of Education, and 16.34% by the School of Social Sciences and Humanities. However, graduate programs show a drop of 45.3% in the number of students who graduated between 2018 and 2019 after an increase of 52.6% from 2017 to 2018 (CIEI, 2020).

Student use of technology

In addition to the technological resources institutionally utilized by UNED and mentioned above, student use of technology should be addressed here as well. In a thorough survey conducted by González et al. (2019) among 2586 students in 2019, the students' "technological profile", resources available to students, and their interaction with them was explored. For example, ownership of electronic devices was described as follows: 95.5% of students who participated in the study reported having a smart phone; 76% own a laptop computer; 22.4% have a desktop computer; 19% own a tablet; and 3.3% report not owning any kind of electronic device.

In the case of the last group, considering that the use of a computer is mandatory in current distance education and e-learning, this is expanded by asking about the place where students have access to a computer: 73.5% use a family or friend's computer; 36.1% one at their university center; 10.8% at municipal computer laboratories or libraries; and 9.6% at their workplace. This underscores the idea that online distance education and e-learning at UNED are

part of the students' everyday life, understanding "e-learning" as the use of electronically-mediated resources for synchronous and asynchronous communication focused on collaborative thinking and learning (Garrison, 2017). Such resources may include Internet-based technologies, mobile, and other devices to support learning and teaching (Conole, 2014).

Regarding access to Internet, 78.3% reported having online access at home, out of which 49.6% have a cable or modem connection, and 20.4% use their mobile phone data plan. Home connection speeds were reported as 3 Mbps for a majority (41.1%), 4-6 Mbps (26.1%), and 7-10 Mbps (17.1%). For mobile phone connection speeds, 55.1% reported 4 Mbps or less; and 16.2%, 4-6 Mbps. This is relevant if the students need to watch or download instructional videos, or are expected to participate in synchronous sessions or conferences. In addition, daily time spent online was reported as 2 hours or less (19.5%); 2-6 hours (40.6%); 6-10 hours (19.2%); and more than 10 hours (16.2%). In other words, students are very active online due to professional, educational, or leisure activities. In relation to frequency of online study-related activities, 46% reported devoting 2-4 days per week; 37%, 5-7 days per week; and 15%, once a week or less. Again, this evidences that online distance learning at UNED demands commitment and constant attention.

When asked about preferred platforms and social media, 81.9% reported using Facebook; 78.8%, YouTube; 78.4%, email; 69.8%, search engines; and 36.2%, Instagram, among others. On the other hand, in order to keep updated about academic news, course assignments and activities, student responses can be seen in Figure 7 (according to González et al., 2019):

Figure 7

Preferred Media and Platforms for Keeping Updated Regarding Academic News, Assignments, and Activities
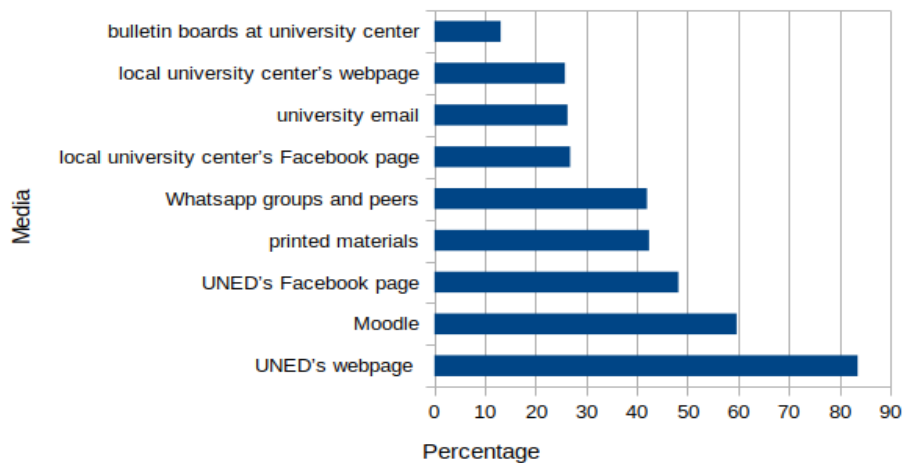
To close this section, we will review the data from González et al. (2019) in regards to online interaction among the surveyed students. For example, only 63.6% interact with their peers, meaning that more than a third of them do not keep communication with their classmates and tackle academic tasks independently. Media, apps, and activities when students interact were reported as WhatsApp groups (81.6%); synchronous or face-to-face sessions (68.4%); Moodle LMS (38.6%); other activities at the local university center (24.9%), and using email (21.6%) among others.

When inquired about interaction with their instructors, 55.9% of students reported communicating with them "occasionally"; 34.8%, "never"; and only 9.4%, "frequently". As the used means of communication, we can mention Moodle LMS (71%); email (63%); during online

or face-to-face sessions (61%); and instant messaging services (18.7%). The report concludes

that there should be a heavier emphasis on social networks like Facebook since it is easy to use

for students, a more intensive use of mobile phones to communicate with students (instant

messaging clients), considering mobile apps and the potential of m-learning, taking advantage of

the university's web page, email, and Moodle, and working on improving interaction with

instructors using the reported ICTs.

Having contextualized current reality of UNED as a distance and online university,

including students' "technological profile" with its strengths and weaknesses, let us now proceed

to describing the Teaching of English major where this research will be implemented.

Teaching of English Program

As mentioned already, the Teaching of English Program for I and II Cycles (primary

school) offers three degrees: "diplomado" or initial certificate for teaching (78 course credits); a

bachelor's degree (additional 56 credits), and a licentiate degree (additional 36 credits and a

thesis). It is important to keep in mind that due to historical and organizational reasons the

Teaching of English Program belongs to the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, and not

to the School of Education. In 2019, the Teaching of English Program graduated 47 new

instructors in the different categories of undergraduate studies ("diplomado", bachelor's degree,

and licentiate degree), as reported by CIEI (2020).

The program's main objective is defined in its web page as: "the training of teachers in I

and II cycles who acquire a complete command of English, so that they may carry out their

functions efficiently in the classroom, where language is taught based on the four macro skills"

(that is, speaking, listening, reading, and writing) (UNED, 2020, our translation). As entry

requirements, a language proficiency exam must be taken, and the following target skills are also

desired: "critical thinking ability, self-regulation, discipline, organization" (UNED, 2020).

More specifically, the program lists skills necessary in order to successfully finish the

program, among others:

- Capable of self-assessing and self-managing their learning

- Willing to work collaboratively

- Willing to work with virtual learning platforms and technological tools

- Critical and constructive

- Promoting the well-being and improvement of society... interested in being an agent

of change

- Able to manage groups and leadership

- Skilled for alternative conflict resolution

These criteria have been cited here since they conform with the tenets of the Community

of Inquiry model, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and collaborative leadership, analyzed in Chapter

2. As such, these skills had to be considered during the data collection and data analysis stages of

this research.

The program syllabus includes courses and topics such as English Grammar, English

Conversation, English Writing, Assessment, Curriculum, Principles of Pedagogy, Reading

Techniques, Learning and Cognition, Fundamentals of Linguistics, Educational Theories,

Education for Peace, Special Educational Needs, Literary Criticism, Applied Linguistics, Research in Teaching, Intercultural Communication, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Technology in English Teaching (according to UNED, 2020).

Furthermore, among the activities students will be engaging in during their major, the university website quotes participating in workshops; participating in collaborative work; developing research and interdisciplinary projects; using information and communication technologies (ICTs) for learning processes (videos, forums, audios); participating in online oral communication activities such as forums, debates, presentations; preparing teaching materials, class plans, assessment materials; carrying out projects that link theory and practice in educational institutions and communities; writing academic and professional texts (essays, reports, field reports); analyzing literary, cultural, and scientific texts (UNED, 2020).

This brief presentation of the Teaching of English Program has provided the necessary elements to have a clear idea of the skills, theoretical and practical concepts, and activities involved in classes, assignments, and assessment, which also draft appropriate criteria considered when collecting and analyzing data for this research, as framed by the three theoretical elements that will interact as our foundation: the Community of Inquiry model, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and collaborative leadership. Let us proceed now to address the state of the problem.

Background

Review of studies that have addressed the problem

As it is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2, the literature review of this dissertation, there have been different studies in recent years that address *partially* the teaching of critical thinking in relation to the three main theoretical foundations described in the research problem section above: Freire's Critical Pedagogy, collaborative leadership, and the CoI model, within EFL teacher training contexts in both industrialized and developing countries. Let us list some of the most relevant studies next.

Following Paul's (2005) conceptualization, critical thinking can be defined as the art of thinking about thinking, which in turn can produce creative thinking. For Franco et al. (2018), critical thinking should be taught overtly in teacher preservice curricula as part of the skills focused on dialogue, decision making, and problem solving. Spaces for such types of "productive" controversy can be found in group discussions ("circles of knowledge"), debates, argumentative essays, and other activities, all of which could take place within constructivist environments such as the Community of Inquiry model.

Regarding EFL, Mpofu and Maphalala (2017) have taken this a step further in the preservice classroom by means of explicit and implicit strategies for teaching critical thinking, such as Socratic questioning, lecture sequencing, and group discussions. In addition, Almulla (2018), in a study with high school students, by following Nosich's (2012) definition of critical

thinking, found that including critical thinking in the curriculum, implementing problem-solving tasks, and using open-ended questions could lead to the development of critical thinking skills.

Related to the potential of Freire's critical pedagogy in EFL, Menachery (2018) established that teachers, as "transformative intellectuals", could by means of discussions, Socratic questioning, and the careful choice of materials that are adapted, foster communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, that in addition to critical pedagogy, we can associate to collaborative leadership, and the CoI model. Furthermore, Menachery suggests that these outcomes could also lead to social transformation and democratic values. On the same line, democratic experiences and analysis of social problems in the classroom can also be related to the development of critical thinking skills, as Uluçınar and Aypay (2018) concluded.

In relation to parallel aspects to critical thinking, such as critical reflection, Yang (2009) discusses the use of blogs to promote critical reflection in a community of practice for future EFL teachers. According to the researcher, the interaction between teacher-students and instructors developed into a community of inquiry with an exchange of feedback that raised awareness about their learning experience. Lundgren and Poell (2009) examined 12 research studies that operationalized and assessed Mezirow's (1991) definition of critical reflection. For Lundgren and Poell, the main obstacle detected was the lack of an overarching framework to operationalize critical reflection. This can be interpreted as a limitation to research and its projection on to critical practice research. Limitations for our research project are discussed in Chapter 6.

Moore (2019) looked at criticality and self-reflection in teacher training programs. Thus, she suggests that reflective practice should include: looking beyond the preservice classroom, on to professional practice as a life-long experience for teachers, in order to develop a democratic concept of the learning experience, a concept akin to both collaborative leadership and Freirean critical pedagogy (2005a). Causarano (2015) elaborated on reflective approaches to teacher training. Although specifically related to literacy teachers, Causarano ponders the importance of ethical responsibility for literacy teachers to become agents for a democratic process that will engage students in the years to come. This resembles what Freire conceptualized as problem-posing education as a step towards social change. Also related to ethical responsibilities for preservice teachers, Marín et al. (2020) analyzed problems of social media and data privacy. This is a new realm of ethics that is gaining relevance day by day as distance education includes technological literacy and other skills that should be taught as part of the curricula, in particular issues related to tracking, protection of personal information and media, prevention of scams, and cyber-harassment among others.

Deficiencies in the studies

The studies summarized above may be interpreted as addressing only one or two of the three theoretical elements that frame this study: Freire's Critical Pedagogy, the CoI model, and collaborative leadership as pertaining to EFL teacher training. In other words, to the awareness of this researcher, the research problem posed here has only been partially explored and in the best of cases, in a fragmentary way.

This implies that some of the findings and conclusions of the reviewed studies were taken into consideration for purposes of reference, but did not provide key information as to what and how to research in this dissertation. In other words, the implications and interactions of the three theoretical spheres, as presented on Figure 8 further below, had to be examined in detail in an original research. As a result, this justified not only the research problem for this dissertation, but as it is discussed in Chapter 3, this also supported the methods to be used for collecting data, data analysis, and the conclusions drawn.

Even if there were a study that encompassed the three theoretical elements (unknown by the time of writing this report), the particular characteristics of distance education in Costa Rica, and specifically within the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at UNED, as uncharted territory in its own native context, offered a valuable environment for advancing knowledge in the fields of the CoI model, collaborative leadership, and Freire's Critical Pedagogy as related to EFL preservice teacher education in a Latin American country.

In this respect, it is worth adding that models like the Community of Inquiry, established for nearly two decades now, in spite of having been extensively researched upon, tested and reviewed (Kineshanko, 2016), and in some cases refuted (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009) are by no means complete or finished models. As Garrison (2016) suggests, the model may be even ready to be on its way to becoming a theory rather than a model. The addition of further findings and within particular contexts (EFL in a developing nation, for example) announce new possibilities and may even enrich the model by showing its versatility, adaptability, and reliability as a

theoretical construct full of affordances for teaching and learning in the 21st century. Discussion or results is presented in Chapter 5, and Conclusions, in Chapter 6.

Now, let us refer to the significance of this study for the delimited context set as part of this dissertation.

Significance of the study for EFL teacher training and distance education

This dissertation intended add new dimensions to the scholarly literature related to CoI in preservice teacher training programs in a developing country. In contrast to industrialized countries like Canada, where the CoI model was conceived, in a developing nation, particular social and economic conditions, such as short budgets, limited access to ICT's, and cultural traits inherited as part of the dominant discourse (as Freire sees it, in terms of unequal power relations originating from colonialism and capitalism) dictated specific conditions to be identified and addressed in the study.

In addition, the research shed new light on how Freire's Critical Pedagogy and CoI can interact in EFL preservice teacher education. Also, in terms of critical pedagogy, the study of the teaching and learning (both overt and covert) of liberating pedagogy extended existing literature regarding how Freire's Critical Pedagogy could be put into practice in the contexts of distance education. Finally, collaborative leadership research was also expanded to new grounds since it was explored to enrich critical thinking, dialogue, and democratic deliberation. In a constructivist context such as a Community of Inquiry, leadership and collaboration are expected and necessary. In Garrison's terms (2016), collaborative leadership translates into "leading

collaboratively", that is, collaborative thinking put into practice. Here, collaborative thinking overlaps with Freire's concepts of problem posing in general, and as part of the interaction between teachers and learners.

Having considered all this academic potential, my study can provide valuable input to decision makers, by giving them more elements to judge the success and failure of policy performance compared to the current practice of official information provided in governmental reports, for example. In terms of UNED (and other public universities in Costa Rica), some of the findings could be considered, or purposely put to test as to how to improve preservice teacher education, critical thinking skills, and Community of Inquiry environments in order to enhance learning objectives, reach present goals, and set new objectives for general and specific learning communities and programs. The value and applicability of the information gathered and analyzed in this project, however, will depend on the political will of decision makers and the resources available to UNED and the EFL teaching major.

Also, decision makers in other Latin American and developing countries may draw from this study as little or as much as they need: criteria for setting goals within a CoI, practices that can be successful for online preservice teacher training, and approaches to collaborative leadership building, among others. Hopefully, this study will also contribute to a clearer view on how to promote democratic values, deliberative dialogue, collaborative associations, and leadership geared towards justice and freedom.

Outcome

One of the outcomes expected in this project was establishing the way that the three theoretical elements overlap reach out in convergent or divergent directions. Thus, it is important to consider that preservice EFL teachers who find their own voice during their training stage (in Freire's terms), in many cases (if not all) start developing their own professional, critical voice even before they start working in the field. A desirable outcome of their learning process and of this very research, was probing into the skills that teacher students acquire and which can bloom into habits as professionals in education. These skills and attitudes, in turn, might be learned by their own students, creating a virtuous cycle of critical thinking, social learning (in a Community of Inquiry), and collaborative leadership aimed at positive social change. As Freire (2005a) sees it, learners would start shaping their own reality.

In this manner, such skills and values, considered part of their teaching practice (reflective practice, as described in Chapter 2), represent key elements in the process of developing critical thinking in professional practice. They could be regarded as natural, perhaps inevitable outcomes of their learning process. Nevertheless, due to the complex implications of including them here, they fell outside the scope of this research and should be followed up in a future project. In brief, the possibilities of exploring collaborative leadership as critically thinking professionals related not only to present but to coming generations of teachers and students as agents of social change. In other words, the effects of teaching and learning of critical thinking skills and values should lead to the creation of responsible citizens who are able to read their reality, question it, and act in order to change it if required.

Statement of Problem

My researched focused on how in developing regions like Latin America, and specifically in the case of Costa Rica, liberating pedagogical practices, when complemented with constructivist approaches in the distance education classroom, exhibited rich affordances worth exploring. For example, there were possibilities of critical thinking as a series of skills that could be taught and learned in the classroom. The presence of critical thinking was studied within the curriculum, class activities, or class delivery when mentors implemented their class or academic projects. It was expected that such activities and interactions drew from the CoI as a constructivist approach, as well as collaborative leadership, and in particular, Freire's Critical Pedagogy.

This led us to ponder what aspects of (Freire's) Critical Pedagogy (if any) were taught and learned in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom for preservice teachers. Was teacher training including elements of liberating pedagogy and democratic debate? Could critical thinking, seen as debate, dialogue, and Freire's problematization become useful in the formation stages of future EFL teachers? To what degree did preservice English teachers, learning the trade and the language itself in online or blended environments acquire the skills to eventually develop a critical approach to the curriculum they learn, and that which they would have to teach when they graduated? These were questions that we found worth examining.

Thus, constructs such as critical thinking, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and collaborative leadership within the Community of Inquiry framework are all elements that interrelated in this case study and defined the research problem: the need for teaching and learning critical thinking

skills, as part of an environment based on Freire's Critical Pedagogy and collaborative leadership in preservice EFL teacher Communities of Inquiry in a public distance education university in Costa Rica. This is depicted in Figure 8:

Figure 8

Proposed Theoretical Model Showing Interaction of Three Main Elements (Freire's Critical Pedagogy, Community of Inquiry Model, and Collaborative Leadership) in a Distance EFL Teacher Training Classroom
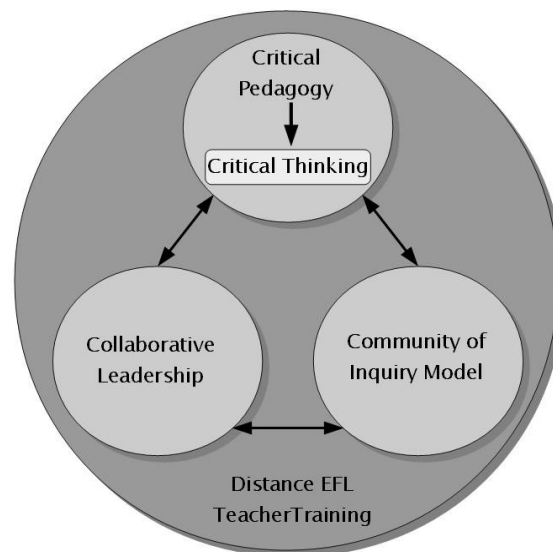
To summarize, Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a), the CoI model, and collaborative leadership functioned as the main theoretical foundations for this study within a distance education program for EFL preservice teachers. For this purpose, Freire's pedagogy was

instrumentalized as critical thinking skills taught in the classroom. In addition, Freire's Critical

Pedagogy and critical thinking skills were assessed in the context of a Community of Inquiry for

EFL preservice teachers, as framed within the CoI model proposed by Garrison et al. (2000), and

later enriched by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012). Collaborative leadership was mainly

addressed in the form of "leading collaboratively", as discussed by Garrison (2016).

Purpose

Up to this point, this was my stated goal, while anticipating that research questions were

prone to vary during the actual research process, and that unexpected obstacles in order to meet

the objectives could be found along with undesirable conclusions, even falling short of what

might have been originally desired. Then, the purpose of this case study was exploring the

teaching and learning of critical thinking skills within the distance environment as framed by the

Community of Inquiry model, from the perspective of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a) along

with collaborative leadership (Garrison, 2016), for EFL preservice teachers at a public university

in Costa Rica. At this initial stage of the research, the relation between CoI, collaborative

leadership, and Freire's pedagogy was defined in a general manner as the overt and covert

teaching and learning of critical thinking skills within a distance EFL preservice teacher training

program.

To be able to determine this, my dissertation engaged in video interviews with

participants, the observation of synchronic sessions, and an analysis of the course outline and

papers written by the students, including that of the answers to online questionnaires submitted

by participants in order to detect further elements that reflected the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills from a Freirean perspective. Then, according to findings and discussion of results, conclusions were drawn and the theoretical model proposed was adjusted, revamping it and offering a new model and an original theoretical focus for the future. As a final step, a series of suggestions (solutions to problems found) was put forward in collaboration with participants aiming at the enhancement of the curriculum and class delivery to integrate critical thinking skills in the EFL teacher training program.

Research Questions

My research questions, based on Freire's Critical Pedagogy, the CoI framework, and collaborative leadership were the following:

Overarching question

To what extent are critical thinking skills (as understood by Freire, 2005a) taught and learned in the distance EFL preservice teacher distance education classroom?

Subquestions

- How is critical thinking incorporated into the syllabus?

- How is critical thinking incorporated into class activities?

- How is critical thinking assessed?

- To what extent is this preservice teacher distance classroom a Community of Inquiry?

- How does this CoI environment contribute to the teaching of critical thinking?

- How does collaborative leadership (as understood by Garrison, 2016) enrich this process of learning?

- What is the teachers' and students' attitude towards learning and teaching English? Should English be considered an "imperialistic" language? What is the role of EFL in the 21st century?

- How do participants describe their social environment?

- How do participants see themselves, as learners, classmates, human beings?

- How is the students' interaction with the instructor and the institution?

- What other social elements are influential to their social learning?

- What problems or contradictions do they perceive as related to the development of critical thinking in their teacher training program? What's causing them?

- According to the participants, how could these problems be solved in order to transform their reality as student-teachers and future teachers?

- What recommendations can participants and researcher design together in order to put into practice the solutions proposed, so as to transform their learning reality into a democratic and liberating experience as conceptualized by Freire?

Case Study Methods: Single-Case Study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Critical Case Study (CCS)

For this research, the single-case study method was used for data collection and analysis, and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was applied for data analysis only (see below).

The case study method was selected because of the rich characteristics of case studies, such as their emphasis on particularization and uniqueness (Stake, 1995). The need to know the case well, delve deep into the participants' opinions and actions, and the flexible nature of case studies turned out to be quite convenient because of time constraints, restrictions of informants to speak in person, the access to artifacts or documents, or limitations to the degree of rapport and the type of information provided. This allowed flexibility as well in regards to the depth and width of the data collected, level of anonymity (depending on the need to protect my informants' identities), time allotted for the application of each instrument, and analysis of the information which included member checking, and discussion of the results with them for clarification and verification (in terms of meaning and interpretation whenever it was necessary).

Therefore, following Yin (2018), I decided on the single case study. Case studies allow the possibility of rich descriptions, and qualitative approaches based on interpretation by means of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Case Study (CSS) method. As already explained, such description and interpretation looked through three lenses to observe the participants' reality: Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a), the Community of Inquiry model, and collaborative leadership, as defined by Garrison (2016) in terms of "leading collaboratively".

Regarding Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it helped deepen the case study analysis based on Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (2005a). Discourse is described by Cohen et al (2011) as meanings in texts that create and influence social behavior, including the exercise of power relations by means of conversation and texts. Thus, since Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a) pays attention to power relations between learners and students, CDA allowed a

narrative analysis (as prescribed by case study) where a Freirean perspective was utilized to look at problems and finding solutions by means of democratic debate, collaborative work, and critical thinking as enabling tools for social change. Such focus on the dialogical expressions of teaching and learning was complemented by collaborative leadership (Garrison's "leading collaboratively", 2016) and the Community of Inquiry model.

Furthermore, I was interested in applying the Critical Case Study method (CCS), as proposed by Barlett and Vavrus (2017), since it was compatible with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in qualitative research. As they state, "context" is not static but unfolding, iterative, and process-oriented. In addition, CCS is a flexible method that adapts according to research goals, the researcher's interests and skills, and the resources available (Barlett & Vavrus, 2017). As I see it now, flexibility was a key element in a case study, granting opportunities to adapt my research questions along the way. This will be addressed further in Chapter 3.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

Among the limitations to this study, data analysis should be addressed first. The data collected, as in the case of any qualitative case study, had to be analyzed by the creation of codes and categories that responded to an epistemological approach based on critical analysis, grounded on Freire's Critical Pedagogy, along with the Community of Inquiry model, and collaborative leadership.

Self-reporting, as implemented in the participants' surveys, did in fact reflect their own values and worldviews, which I must admit as part of my research bias, was comprehended, measured, or even interpreted as objectively as possible. As a result of using instruments that permitted for the participants to convey their own view of their situation, such instruments met the criteria set by Freire's pedagogy in terms of assisting participants (teacher mentors, teacher students, and administrative staff) to express their own voice, pinpoint the problems to be solved, and put forward their own solutions. As it will be discussed below, this implied that the researcher was required to keep an open and receptive mind, in order to record views or perspectives not originally considered (views on technology and hierarchy, for example).

Moreover, since a purposeful sample was followed, this facilitated the collection and processing of information, but as it is evident in such samples, it did not necessarily reflect the universe of the institution's larger population: such sampling may reflect the participants' bias, views, values, and emotions, but is not generalizable to the whole teacher training program or the university itself. It reflected the participants' perspectives during the actual time of data collection and observation, as such perspectives may evolve later as preservice teachers, for example, become in-service teachers or as teachers gain more professional experience.

A final aspect to be considered here were time constraints. Due to the limitations of time allotted for the process of data collection, analysis of results and writing up of the dissertation as I remained working half time in my academic job, data collection had to be reduced to one term the most (less than 16 weeks). This facilitated the later process of coding, analysis, and writing.

Delimitations

Literature review was restricted to the topics that were the most relevantly connected with critical thinking, such as critical theory, critical pedagogy, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, critical practice, critical reflection in EFL, metacognition, Community of Inquiry model, and collaborative leadership. Other topics, such as democratic leadership or power relations in the classroom, were left out in order to narrow down the focus of the study as categories in themselves. Furthermore, as there was little gender variety among the participant population, gender was not considered a critical issue for the problem studied. However, tangential issues were weighed with an open mind by the researcher and faithfully conveyed whenever they were reported by participants.

The research population was chosen among preservice teachers studying the English Teaching Licentiate Program at UNED only, along with their course instructor and two academic authorities within the major (representing administrative staff). Although students from other universities may have enriched the research, the overwhelming reasons for this restriction were the convenience of working in my own university, as well as contractual commitments as to where to develop my study as part of my university's grant. Nevertheless, the door has been opened already for potential new research within other universities and teacher training programs.

As mentioned above, case study as qualitative research was developed to faithfully record and discuss the participants' circumstances as required by Freire's Critical Pedagogy, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Critical Case Study. However, some quantitative indicators

were considered only for purposes of triangulation and depth of the qualitative data collected and analysis.

Definition of Terms

Collaborative leadership: dynamic practice in the classroom where teachers and students construct knowledge together and exchange roles as both teachers and learners.

Community of Inquiry (CoI): model for constructivist education proposed by Garrison et al., (2001) and later extended by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012), which involves a teaching, a cognitive, a social, and an emotional presence or sphere of learning.

Critical thinking: set of skills aimed at questioning the dominant discourse within (and without) the classroom.

Critical pedagogy: critical approach to teaching and learning, based on Freire's ideas among others, that is, the social construction of knowledge, democratic dialogue, and problematization of education and power relations.

Distance education: umbrella term that includes online education, blended learning, and traditional (pre-Internet) distance education methods.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): field of teaching for speakers of other languages, where English is taught within a non-English speaking culture or environment.

Neoliberalism: group of economic and political tenets that preach free market, privatization, business-like efficiency in public services, and the increasing precarity of jobs and changes in labor laws, implemented since the 1980's throughout the world.

Teacher training: for this research, university education and programs for preservice teachers.

Summary

Neoliberal policies have affected higher education in the last four decades, as education has been transformed into a commodity rather than a human right to economic and social progress and social mobility. Thus, skills like critical thinking fall into a category of "undesirable" skills as they may not be included in curriculum, text books, and class activities, or if they are, they might be only included to pay lip service, considering they may contradict or resist some of the Neoliberal tendencies to undermine social agency and independent thinking in universities. Challenges remain in order to further democratize higher education, stop Neoliberal counter-reforms, and integrate further the three spheres of university influence on society and economy: teaching, research, and extension. Historically, public universities in Costa Rica have moved in that direction and have achieved important landmarks in democratization and social indicators. However, there is still much work to be done. New challenges lie ahead, like innovation, ideologization, and corporate control of education. Critical thinking, then, becomes one of the most important tools and weapons teachers, students, and society as a whole can wield in favor of democratic practices, justice, freedom, positive social change, and strengthening of public higher education.

UNED has been a trailblazing distance university in Latin America and Costa Rica, and offers quality education to rural and urban communities and social groups who otherwise would not have been able to obtain a higher education degree. Its projection and influence across Costa

Rica have been evidenced through time. Such a valuable educational project should be expanded further. New ICTs allow for new possibilities that should be seized as well. As the respected Costa Rican academic Prof. Carlos Monge-Alfaro (1978) conceptualized it, what is necessary for the future of Costa Rica is a university which works as a creator of knowledge, philosophical thought, and scientific research, that is, adaptable to our times: a higher education that is open, independent, dynamic, critical, flexible, and which includes a national perspective on the world. All of these concepts rhyme with critical thinking in many ways.

In the specific context of EFL teacher training, critical thinking, taken as an environment where deliberative dialogue, democratic power relations, and problem solving develop, has been only partially analyzed by previous literature. Furthermore, the application of Freire's Critical Pedagogy within a context of collaborative leadership may represent a valuable extension of the Community of Inquiry model, as the rich affordances of constructivist approaches to learning may flourish in order to foster critical thinking in EFL teacher training programs in Costa Rica.

In order to achieve the research goals of exploring to what extent critical thinking is taught and learned in distance EFL preservice teacher classrooms at UNED's Teaching of English major, a single case study is presented here, which gave the opportunity for qualitative exploration and data collection methods as well as Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Case Study interpretation of the results using Freirean pedagogy. As an important delimitation, although critical thinking skills and attitudes may be acquired by preservice teachers and may even be internalized as a set of habits with the implications of transforming society as sustained

by Freire, such follow-up falls out of the scope of the present project, unlocking new directions

for future research.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Introduction

Since the second half of the twentieth century, critical pedagogies originating in Latin America have been applied at different moments, and have also undergone a constant evolution towards a more open and flexible educational praxis. Initially nurtured from Marxist theories, enriched by Catholic Liberation Theory approaches, constructivism, and more recently, incorporating elements of distance education and computer-mediated communication (CMC), critical pedagogies have gained relevance after the end of the Cold War and later after the coming of Neoliberal policies and counter-reforms throughout the world.

Starting from the specific to the general, and from the micro to the macro levels, we will ponder how critical pedagogy approaches can be implemented in the distance education preservice teacher language classroom. From here, other elements will be integrated. For example, how does the Community of Inquiry framework function as a setting for studying the role of the teacher and students as collaborative leaders in order to develop critical thinking? Thus, taking into consideration these three elements, in this literature review we will try to answer the following general question: To what extent can critical thinking skills (as understood by Freire, 2005a) be taught and learned in the distance EFL preservice teacher distance education?

Rationale

First, let us consider if the CoI model is able to support and train for critical thinking and collaborative leadership. As it will be elaborated below in this chapter, this is a relevant topic since CoI as a constructivist model includes affordances that can foster critical thinking, by drawing from critical pedagogy and collaborative leadership. Such critical thinking within CoI could, in addition, promote in future teachers an interest for transforming society. But what if the CoI model does not cater for such support and training for both critical thinking and collaborative leadership? In such case, we would be finding new boundaries to the CoI model, which would also enrich the field of critical study on the CoI framework as a "nascent educational theory" (Garrison, 2017, p.32).

As a caveat, however, while the promotion of social change might result from the interaction between critical thinking and Freire's critical pedagogy within the setting of a Community of Inquiry, social change will be not contemplated in this research project. Therefore, before we proceed on to the literature review, some founding assumptions and background will be addressed. To discern how preservice English teachers can develop critical thinking competencies, we will also analyze metacognition, critical reflection, and critical practice as correlated elements. Engaging student teachers is of key importance as they will act as future leaders in a more democratic society where the potential for social transformation for a just society may flourish. This aspiration towards transformation implies political commitment

and critical positioning in the shape of critical awareness of social problems, what Freire worded as the educator's duty of not being neutral (2005a).

Such initial assumptions will inevitably divert our gaze towards the world beyond the classroom: To what degree can these elements be used as lenses in order to conceptualize and try out within the distance education classroom a trial version of the democratic society to be expected? The classroom environment is a micro society that will prepare students as leaders and creators of leaders when they acquire skills to be applied in the classroom itself and eventually, in the world outside. Although some elements of such an ideal "democratic society" might be observed during this research as modeled inside the micro world of the distance education classroom, such implications transcend the scope of this dissertation and should be contemplated in future research.

Scope of this Paper

Having established the initial assumptions, the integration of these three elements, that is, the Community of Inquiry model, critical pedagogy, and collaborative leadership plays a role that deserves to be studied as the foundations of critical thinking and collaboration inside the distance teacher education classroom. Therefore, this review will attempt to find out to what level this is all possible within the specific context of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) preservice teacher distance education classroom.

As a Latin American teacher and researcher, I have the moral responsibility to acknowledge my own cultural and historical heritage. Thus, the influence of contemporary

education thinkers cannot be denied as it has been exerting its influence for several decades

inside and outside Latin America, with current developments. One of the most relevant theorists

of Latin American pedagogy is Paulo Freire, who developed his theories incorporating elements

like Marxist theory, Liberation Theory approaches, and a deep knowledge of the Latin American

reality.

For the purposes of this paper, let us clarify, critical pedagogy will be limited basically

to Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogy, originally presented in his book "Pedagogy of the

Oppressed" (1968) and later works. In addition to Freire's original concepts, more recent

contributions by some contemporary theorists and educators will be considered as well. In order

to have a clearer view of the elements and implications of Freire's critical pedagogy in modern

distance education, other related elements like critical practice, critical thinking, metacognition,

critical reflection, the Community of Inquiry framework, and collaborative leadership will be

explained in order to support our thesis that Freire's pedagogy, the Community of Inquiry

framework, and collaborative leadership can all converge within the EFL distance education

preservice teacher classroom in order to prepare teachers as critical collaborative leaders and role

models for a free and democratic society in the 21st century.

Critical Theory

As the first element of this theoretical framework, it is pertinent to discuss critical theory

as part of the setting necessary to understand where Freire's critical pedagogy originated. Thus, it

will be easier to piece together critical theory with the following elements in order to answer the

proposed research questions. According to Allman (2009), as a by-product of Marxism, critical theory was developed by the Institute for Social Research (also known as the Frankfurt School) during the twentieth century and it had influence on Paulo Freire's views as well. The brief presentation below draws from Giroux's (2009) summary of the history and evolution of critical pedagogy.

To start, let us look at the historical context that originated critical theory. The so-called Frankfurt School was founded in Germany in the 1920's, and in 1930 Max Horkheimer assumed its directorship. Being an institute for social and political analysis rooted in Marxism and composed of Jewish theorists and social scientists in its majority, it fell from grace during the National Socialist regime, and thus, the institute moved to New York, at Columbia University. Once the war was over, the school moved back to Frankfurt in 1953.

Regarding its ideological origin, according to Giroux (2009), the main objective of the institute was to shed light on new ways of social inquiry that could distinguish between what existed and should exist in society. This means that the exploration carried out by the Frankfurt School during several decades spanned all spheres of contemporary Western culture, taking into consideration the context of the Cold War, the social and cultural revolutions of the sixties in the United States, France, and Mexico, as well as political phenomena like the Cuban Revolution and the Space Race. Thus, the scope of the School was encyclopedic in its ambition to not only understand modern culture better, but also to contribute to the development of social theory and the transformation of social reality from a Marxist perspective focused on culture, as Gramsci

proposed in his works (Laje, 2022; Rodrigo-Iturralde, 2021). Curiously enough, thinkers of the School like Reich and Marcuse also explored the possibilities of sexual revolution for political aims (Muñoz-Iturrieta, 2021). In short, two key aspects can be found in both Marxist philosophy and Freire's critical pedagogy: transformation of society and revolutionary education. However, it is important to remind the reader of the emphasis that Freire puts on education as "the practice of liberty" (2005b) and education for emancipation (2005a).

Now, some useful terms and tenets of critical pedagogy will be defined, in addition to their function within critical theory as it pertains to education. First, the members of the Frankfurt School based their work on the issues of domination produced by ideological control in the West, focusing on a critique of positivist rationalism "*and its technocratic view of science* [which] *represented a threat to the notion of subjectivity and critical thinking*" (Giroux, 2009, p.32, emphasis in the original).

As Giroux summarizes, such limitations hidden in positivism became a "fetishism of facts", where subjectivity became a "truth" and thus, an "objective" fact. Moreover, he claims, positivism proved to be unable (or unwilling) to question and analyze itself, in particular, as the result of historical and social conditions, claiming falsely to be "above history". This characteristic, as it will be further elaborated below, is also common to Neoliberalism in the present, as both positivism and Neoliberalism "in the guise of neutrality, scientific knowledge and all theory became rational on the grounds of whether or not they are efficient, economic, or correct" (Giroux, 2009, p.33). To round it off, such a belief in value neutrality expressed itself in

a political conservatism which, consciously or unconsciously, played along with the status quo of society (Giroux, 2009). This means that people participate in this process of social reproduction sometimes even against their own will, as Freire points out in his critical pedagogy. In other words, they become unwilling instruments of their own unfair situation. This process of the oppressed adopting the colonial or dominant culture can also take place when one culture invades or tries to submit another (Fanon, 2016).

Another important element is theory. For the members of the Frankfurt School, theory "must acknowledge the value-laden interests it represents" (Giroux, 2009, p.33) as meta-theory. In other words, theory should be able to self-criticize. This could overcome the myopia of positivism since "methodological correctness" does not equal seizing the truth of a situation (Giroux, 2009). In contrast, dialectical thought, as conceived by critical theorists following Hegel and Marx, is a tool used to discover the incompleteness in the apparently complete, focusing on imperfections and potentialities of reality (Held, 1980 in Giroux, 2009). As embedded in Freire's critical pedagogy, dialectical thought allows to perceive the contradictions within society as the result of a historical process, but also the potentiality for changes as a result of human agency: "dialectical thought argues that there is a link between knowledge, power, and domination [therefore] some knowledge is false, and the ultimate purpose of critique should be critical thinking in the interest of social change" (Giroux, 2009, p.34). While the epistemological nature of knowledge is not part of this project, dialectical thought as a philosophical foundation for Freire's critical pedagogy will be observed when it surfaces in classroom activities that promote critical thinking.

Both theory and dialectical thought as theory can be used to lead the way to a new society without injustice. Critical theory articulates the aspirations of many towards social transformation, by providing the theoretical (and practical) tools to achieve it. This is synthesized by Giroux (2009) when he points out that critical theory encapsulates a transcendent potential for human freedom by taking sides "in the interest of struggling for a better world" (p.35). As stated in the rationale above, this is a mostly desirable outcome of implementing the model proposed in this research, but its actual study rests beyond the scope of this paper.

On the other hand, experience and empirical studies when seen within a dialectical approach, cannot substitute critical reflection. In other words, the point of departure is the observation set within a theoretical framework that at the same time acknowledges the limitations of such framework (Giroux, 2009). Once again, theory must be a meta-theory that is self-critical. Theory can only help understand experience, under the risk of biasing the observer's point of view, even when it is used for the purposes of social transformation. Therefore, as a post-positivist political epistemological and ontological practice, there should be no confusion regarding the limitations of theory: an observation is subjective, all approaches take a stand, and even a good cause could be put to question, no matter how just it might appear.

In relation to the uses of theory and experience as instruments and input for organized learning and teaching, Giroux warns about their inherent limitations. Their value is not intrinsic, but dictated by the social context of human agency. This means that neither theory nor experience are deterministic and "given". Quite the opposite, they are constantly constructed

within the learning community. That is, their combination in the learning context provides the affordances that make critical thinking possible in the classroom as a mutual exchange between teachers and learners, who in the context of the Community of Inquiry may switch roles when all participants both teach and learn together:

> [The real value of theory] lies in its ability to establish possibilities for reflexive thought and practice on the part of those who use it; in the case of teachers, it becomes invaluable as an instrument of critique and understanding. As a mode of critique and analysis, theory functions as a set of tools inextricably affected by the context in which it is brought to bear, but it is never reducible to that context. It has its own distance and purpose, its own element of practice. The crucial element in both its production and use is not the structure at which it is aimed, but the human agents who use it to give meaning to their lives. (Giroux, 2009, p.36)

In this sense, let us point out that theory can be instrumentalized for political purposes by those who yield it. It could, as a result, be applied for improving society aspiring for further justice. In contrast, it could also be put to work in order to prune freedom and reduce human agency, free thought, and free speech. Being aware of this possibility, i.e., assuming a critical stance about critical theory itself should raise awareness towards the true value of education as a practice for freedom rather than a system of unreflective indoctrination and blind compliance.

Related to reflexive thinking, the use of theory described by Giroux can be linked to deliberative dialogue. Although there are different ways of participating in deliberative dialogue,

the main goal seeks to share points of view and reach a consensus, or at a minimum, to end up with an informed opinion about the subject. According to Guzmán (1999), deliberative dialogue may be practical for public opinion research, public hearings and meetings, and more pertinent to educational contexts, like debates within a study circle. Study circles could be implemented by teachers in a CoI context in synchronous or asynchronous communication. In turn, deliberative dialogue may be extended to education policy makers and members of the community, who along with teachers and students, can "all benefit when they understand each other and share a common vision" (Guzmán, 1999, par. 3).

In addition, as Harriger (2014) established, deliberative dialogue can help college students develop democratic dispositions, based on civic identities. Such disposition requires more than cognitive skills or overt teaching, as it also demands "practice and engagement with others" (p.56). This implies that in a CoI environment, teachers should provide enough opportunities for deliberative dialogue in order to offer students practice to develop their own democratic dispositions and identities as part of a learning community.

Therefore, from the perspective of critical theory, human agency can function as an enabling tool within the Community of Inquiry classroom (be it brick-and-mortar or digital): first, education is conceptualized as a constructivist process where ideas and information are exchanged and constantly elaborated (cognitive presence) by the social and affective interaction of participants towards a common goal (social and emotional presences). Second, learning takes place in collaborative fashion (teaching presence) by means of a constant flow of views and

opinions, theory and experience, weighed in their limitations and possibilities. As a result, education becomes a process of critical thought. Once again, this is not necessarily a finished product: critical thinking is an iterative process of construction and transformation, as critical pedagogy will illustrate.

Once critical theory has been introduced, let us look a little deeper in terms of how it has developed in the recent history of Latin America as pedagogical theory. For this purpose, Freire's critical pedagogy (FCP) will be addressed next as an instrument for social transformation.

Critical Pedagogy

As a philosophical and political product, critical pedagogy in Latin America responds to a series of needs reflecting a historical condition of inequality. Besides, it incorporates the aspiration to the definition of the "Latin American We" as Roig (2004) called it. Thus, for Cuevas-Molina and Mora-Ramírez (2019), critical pedagogy in Latin America presents four main characteristics in its search for a Latin American identity:

- It strives to create a critical attitude towards the dominant discourse, in order to identify the factual interests and needs of particular social groups.

- It defines itself as "liberating", aimed at forming human beings aware of their own nature and limitations in order to achieve self-realization in all fields.

- It acknowledges the "way of thinking-praxis-thinking" as the best possible to develop criteria of truth. This can also be called "theory-practice-theory".

- It sees itself as part of a wider process, not only limited to education or pedagogy, but focused on the need to "transform the world". This is achieved by inserting pedagogical practices into global sociopolitical practices, where education becomes an instrument for social change.

The authors add a caveat: these traits are not always evident or generalized within a particular society, as each historical moment will offer different potentialities and limitations. In other words, some of the traits listed above will be present and absent in different moments and places, as the history of Latin America cannot be considered "linear". There have always been reforms and counter-reforms; steps forward in the march towards equality and justice, as well as temporary drawbacks like those witnessed during military dictatorships. Some examples of pendular political tendencies may be found in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil among other countries during the last century.

Critical pedagogy in Latin America, in particular Freire's liberating pedagogy, shows some of these aspects in various contexts, as seen in the Freirean pedagogical practices in historical and political processes in Chile, Brazil, and Cuba in the 1960's, and Nicaragua in the 1980's (Romain, 2006). Kaufman's critical contemplative pedagogy (2017), although offering attractive alternatives based on Freire's views, falls outside the scope of this paper. For the time being, Freire's liberating pedagogy will be discussed.

Paulo Freire's Liberating Pedagogy

Drawing from Freire's opus *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), pedagogy as a liberating and transforming practice stems directly form Marxism (Allman, 2009). According to her, it is necessary to become familiar with Marxist theory in order to understand and grasp the true depth of Freire's teachings. Some of Allman's main points when reading Freire are synthesized next.

When Freire examines the troubled Latin American socioeconomic context (tragically enough, very similar to the rest of the developing world and increasingly so for a considerable percentage of people in industrialized countries, too), social and economic inequality engenders political and ideological oppression. As a historical result of the Spanish conquest and colonialism, inequality and injustice have been part of Latin American reality since the XVI century. Although this may sound far-fetched, political reforms have been very slow, painful, and in most cases, partial. That is, they have historically benefited only the rich or dominant classes, and later, middle classes, while leaving other groups such as indigenous peoples, mulattoes, and peasants in backward conditions.

Such heritage of injustice, be it economic (as poverty), social (as lack of access to health services and education, for example), or political (neglect, torture and disappearances during the military regimes in Latin America in the sixties and seventies, for example) has begotten a society and a social system where dehumanization in the shape of inequality, injustice, corruption, violence, impunity, poverty, drug traffic and drug addiction, prostitution, and other social cancers seems to reproduce indefinitely. According to this Freirean view of history,

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society may be divided into two main categories: the oppressors (Marx's bourgeoisie) and the oppressed (Marx's working class). In contemporary late-Capitalism terms, both classes are equivalent to the rich and the poor.

Therefore, for Freire, the role of pedagogy and teachers is to humanize society by amending the dehumanization engendered as the fruit of such historical process. In their role of active agents of society, committed teachers will assist the those at a disadvantage in their own process of liberation. This is described in a very intense way:

> [This is] a struggle that is only meaningful when the oppressed, in their search for recovering their humanity, which becomes a way of creating it, do not feel idealistically oppressors of their own oppressors, neither they become, in fact, their oppressors' oppressors, but restorers of both groups' humanity. There lies the great humanist and historical task of the oppressed: liberating themselves and their oppressors. (Freire, 2000, p.33)

Following such point of view, teachers should become leaders for change. Their function is not "instructing" or "educating" students but helping them find their own voice. Such process of finding one's voice is in itself liberating. This happens in opposition to standardized Western education. In other words, this "old" education is what Freire calls "banking pedagogy": teachers, as repositories of knowledge, transmit it to their students who play the role of deposits of information. In turn, knowledge should be understood here as finite, complete. Knowledge is, in this banking model, the ruling class's patrimony. As such, it contains ideology that reproduces

social inequality and dehumanization. The mere exercise of transmission of knowledge from the teacher's to the student's mind ought to be understood as an ideological practice that is exclusive and elitist since only a chosen few are really lucky enough to receive such knowledge.

On the other hand, liberating pedagogy is conceived as a means to an end: teachers act as agents who help students become aware of their own problems, conscious of their oppression, and the dehumanization historically found within the social order. Once learners have "woken up" as a result of the development of critical thinking and critical approaches (the instrumentalization of the strategies and tools the teacher helped them acquire), and thus, once they have found their own voice, students and society can start constructing their own world using their own critique and free agency. In short, students will become liberators and transforming agents for a new society. In Freire's own definition, this is "education as the practice of liberty" (2005b).

In fact, for Freire, not only critical or liberating pedagogy but education itself are instances of praxis of the theory in order to change reality. According to Allman (2009), Freire considers education to be a "thoroughly political process" (p.421). Taking this into consideration, it can be said that all educational acts are political acts, as they either reproduce or transform the system in which they take place. That is, teachers must take a stance and cannot remain "neutral" in the face of social exclusion and inequality.

The implications for teachers are binding and should not be evaded: "educators and every other cultural worker must make a political choice between domestication and liberation

and in making that choice to be clear about whose interests they are serving" (Allman, 2009, p.421). Pedagogy represents either a space for emancipation and student agency (which brings echoes of radical servant leadership and transformative leadership among others), or a practice for reproducing oppression and social stagnation. Moreover, educators must assume a moral and political posture: will they support a system that engenders and reproduces dehumanization and inequality, such as the Neoliberal phase of capitalism, with social exclusion, privatization, and criminalization of the poor? Or will they choose the side of social change: that is, working to make democracy truly effective, truly just in terms of access and opportunities for well-being and growth?

For education thinkers like Freire, Giroux, or McLaren, the option is evident: teachers should assume the role of leaders for social transformation and liberation instead of that of clogs in the machinery of an unfair economic and political system. As teachers, then, we can and should work towards a society that is based on freedom, justice, and democracy. Thus, the starting place to pursue these goals has to be our own classroom, whenever we work along with our own students.

Regarding higher education today, contemporary thinkers and academics like Chomsky and Giroux denounce Neoliberalism as a sets of policies focused on extending and perpetuating inequality and anti-democratic theory and praxis. For others, like Muñoz-Iturrieta (2021), the academia has become a place where ideology and acquiescence to the current dominant

discourse is instilled into new generations of students. In turn, McLaren (2016) warns against academic compliance with Neoliberalism and capitalism in general.

As mentioned above, Freire (2000) understands that social reality should not be passively accepted as the product of chance, and thus, it cannot be changed by simple chance, either. That is, a better society can only bloom as the result of human agency when such agency is the consequence of the oppressed becoming aware of their oppression and then, acting. Critical thought targets knowledge as it is established (Allman, 2009), and by means of problematization, the dialectical contradictions (unjust situations and realities) become transparent in order to be studied, analyzed, and changed. For Allman (2009) this is a truth to be grasped when she states that for Freire all sorts of knowledge (be it academic, critical, personal) are goals in themselves.

In fact, by dissecting the contradictions perceivable in an educational context, students and teachers learn about the ideology behind it. Learning, then, is only the first step in Freire's pedagogy: the actual awakening to injustice. The next steps require students to find their own voice and stance regarding those problems, and finally, proposing solutions which can be implemented in order to improve the conditions of society itself. Allman (2009) summarizes it thus: "when knowledge enables us to unmask the dialectical contradictions of our reality, it becomes the springboard for the creation of new knowledge or a deeper understanding of the world, which we will need for a revolutionary praxis" (p.425).

Up to this point, it is evident that critical pedagogy seeks to enable students to become active members of society, in order to assist them in the process of becoming aware of injustice

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by means of the problematization of their situation, based on their own experience. Therefore, the teacher does not transmit knowledge, but helps students find their own voice and thus, create their own knowledge. This new knowledge (in constant creation and always incomplete, as Giroux puts it) will provide people with the cognitive, social, and political tools necessary to exert their agency, and eventually, to change their social conditions to achieve and realize humanization and justice. In short, the oppressed will be liberating themselves, and in Freire's words, also liberating their oppressors by helping both groups fulfill their human potential within a democratic system.

This is extended by Giroux (2011) when he refers to the role and objective of critical pedagogy as a bridge towards social change founded on justice, democracy, and active citizenship. Moreover, he claims that Freire sees education as a liberating project that allows for self-reflection, self-management, and agency for social transformation. According to Shih (2018) the change Freire proposes for both teachers and students is a change of attitudes, awareness, and beliefs. From our perspective, such change will take place if teachers assist students in the dialogical process of liberation, preparing students to become agents of change themselves. During this process, however, teachers will also liberate themselves as a result of their students' process of liberation.

Having discussed critical thought and Freire's critical pedagogy as practice for liberty, now it is pertinent to look more closely at related processes such as critical thinking for social

transformation, and metacognition, to be later enhanced and operationalized as critical reflection and critical practice.

Critical Thinking in Teacher-Mentoring Contexts and Social Transformation

Let us refocus on our point of interest: How can critical thinking be taught in preservice EFL contexts? As some of the recent literature in the area of preservice teacher education evidences, critical thinking can be taught as a means to promote not only critical thinking skills as part of teachers' professional identity, but also as a way to find creative approaches to problems and raising awareness towards justice and social transformation.

First, critical thinking may be defined as "the art of thinking about thinking in an intellectually disciplined manner" (Paul, 2005, p.28). Moreover, critical thinking can engender creative thinking as the result of analyzing, assessing, and improving thinking itself (Paul, 2005). The importance of critical thinking and creative thinking transcends the academic environment and should be acquired and used for "dialogical interaction and decision making and problem solving" (Franco et al., 2018, p.133). To put it another way, critical thinking may be seen as a precondition for Freire's critical pedagogy practice in the teacher classroom, as dialogue, problem analysis, and problem solving are all elements of Freire's pedagogy.

In teacher training, critical thinking skills should have a fundamental role so they can be later applied in professional practice. For example, in a recent meta-study, Michelot et al. (2022) described critical thinking scores between French speaking preservice teachers in different countries. They established a relation between critical thinking and self-efficacy in literacy. They

also concluded that involvement in professional life seemed to promote critical thinking in preservice teachers.

In order to be taught, nevertheless, Franco et al. (2018) state that critical thinking requires overt teaching in the preservice curriculum that is "open to students' everyday life and real issues" (p.134). Such overt teaching means not only including critical thinking skills in the curriculum, but also pedagogical spaces in the classroom to put it into practice in a continuous way, within a "collaborative dialogic environment" (p.135). Such dialogic environments stand out as one of the affordances allowed by the Community of Inquiry framework.

Other collaborative and dialogical activities in the teacher mentoring classroom conducive to critical thinking found in the literature are argumentative essays, use of case studies, "constructive controversy" (presenting and evaluating pros and cons of an issue), "circle of knowledge" (small group first and then general discussions), problem-based learning, oriented debates, using videos to start analyses and debates, elaborating concept maps, and others (Franco et al., 2018).

Mpofu and Maphalala (2017) add both explicit and implicit strategies for fostering critical thinking in the preservice classroom. Some explicit strategies are Socratic questioning, including questions for clarification, questions that probe assumptions, and questions that probe reason and evidence. Some of the implicit strategies are lecture sequencing (introduction, discussion, and conclusion), and Slameto's proposed activities such as small group discussion, using relevant contexts, and student engagement in high-cognitive levels of discussion, such as Bloom's evaluation. Besides, constructivist and reflective activities for preservice teachers as

means to promote critical thinking within a meaningful and collaborative context coincide also with Peterson-Hernandez and Fletcher's conclusions (2019) about "a community of practice centered on respect and dignity for learning" (2019, p.15).

On the same line, Almulla (2018) adapted Nosich's (2011) concept of critical thinking, targeting on encouraging dialogue, establishing a positive classroom atmosphere, incorporating critical thinking teaching into the curriculum, and providing students with problem-solving tasks among others. Based on the information volunteered by the teachers in his study, Almulla (2018) concluded that promoting critical thinking gave best results using open-ended questions, although developing critical thinking skills is a complex process that requires more than classroom practices, as it depends also on "broader factors related to the academic environment" (p.24), such as curricula.

Now, regarding language teaching, critical thinking may and should be taught overtly as it expands the relevance, variety, and depth of classes. This criticality can pertain to either culture, democratic values, or social issues. In this sense, English classes, for example, are rich in possibilities since teachers are in many cases free to choose topics that could be attractive to their students. This may be done as part of the curriculum, or as per the teacher's own initiative. For example, Menachery (2018) points out that "teachers as change agents, can make learning more engaging and relevant and students have the opportunity to understand new material in terms of their own lives and realities" (p.226).

This is what Menachery defines as "transformative intellectuals": instructors who can play the role of mentors and leaders towards students' academic progress and personal

transformation. Thus, following Freire's critical pedagogy, Menachery concluded that English classes where strategies such as discussion and debates, WHY sessions (Socratic questioning), unmasking harmful traditions and customs, grammar through community issues (teaching grammar and raising consciousness towards community problems at the same time), as well as using authentic materials as reading resources, may in fact, be "adjusted, altered, advanced or discarded to assist learners to develop critical thought [in such a way that a] language teacher can sow the seeds of change by fostering the skills of communication, collaboration and critical thinking" (p.230). This is an example of how elements of critical pedagogy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, and constructivist environments could come all into play at the same time, allowing for deep learning and teaching experiences aimed at teaching critical thinking skills for social transformation and democratic practice.

Furthermore, democratic practice should take place as a natural result of Freire's critical pedagogy, as it strives for constructivist and participative learning communities, and as a prerequisite for social transformation. There is evidence that preservice teachers who develop critical thinking also express democratic attitudes towards their students and environment. In agreement with the findings of other studies reviewed in this section, Uluçınar and Aypay (2018) established that "one of the most important experience in students' developing critical thinking and democratic experiences may be studying real social and educational problems of society" (p.13). That is to say, meaningful context is a key to teaching and developing critical thinking, along with "school of education curricula" (p.13). In this manner, critical thinking dispositions such as suspicious thinking (not trusting information at face value), open-mindedness, and truth-

seeking dispositions, correlated positively with democratic values and solidarity. This reinforces the urgency of overt teaching and offering preservice teachers the chance of engaging in classroom activities intended to develop critical thinking skills within and without the classroom.

To summarize, critical thinking should be taught in an active way in teacher mentoring classrooms (either as part of the curriculum or as part of class activities), in order to help future teachers develop critical and democratic attitudes, as well as a tendency towards problematization and making their language classes more meaningful and collaborative. In a CoI environment, this translates as choosing activities and topics relevant to their students' needs and interests. However, in the case of distance education, critical thinking may face more obstacles (Tilak & Pelfrey, 2020), which requires attention in the curriculum and the actual delivery of the class in order to foster critical thinking. In short, critical thinking enhances democratic dialogue, collaborative environments, and rich learning contexts where preservice teachers have the opportunity to assume an active role, analyzing social problems, and proposing and discussing solutions as part of Freire's liberating education. Active participation also implies teachers' agency as leaders committed to justice and social change.

Now, let us discuss another mental process that goes hand in hand with critical thinking and which can be taught in an overtly as well: metacognition.

Metacognition

Once critical thinking has been discussed, there is another important element to be taken into consideration, as reflection implies an introspection about the teachers' own teaching

practice. As Flavell (1979) defines it, it is "cognition about cognitive phenomena" (p.906). For Halpern (1998), metacognition is the ability to improve knowledge by directing thinking skills (in Magno, 2010, p.138). For Magno (2010), metacognition can be taken as a predictor of critical thinking. For Akyol and Garrison (2011), metacognition is the awareness and ability to become responsible and control one's own meaning and knowledge construction processes. In fact, in literature it is very common to find both critical thinking and metacognition directly associated, either as parallel phenomena, or as mutual precursors (Kuhn, 1999; and Martínez, 2006, in Şchiopu, 2018).

As Garrison (2016) points out, although metacognition has been regarded as an individual process, in the case of learning communities, it should be addressed as both a personal and collaborative phenomenon. In the case of students, metacognition may be extended as a reflection about their own learning process. For Akyol and Garrison (2011), in the specific context of online learning communities, metacognition can be defined as a mediator between internal knowledge construction and collaborative learning activities. This implies that within a Community of Inquiry, discourse, critical exchanges, and collaborative interaction contexts allow for the co-construction of knowledge and the development of metacognitive skills.

Therefore, for the context of Communities of Inquiry, metacognition can be learned and practiced by individuals as part of a collaborative learning environment. In this sense, metacognition touches upon the four presences of the CoI framework. It relates to the cognitive presence, as it involves an examination of thinking processes; it also deals with the teaching

presence, as teachers and students must address metacognition, and openly exchange opinions about their learning process, which in fact, makes this exchange part or the social and emotional presences since affective and interpersonal factors will come into play as well.

As Vaughan et al. (2013) add, metacognition requires feedback, direct instruction, and responsibility, which within the CoI framework should be rather regarded as a shared responsibility and shared feedback because teachers and students are learning together in a collaborative and constructivist experience. This operation is called by Garrison (2016) "shared metacognitive awareness" (p.64). In fact, this resembles the manner in which Freire sees the possibility of switching roles between teacher and student.

In the case of the English language classroom, it has also been found that the teaching and development of critical thinking skills and metacognition can have important benefits for students, as enhancers of their learning process. As reviewed by Șchiopu (2018), for Marzano (1998), students can find flexible and innovative ways of solving problems, whereas for Hacker et al., (2009), students increase their skills to acquire a foreign language. Finally, for Jacobse and Harskamp (2009), there is a positive impact on learning by teaching metacognition and critical thinking skills (in Șchiopu, 2018). In a case study focused on metacognition among preservice English teachers in Costa Rica, Quirós (2019) established that metacognitive knowledge should be explicitly taught and modeled by teacher mentors.

In terms of instrumentalizing metacognition, Garrison and Akyol (2015) recommend using constructs of both self-cognition and co-regulation of cognition. In other words, cognition

can be extended on to metacognition by individual and group activities where there is regulation and analysis of the cognition process. Some ways in which metacognition may be increased are practices that require peer assessment, collective reflection, modeling metacognitive processes, journals, and student-moderated discussions in forums that include summaries following the practical inquiry model (Vaughan et al., 2013).

Having addressed metacognition, in the next sections of this chapter, critical reflection will be examined in the light of different authors, in order to enrich the discussion related to critical pedagogy and critical theory. Specifically, critical reflection will be seen as an element which can contribute to the implementation of critical pedagogy, and thus, a praxis of liberation in Freire's terms ("emancipation praxis" for Giroux).

Critical Reflection in EFL and Teacher Education

To begin with, it is important to keep in mind the difference between reflection and critical reflection. As Mezirow (1991) puts it, in the learning experience (for both ordinary and learning experiences), reflection allows us to correct distortions in our beliefs and mistakes when solving problems. For Dewey, reflection refers to "assessing the grounds of one's beliefs" (in Mezirow, 1991, p.5). On the other hand, critical reflection involves a critical standpoint regarding the suppositions that support our beliefs, that is, "the very premises on which problems are posed or defined in the first place" (Mezirow, 1991, p.12). This means that critical reflection enables learners to delve into the causes of our beliefs and actions: "the way, the reasons for and consequences of what we do" (p.13).

Brookfield (2017) sees this as an intentional process that allows the teacher to verify the accuracy and validity of teaching assumptions. Such assumptions may be paradigmatic (structuring and categorizing assumptions), prescriptive (what "should" be), or causal (predictive) assumptions. With such tools, teachers and teacher-students can become active agents in personal and collaborative transformational processes.

In this manner, Mezirow continues, we should consider possibilities of change since critical reflection may lead to transformative learning. This transformation can be individual or collective, either as learners or members of a community of inquiry. By changing our cultural, social or ideological assumptions, learners transform their learning experience and even themselves "to permit more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspectives" (Mezirow, 1991, p.14). Then, the implications should not be neglected, because critical reflection, when it has been explicitly taught and developed in the learning environment, means that learners will transform themselves and their surroundings. This also suggests a perspective of agency and leadership, which critically reflective learners (and teachers) can display and promote in others by means of "emancipatory education as an organized effort" (Mezirow, 1991, p.18). Thus, critical pedagogy when intentionally directed within a community of learning, could be conducive to intentional transformation and justice.

Before discussing critical reflection in EFL, let us review the different perspectives recommended by Brookfield (2017) for analyzing teaching assumptions. Such analysis should be continuous and sustained, for such is the "discipline of critical reflection" (p.7). Thus, critical

reflection prescribes scrutinizing teaching practice from the students' perspective, the colleagues' perception, the teacher's personal experience (a basic point stated by Freire also), and both theory and research.

In a study related to using critical reflection in the classroom, Murdock and Hamel (2016) concluded that critical reflection for preservice teachers when focused on cultural awareness and diversity, can act as a tool to help teachers acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions which later would lead them to connect and enrich their students' families and communities. The importance of critical practice in EFL/ESL teaching training was also explored by Quesada (2005) in the particular context of Costa Rica, concluding that reflective thinking and practice ("reflective teaching") can potentiate professional practice by means of guided reflection on field experiences, self-analysis, and evaluation.

Likewise, Yang (2009) explored how blogs could be used to promote critical reflection in a community of practice for future EFL teachers. In the Taiwanese EFL teacher-education environment, Yang concluded that "posting messages did lead to a kind of inquiry that accentuated critical reflection" (p.18). As it turned out, the interaction between instructors and teachers students developed into communities of inquiry where critical reflection flourished and allowed preservice EFL teachers to develop an awareness about their learning experience, that is, a critically reflective learning experience.

Widening their scope, Lundgren and Poell (2009) analyzed 12 research studies that operationalized and assessed Mezirow's definition of critical reflection. Here, the authors found

that the absence of an overarching framework to operationalize critical reflection has hindered research in the field. They recommend contemplating different traditions of critical reflection instead of only one, using "thematic embedding" which would frame the reflection within a meaningful context for those who reflect; and more importantly, as it relates to the objectives of this dissertation, the researchers suggest "broadening our cognitive perspective on the boundaries of critical reflection to allow for non-reflective and emotional aspects, too" (p.22). As it will be discussed below, emotional aspects, contemplated in the emotional presence of the Community of Inquiry framework play a fundamental role in order to foster critical thinking, metacognition, collaborative leadership, and transformative learning experiences (like those based on Freire's critical pedagogy).

In a more political approach, Moore (2019) reflects upon the role of criticality and self-reflection in teacher education programs. From her perspective, based on Adorno's ideas, critical reflection should extend beyond the classroom on to a worldview capable of assessing power relations. She suggests keeping a wider horizon in view: "while preservice teachers should certainly reflect upon their instructional strategies, classroom management procedures, and their own collegiality, there should be also be time spent reflecting on broader educational policies" (p.118). Once again, such perspective is compatible with Freire's critical pedagogy, which has profound political implications when students and teachers assume their role as agents of social transformation.

Moreover, the process Moore describes should be life-long, as teachers need to be aware and reflect critically upon their role as educators, professionals, and scholars throughout their careers and across their field experience. Criticality and self-direction, Moore concludes, must be directed towards a democratic concept of schooling, as collaborative leadership within a Community of Inquiry (and beyond) aiming at democratic schooling is a desirable goal in higher-education institutions assailed by Neoliberal policies: "not only should pre-service teachers see themselves as educators, but fully participating members in our local communities" (p.120). Thus, teachers should act as agents for democratic transformation of education and society as Freire and Giroux propose.

After exploring the definition and implications of critical reflection inside and outside the classroom, let us move on to the topic of critical practice, closely related with critical reflection in teacher education and EFL contexts.

Critical Practice

In the first place, it is important to keep in mind the contributions by Dewey (1933), and Schön (1983, 1987, 1991) regarding reflective teaching. Thus, for Dewey (1933), reflective teaching focuses on the causes and effects of "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge" (in Moradkhani et al., 2017, p.2). In addition, Jay and Johnson (2002) provided a typology focused on three stages of teacher reflection: description, comparison and criticism of teachers' reflective practices. Examples of reflection in practice have also been reviewed by Ke et al. (2011).

In the context of EFL, Wallace (1991) first introduced reflective teaching in the field. Later work on the topic was reviewed by Farrell (2016), where he analyzed 116 studies of Teaching of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). He concluded that preservice and in-service teachers were interested and found benefits in engaging in reflective practice. Besides, reflective practice led into critical reflective practice, as many teachers wanted to further reflect on their practice and "even challenge their current approaches to their practice, eespecially when they note any tensions between their philosophy, principles, theory and practice both inside and outside the language classroom" (p. 241). According to Farrell, some of the ways in which reflective teaching practice can be exercised are action research, teaching journals and diaries, discussion groups, critical friendship, self and peer classroom observation, and classroom video analysis (in Moradkhani et al., 2017). All of these activities can be implemented in the English preservice distance classroom, and can be framed within Freire's critical pedagogy and the CoI framework, considering they demand problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking, constructivist interactions, and social and emotional variables in addition to cognitive ones.

In contrast, in a study that sheds light on part of the problem to be explored in this paper, Carlson (2019) reports the use of critical friend groups (CFG) with secondary English teachers, and established that critical reflection and critical practice, do not occur "on their own". Thus, if critical practice is not part of the curriculum, beginning teaching candidates will not develop, as a rule, critical reflection and may in fact limit themselves to reproducing traditional conceptions such as working in isolation "from other adults (colleagues, administrators, parents, and other community partners and members)" (p.15).

This means that critical thinking and critical practice must be overtly taught and modeled and made explicit in the learning program. According to Carlson, CFG's do not guarantee transformational learning or interests in justice and equality although they increase the chances of preservice teachers developing critical attitudes towards their profession and practice. In turn, critical practice begets collaboration: "teachers who have critically reflective preparation are in a better position than those who have not been prepared to be critically reflective to choose the route of collaborative dialogue" (p.15). Here, the relation between critical thinking, critical practice, collaboration, and active learning that includes elements of Freire's critical pedagogy such as collaborative dialogue and learning opportunities that feed on personal experience become evident as well. On this line, reflective practice has proven to be beneficial to EFL teachers in collaborative online communities (Burhan-Horasanli & Ortaçtepe, 2016).

In their effort to outline a theoretical basis for reflective practice, Thompson and Pascal (2012), established three historical elements: a critique of technical rationality, the artistry of the professional practice, and reflective learning. Following Schön's position, they warn against technical rationality since it limits teachers to "the level of technicians" who are supposed to simply implement research findings and theory. On the other hand, the artistry of professional practice resides in "wrestling with the complexity of both theory and practice" counting on the "artistic" side of teaching (p.313). That is, teaching should be considered not a scientific, but humanistic, inspired, and creative activity, where practitioners reflect upon their experience.

Reflective learning, then, profits from experience and promotes a climate of active learning where practitioners learn in a participative way, rather than passive. Here, as Thompson and Pascal (2012) point out, critical practice falls into place. They relate it to Freire's ideas via Mezirow's contributions on critical reflection (1983), while extending Schön's concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Schön's approach to self-reflective practice was also explored with preservice English teachers by Causarano (2015).

Finally, Thompson and Pascal (2012) argue as a conclusion for the relevance of critical practice and on the importance of not neglecting the emotional dimension of learning, given the "emotional demands of the challenge involved" in professional practice (p.318). This final aspect will be further developed below in the section related to the emotional presence in the Community of Inquiry framework.

To wrap it up, critical practice makes practitioners subjects of their own learning process since they can draw from professional experience in order to construct knowledge that is not based on theory or research exclusively, but on actual practice. This, in turn, implies humanistic elements such as a critical point of view, an active and participative attitude in the learning environment, taking into consideration a critique of teaching as given practice, and emotional factors within the learning community. These expressions of cognitive, teaching, social, and emotional presences can all be supported by the CoI framework, while incorporating critical thinking as part of Freire's pedagogical praxis.

Community of Inquiry Framework

History of the CoI framework

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework sinks its roots into the end of the last century, being the brainchild of a research project sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). According to Kineshanko (2014), the project "A Study of the Characteristics and Qualities of Text-Based Computer Conferencing for Educational Purposes," was developed from 1997 to 2001. In 2000, the seminal paper "Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education" was co-authored by Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer. In this article, they introduced the "conceptual framework that identifies the elements that are crucial prerequisites for a successful higher educational experience" (Garrison et al., 2000, p.87).

Thus, the cognitive, teaching, and social presences were presented, and one of the conclusions was that Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), in this particular case, computer conferencing, allowed for "considerable potential for creating an educational community of inquiry and mediating critical reflection and discourse (i.e., critical inquiry)" (p.103). In addition, the paper introduced the practical inquiry model (to be described below) based on the critical thinking model, first proposed by Garrison in 1991 (Garrison et al., 2000).

This paper laid down the foundations of the CoI framework to be used in distance education research and learning environments. For example, in their article "Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education", Garrison et al., (2001)

elaborated on the practical inquiry model inspired by Dewey, as an "efficient and reliable electronic assessment tool" (p.21), which could be applied to analyze computer-conference transcripts in order to study the teaching and learning aspects of the critical-thinking processes (which would be known later as cognitive presence).

Characteristics of the Community of Inquiry framework

The Community of Inquiry framework is based on the constructivist perspective that meaningful knowledge should comprehend "the learner's personal world (reflective and meaning-focused) as well as the shared world (collaborative and knowledge-focused) associated with a purposeful and structured educational environment" (Garrison et al., 2000, p.92). That is, the learner must tackle the learning experience both as an individual (which has been the historical conceptualization of behaviorism or Piaget's cognitivism, for example), and also as a member of a community (a group, class, network, etc.), as proposed by social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1986).

Building upon Lipman's (1991) ideas, Garrison et al. (2000) examined issues such as the relevance of community for higher-order thinking and the development of "questioning, reasoning, connecting, deliberating, challenging, and developing problem-solving techniques" (p.91). Furthermore, a community of inquiry offers an appropriate context for achieving critical thinking and deep learning (Garrison et al., 2000). This implies that one of the main contributions stated is that teaching and learning within a community (of inquiry) create

affordances for exchanges, collaborative knowledge, and cognitive and social abilities which could be taught and learned in the classroom.

What Garrison et al. (2000) add is the connotations of extending these ideas to Computer-Mediated Communication, which opened a new door into the future as the Community of Inquiry model translated Dewey's, Vygotsky's, and Lipman's concepts into the language of distance education. Computers and new technologies meant that learning communities could be built across geographical and chronological distances (synchronous and asynchronous communication), with almost infinite new possibilities. An example of this is connectivism, which proposes learning as a process of connecting information sources and access to potential knowledge in addition to current knowledge (Siemens, 2004).

Before proceeding to the analysis of the CoI's affordances for critical pedagogy and collaborative leadership further below, it is pertinent to remind the reader of what the three constitutive elements of the Community of Inquiry framework represent,

- Cognitive presence, which relates to the learners' ability to construct meaning by means of reflection and discourse (Garrison et al., 2001, p.11).

- Social presence, which motivates an environment of trust, communication and cohesion as a group (Vaughan et al., 2013, p.11). It also projects participants socially and emotionally as real people (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer in Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012, p. 282).

- Teaching presence, which joins the social and cognitive presences, focusing on design, facilitation, and direction of a community of inquiry (Vaughan et al., 2013, p.12). This presence is not limited to instructors but extends to learners as well, taking into consideration that the teaching and learning roles should be interchangeable within a constructivist learning environment, meaning that both students and learners can switch teacher and learner roles and develop leadership roles at different moments of the learning experience (Garrison, 2016). More recently, Shea et al. (2022), have proposed a "Learning Presence", which can account for the self-, co-, and shared regulation of learning by the students themselves. However, due to the scope of this paper, such potentially new presence will not be discussed here.

Thus, the CoI model is visually represented in Figure 9:

Figure 9

Community of Inquiry Framework
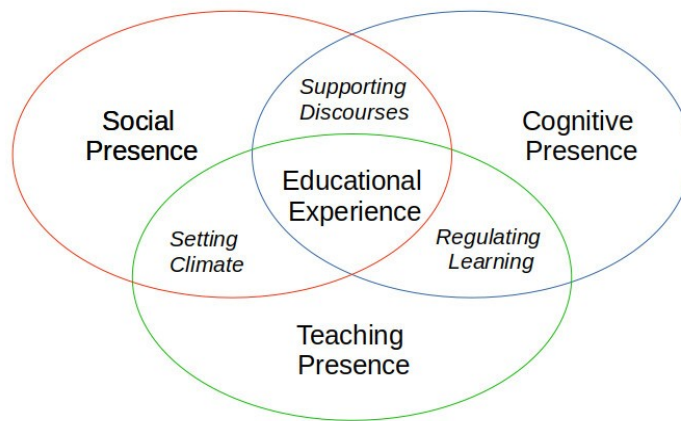
Note. Adapted from *Teaching in blended learning environments: Creating and sustaining communities of inquiry* (p.11), by N.D. Vaughan, M. Cleveland-Innes, and D.R. Garrison, 2013, Athabasca University Press.

The Practical Inquiry model

Let us ask once more: What is critical thinking? What is its role in a Community of Inquiry? Critical thinking has been defined as a key element for higher education by Bloom et al., 1956; Gibson, 1996; Bostock, 1997; Romiszowski, 1997; Haughey and Anderson, 1998; Marttunen, 1998; Collison et al., 2000; Strother, 2002; and Roblyer and Schwier, 2003 (all in Fahy, 2005). Other studies that complement this are those by McPeck (1981, 1990, 2018) and in the specific context of computer-mediated learning, the one by Jonassen (1996) among others.

In addition, the teaching of critical thinking within communities of inquiry has been explored extensively in Rourke et al., 1999; Anderson et al., 2001; and Garrison et al., 2001 (all in Fahy, 2005). For Garrison et al. (2001), critical thinking "includes creativity, problem solving, intuition and insight" (p.8) and because critical thinking is complex and not accessible in a direct way, it should be implemented and measured by means of instruments aimed at critical discourse and reflection. Such tools are developed within the context of a Community of Inquiry (CoI) as a model: Practical Inquiry (PI) for computer-mediated communication (CMC), by means of which EFL may be taught and learned in blended, distance, and distributed learning environments. In short, critical thinking is present in the CoI model as part of PI in the shape of critical inquiry, the very essence of the PI, as it will be shown below.

This model is based on Dewey's original concepts, as it "is grounded in experience but includes imagination and reflection leading back to experience and practice" (Garrison et al., 2001, p.9). In fact, the model of practical inquiry uses four phases in order to describe cognitive presence in CoI. This sequence, referred to as a process of critical inquiry, is presented on Figure 10:

Figure 10

Practical Inquiry Model Showing the Four Phases of Critical Inquiry
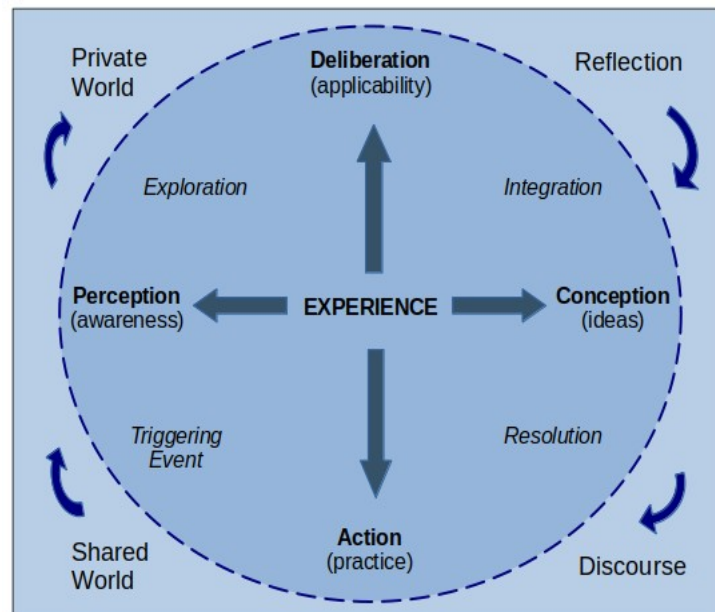
Note. Adapted from "Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education," by D.R. Garrison, T. Anderson, and W. Archer, 2001, *American Journal of Distance Education 15* (1), p.9.

Thus, the first phase represents the triggering event. That is, an issue or problem is identified or recognized from experience. Its relevance to experience as a source of understanding and its problematization as a starting point for further analysis echoes Freire's emphasis on experience and problematizing education as basic concepts of critical pedagogy.

Phase two is exploration, balancing private ideas and social aspects (i.e., context), or in other words, balancing critical reflection and discourse as Garrison et al. (2001), put it. The

exploration phase prescribes brainstorming, questioning, and exchange of information (Garrison et al., 2001).

The third phase, integration, seeks to construct meaning based on the ideas and exchanges explored in phase two. According to Garrison et al. (2001), this is the most difficult phase to detect from a teaching or research perspective as the integration of ideas and construction of meaning must be inferred from communication in the CoI. Furthermore, the exploration phase requires "active teaching presence to diagnose misconceptions, to provide probing questions, comments, and additional information in an effort to ensure continuous cognitive development, and to model the critical thinking process" (Garrison et al., 2001, p.10).

Lastly, the fourth phase, or resolution, entails vicarious action to test the newly acquired knowledge. In the context of CoI, this means using "thought experiments", building consensus, and moving on to a new problem and new triggering events, starting a fresh cycle of critical inquiry. Garrison et al. (2001) state that the practical inquiry model portrays the critical thinking process and the means to enhance cognitive presence, that is, cognitive presence conceptualized as an interaction where meaning is constructed by means of reflection and discourse (Garrison et al., 2001).

Regarding criticisms to the PI model, as Fahy (2005) points out, there are some limitations to be found, as recognized by Garrison et al. (2001). Thinking processes are difficult to observe and assess directly, which makes them more perceivable as "traces" to be found in class transcripts. This is relevant to our research project. Besides, analyzing thought processes

and critical thinking is "inevitably inductive and prone to error" (Garrison et al., 2001, p.12), which requires some subjective judgments (Fahy, 2005). Again, this should be taken into consideration because detecting and assessing critical thinking in a community of inquiry is the main goal of this paper.

Notwithstanding, the PI model allows for an iterative cycle of critical thinking. In addition, it is based on Dewey's ideas and it is compatible with Freire's views for critical thinking and problematizing education, which makes the PI model a valuable resource of critical analysis and critical pedagogy applications in the CoI context. In short, the PI model can be utilized by teachers and researchers as an operationalization tool to foster, teach, and assess critical thinking in the CoI classroom, as evidenced by the interactions between instructors and students, analysis of transcripts, and messages in blended and distance environments such as blogs, forums, emails, or videoconferencing.

To conclude, the Practical Inquiry Model can be used to generate and assess critical thinking and to instrumentalize critical pedagogy practices, as it will be discussed in this dissertation.

A potentially new presence: Emotional presence in the CoI framework

Emotional presence as a concept was proposed by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) as an addition and extension to the original three presences of the CoI framework: cognitive, teaching, and social presences. Thus, emotional presence translates as visible emotion, affect, and feelings of the members of the CoI (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). This, as the

authors state, implies "new roles" for the online learners and extends the CoI framework as the emotional is present along with the other three presences. Such enhancement of the CoI framework by the addition of emotional presence is confirmed by Williams (2017) as a "critical part of learner presence […] especially for the adult online learner" (p.129), something to take into consideration when dealing with preservice teachers in higher education contexts.

In fact, communication is related to emotions as the new roles of students require negotiation of meaning and ideas so that students can assume greater responsibility over their learning (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). This, in turns, pertains to social presence, that is, the actual building of community in the CoI environment. Sarsar and Kisla (2016) emphasize the importance of communication between mentors and students in order to "feel closer to their instructors" (p.57). This would enhance social presence as well, as it can nurture from emotions. In their study, Sarsar and Kisla established that using a pre-course survey provided evidence about students' emotions, affordances for instructors to communicate better with their students, and helped instructors identify their students' communicational skills. As research instruments, such surveys may be used during course design and during the actual implementation of the course (Sarsar & Kisla, 2016).

In contrast, for Majeski et al. (2018), emotional presence can be assimilated with emotional intelligence, in order to make it easier to instrumentalize in the online classroom. Thus, the authors regard emotional presence as "interpenetrating teaching, social, and cognitive presence" (p.55), paying special attention to teaching presence as it interacts with emotional

presence. For them, teaching presence promotes learner emotional presence, learner cognitive presence, and learner social presence, enriching the learning experience. Drawing from Mortiboys' (2012) work, Majeski et al. (2018), consider that if instructors perceive, understand, and respond to learners' needs and emotions, they can increase the students' "sense of safety and comfort in the online classroom and set the foundation for learner success" (p.56). This, in turn, may be achieved by using active and reflective listening skills, such as actively listening to students' words, reflecting on learners' emotions and thoughts, asking open-ended questions to assist students explore and clarify their feelings, and checking what learners say by focusing on inconsistencies and using silence intentionally.

In addition, instructors should engage in emotional facilitation in order to pursue non-emotional objectives, that is, piquing students' curiosity towards learning. Some pedagogical techniques recommended are engaging learners in collaborative activities, such as working with interactive multimedia content, which will enhance cognitive and social presences. Mastery-oriented activities learning activities ingrained into course design, presented as complex tasks broken down into simpler tasks, can also challenge and engage students. Besides, using positive emotion to enhance attention may result in higher rates of innovative thinking, effective decision making, and better understanding of self and others (emotional and cognitive presences). Once again, positive communication will also produce group cohesion and benefit social presence. All of these elements, i.e., creative thinking, collaborative interaction, effective decision making, group cohesion, and improved communication can be related to critical thinking skills, dialogue, and debate in Freire's pedagogy, as well as collaborative leadership.

The dynamic integration of the teaching, emotional, social, and cognitive presences, and learner experience within the CoI framework can be seen below. Here, the teaching presence has both an emotional and instructional presence, which can be exploited by the instructor to engage the learner's emotional, social, and cognitive presences. In a two-way interaction, all the four presences combine and result in the actual learner experience. Ideally, such experience should be conducive to learning in a collaborative manner. Thus, the interaction between the presences and student learning is depicted in Figure 11:

Figure 11

Integrated Model of CoI and Learner Experience
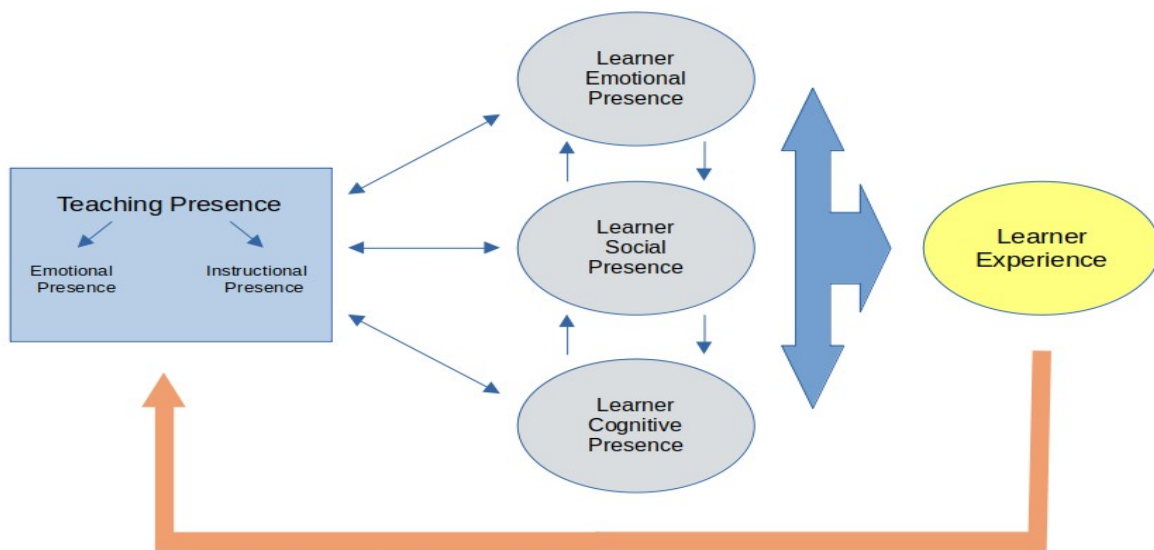
Note. The arrow at the bottom indicates that the process is iterative, in a way that the Learner Experience feeds back into the Teaching Presence. Adapted from "The Community of Inquiry

and emotional presence," by Majeski, R. A., Stover, M., & Valais, T., 2018, *Adult Learning*, *29*(2), 53–61, p.59.

An effort to extend the CoI model and to adapt it to other learning conditions, was the one undertaken by Stenbom et al. (2016) when they developed the Relationship of Inquiry method, a pedagogical instrumentalization of the CoI framework incorporating emotional presence. In this case, however, it was focused on one-to-one learning, that is, online coaching for math students. They concluded that emotional presence can be measured outside social presence within the Relationship of Inquiry method, while emotional presence "has the potential to enhance frameworks for analyzing online learning" (p.11). Once again, it becomes evident that emotions play a vital role in online learning, either group or individual learning environments. Consequently, the use of positive emotions in a productive way tailored to learning outcomes can promote learning, student interest, and motivation.

Focused on text-based online learning environments, Robinson (2016) concluded that social and emotional presences go hand in hand, as students substitute face-to-face "realness" by appropriating technology and supporting discourse. This is carried out by means of non-linguistic elements, while acknowledging their peers' (the others') ideas in a supportive interaction. Regarding teacher roles, if instructors work in pairs or as a team, they can help manage "group think" and support students in a more effective way, as long as the technological resources (learning management system, LMS) include the corresponding affordances. In the case of preservice online classes, teacher mentors who coordinate courses or co-teach can

provide richer feedback, as they are also able to analyze student emotions, consider their

students' emotional needs, interpret, facilitate, and supervise group work online.

Having discussed the roles of the teaching presence, cognitive presence, social presence,

and emotional presence, criticisms to the CoI framework will be addressed next.

Criticisms to the Community of Inquiry model

As a model that has been evolving long enough to be explored, tested, and evaluated by

researchers and teachers since its inception twenty years ago, the CoI model has matured as a

framework for teaching and learning in distance education contexts. One of the most important

criticisms to the CoI model and the way it relates to deep learning was contributed by Rourke

and Kanuka (2009). In a literature review of 200 research papers that cited the CoI framework,

only five evaluated actual learning. The authors questioned that the indicators used to establish

learning within CoI environments were self-reports, which they described as "dubious in the best

of circumstances". Thus, they aligned their conclusions along three main axes: the "failure of the

CoI as a program of research," the absence of cognitive presence, and the weakness of the

framework to procure deep and meaningful learning. Since Rourke and Kanuka did originate a

relevant debate around CoI, their arguments will be presented below and then refuted based on

later research.

In the first place, the authors claim that research becomes limited in CoI since self-

reports are inadequate means of assessing student learning as they are not valid (Gonyea, 2005,

in Rourke & Kanuka, 2009) because they cannot measure what they are supposed to do. Besides,

the construct "learning" is "underrepresented" as a bias in the instruments used in the studies about meaningful learning.

In the second place, and based on Garrison et al. (2001), for cognitive presence to exist there must be evidence of its four stages: the trigger event (a dilemma to be solved); exploration (search for solutions to the dilemma); integration (construction of meaning); and resolution (the solution to the dilemma posed). When examining critical forums, the researchers reviewed found that "less than half of the messages" could be identified as cognitive presence. Following this, Rourke and Kanuka (2009) state that "the lack of cognitive presence is a logical explanation for the absence of deep and meaningful learning in CoI" (p.41).

Finally, they consider that the CoI model is weak as a means to engender deep and meaningful learning. According to them, as a CoI requires students to articulate their understanding of the course contents while being critical of their partners' opinions, the literature reviewed evidenced that "the percentage of student communicative activity that is classified as critical discourse, mutual critique, or argumentation, in whatever way it might be operationalized, ranges from 5 to 22%" (p.43). In other words, the CoI framework would be apt for developing deep and meaningful learning in only a tiny number of cases, taking into consideration that the students' chance of becoming critical of their peers' ideas, articulating their own, and being able to confront their own misconceptions would happen in less than a quarter of CoI environments.

Despite their criticisms, both Rourke and Kanuka finally acknowledge that "it is difficult to derive any conclusions about learning in communities of inquiry from five studies with methodological weaknesses" (p.43). Thus, their observations can be questioned as well, and may be regarded as lacking adequate support. Should methodological deficiencies in a study account for the claimed deficiencies in the CoI framework itself? To close, both authors make the recommendation for future researchers to "conduct more substantial studies of learning in CoI" (p.44).

Further criticisms to the CoI framework comes from Jézégou (2010). According to her, the CoI model is deficient in its epistemological foundations as related to its theoretical foundations in regard to the collective construction of knowledge. In fact, a more detailed explanation in this sense would benefit its potential as a research tool in e-learning environments. In terms of learning, Jézégou believes that the propositions of socio-constructivism as integrated into the CoI model have not been explained either, which makes difficult to grasp the original statement that the CoI framework promotes learning on the individual and collective levels.

Lastly, she points out at the lack of elaboration in the analytical grid for measuring presences (the descriptors for each of the three presences in the CoI model), as it becomes merely a descriptive exercise without analysis on how Dewey's ideas, for example, were incorporated into the cognitive presence's four stages (as explained above). To summarize, since Jézégou's article has a constructive approach, she gears her criticisms towards facilitating the

appropriation of the model by other researchers, while confirming that the CoI model does in fact incorporate the theoretical findings of pragmatism and socio-constructivism.

Before proceeding in our purview of the CoI framework as an environment that can foster critical thinking in the EFL classroom, let us include here what Akyol et al. (2009) replied to Rourke and Kanuka's position. To start with, the authors point out that Rourke and Kanuka selected works that were not representative, by "excluding recent research studies and including the research studies that have no relationship to the CoI framework" (p.129). Besides, Akyol et al. clarify that the CoI is not a model for learning outcomes, but for "generic educational experiences" (p.124). In other words, deep learning (or its lack thereof) should not be attributed to the CoI as it does not focus on the end results of learning but on the *process* of learning in distance education environments. Thus, CoI is characterized by its transactional nature. This process is both individual and social, as the three presences, cognitive, social, and teaching and later the emotional presence highlight.

Regarding Rourke and Kanuka's first claim, i.e., that student self-reports are not valid means of measuring learning, Akyol et al. state that such reports "may be warranted to increase the generalizability of CoI research and to increase knowledge of the entirety of the process of developing cognitive presence" (p.128). Quite the opposite, in agreement with Arbaugh (2008), they find that self-reports of student learning are "necessary" since in order for students to report learning and cognitive presence, the last two stages of integration and resolution must have taken place before.

This also addresses Rourke and Kanuka's questioning that cognitive presence was not evidenced in the research reviewed. To clarify the development of cognitive presence, Akyol et al. (2009) add that knowledge which can be applied in future cases can only mean that cognitive presence happened in its four stages, conducing to knowledge that "may not emerge as a result of a single within-course inquiry but may come as a result of the cumulative effect of multiple within-course inquiries or engagements with course content" (p.128). Such knowledge, as the result of being critical of the course's contents and their peers' opinions, reflects the cognitive processes summarized in the Practical Inquiry model: triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution. New knowledge, as reported by the students themselves, confirms that integration and resolution were achieved, and thus, that cognitive presence was present. In turn, this implies that all three presences occurred, fostering true instances of CoI.

As mentioned above, Rourke and Kanuka's last argument that the CoI model shows weaknesses in engendering deep and meaningful learning is rejected by Akyol et al. based on the transactional nature of the CoI model, as emphasizing the process rather than the product of learning. Besides, since cognitive presence does occur according to the literature, deep learning as reported by participants themselves reflects that the last two stages of the Practical Inquiry Model, integration and resolution, resulted in new knowledge and thus, evidence instances of deep learning. Finally, Akyol et al. (2009) concluded that the true importance of the CoI model lies precisely in its focus on the learning process rather than learning outcomes, as examining the learning process may "well be of much greater value in understanding, shaping and improving the educational experience" (p.131).

To close this section, let us add that for critical teachers and researchers, the importance of applying the CoI model in the distance learning classroom is reflected in its interest on the learning process per se. As such, learning becomes a constructive experience shared by instructors and students where reflection expressed in the four presences and enriched by critical pedagogy can develop to create critical thinking in teacher-students. In this manner, collaborative leadership, as it will be discussed below, can also be favoured, and become part of the learning experience for preservice teachers. This means that by nurturing communities of inquiry, participants may arrive to their own conclusions and knowledge, and with them, reach deep learning to apply in their professional practice.

Having reviewed some of the main criticisms to the CoI model, we will refer now to the last two elements in our thesis: critical thinking within CoI, and collaborative leadership.

Critical Thinking and the Community of Inquiry Framework

How can critical thinking develop within the environment of a Community of Inquiry (CoI)? Although answering this question is one of the main goals of this dissertation, in this chapter the reader will find a brief review of the main elements of the CoI framework and how these elements foster and motivate critical thinking. First, as Vaughan et al. (2013) state, it is instructors themselves who create the conditions that propitiate critical thinking, understanding, and rational judgments within the context of a Community of Inquiry.

In other words, the CoI framework, as expressed in the cognitive presence and the teaching presence, complemented and nurtured by the social presence (Garrison et al., 2001) and

the emotional presence (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012), can engender the conditions for critical thinking and reflection within the blended learning classroom. Due to the nature of the Community of Inquiry model as an environment for collaborative constructivist learning (Vaughan et al., 2013), the interactions and constant communication between instructors and students which unfold with the convergence of the four presences, allow for the creation of shared meaning and knowledge.

The Community of Inquiry model could be observed in Figure 9 above with the three original presences (social, cognitive, and teaching) as they overlap and afford the creation of a learning setting, supporting discourses (material analyzed by critical pedagogy in our research), and the regulation of learning. All of these elements are conducive to a constructivist educational experience, which can also be considered a stepping stone for critical pedagogy analysis for students using experience as a trigger or original input (Garrison et al., 2001), or in other terms, the problem posed to be solved (Freire, 2000).

The CoI, in turn, will allow for the conditions for new knowledge, to be problematized again following Freire's critical pedagogy, in order to produce a continuous cycle of triggering problems, analyses, solutions, and constructed knowledge. Now, let us introduce the last element in our convergent theoretical framework as sketched in this literature review.

Leadership as Collaboration

As we begin the third decade of the 21st century, more than ever, pressure is put on higher education as an agent of social change, social mobility, and human progress in general.

Facing conditions such as social change, globalization and intercultural relations, migration, aging of population, changing of family structures, exponential growth of information, shifting roles of teachers and students, and new technologies among other factors (Cleveland-Innes & Sangrà, 2010; Cortese, 2012; Keller, 2008; Vaughan et al., 2013) higher education must follow course in novel directions and attend to urgent decisions. Universities should look on to the future with new eyes while keeping true to their essence.

Under heavy attacks from the political, social, economic, and ethical fronts, what Chomsky (2014) calls the "Neoliberal assault on higher education", that is, as different economic and ideological interests question the importance of universities instead of supporting them, and as the increasing interest to privatize, corporatize, and militarize universities continues to grow (Giroux, 2014) even affecting research (Trakakis, 2020), higher education needs to assert effectively its true identity and its irreplaceable contribution to society. As a truly independent exercise in the academic world, this can only be achieved from within universities by means of leadership. Such leadership should be exerted in a democratic way while incorporating all stakeholders committed to the goals of universities as conceived since their origins, and more so in our present and troubled times.

Delving a little deeper, why is leadership important in universities? According to Cleveland-Innes (2012), leadership is a moral responsibility and part of the *raison d'être* of higher education:

When we speak of leadership in education, we are speaking of leadership in public institutions that are designed to serve the greater good. It is not possible to provide effective leadership without an understanding of the purpose of education and its role in society. Education is fundamentally characterized by a quest for improving the human condition. It is to overcome social and economic challenges, resolve inequities, promote societal power and prowess, and allow for individual development. (p.232)

In our century, higher education should provide opportunities for people of all ages to access knowledge, acquire new qualifications, and aspire to better professional and economic conditions. In addition, higher education should continue to fulfill its role as a space for democratic debate, social mobility, and agency for freedom and justice. All of these are complex goals that require the participation of more actors than just faculty, students, and administrative staff while taking into consideration the conditions and culture of each institution. This is what Cleveland-Innes and Sangrà (2010) define as "leadership in context": a type of leadership that rests upon collaborative partnerships, networked environments, new models of teaching and learning, and continuous strategic planning. In this manner, a wider scope is necessary: social change towards justice in our changing times cannot be brought by universities only, but by the inclusion of other social agents such as communities, committed politicians, corporations, the media, churches, and active citizenship. For the time being, though, we will circumscribe our discussion to the academic sphere.

First, leadership in education must be defined. In an extensive literature review on leadership theories in education, Daniëls et al. (2019) conceptualize leadership in education as a process of influencing teachers, students, and other stakeholders in the educational organization in order to host an effective learning climate. For our purposes, emphasis will be put on both instructors (mentor teachers) and learners (teacher students). This means that this process of influence as collaborative leadership will cater for a propitious learning environment as framed by the Community of Inquiry model, while incorporating elements from Freire's critical pedagogy.

Regarding collaboration, Devecchi and Rouse (2010) consider it to be a process of cooperation among people by reaching "a mutual understanding of how to solve problems and solve complex ethical and practical dilemmas" (p.91). As it stands out, this flows along with Freire's tenets of proposing solutions to common problems by means of dialogue and consensus. In contrast, for Garrison (2016), rather than cooperation, which means having everybody take care of their own responsibilities and fulfilling their own quota of duties, collaboration goes beyond: it "is working with others on common problems" (p.103). Once again, the goal in mind for both collaboration in the classroom and Freire's pedagogy is finding solutions to problems shared by the (learning) community. Collaborative environments and team building culture in faculty foster effective collaborative leadership in higher education environments, as it has been confirmed by Amanchukwu et al. (2015), Bryman (2007), DeWitt (2018), Dinh et al. (2014), Dopson et al. (2016); and Otter and Paxton (2017) among others. Besides, as Vaughan et al.

(2013) point out, inquiry is central in a collaborative learning experience, as it upholds a common goal and builds group identity.

Regarding the use of technology and ICTs in higher education environments (Sangrà, 2011), technology enhances also international and intercultural communities of inquiry, as studied by Quesada (2011), as well as collaborative language learning among students (Quesada, 2006). As a result, since it is based on socio-constructivist notions, the CoI model provides enough affordances when it is implemented as negotiation, individual responsibility, and support and feedback within a community of collaboration between peers, and between peers and mentors (Vaughan et al., 2013). Therefore, it is fair to say that the CoI model allows for the implementation of collaborative leadership, too.

Thus, as already suggested by the collaborative aspects of the Community of Inquiry framework, the importance of leadership for both instructors and students cannot be neglected. In the context that is relevant for the present research, collaboration needs to develop between teacher mentors and teacher students, but also among teacher students themselves. Within the CoI framework (and as Freire's pedagogy also implies), all actors involved become agents rather than subjects. This is what Vaughan et al. (2013) define as collaborative leadership: "collaborative leadership instills common purpose, trust, and identification with the institution" (p.123). By avoiding top-down or bottom-up approaches, that is, just following either official policy or grass-roots voluntarism, collaborative leadership proposes unified purpose and effort (Vaughan et al., 2013). Thus, all stakeholders (teachers, students, staff, the whole community)

may, and in our view, should all take part in collaborative leadership. For the scope of this paper, nevertheless, emphasis is put on teachers, students, and administrative authorities.

Based on this, the affordances for agency and leadership within the CoI framework ought to be discussed as well. For example, teaching presence and social presence can help establish collaborative attitudes and a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom as all actors (instructors and students), take the roles of learners. In a constructivist environment such as CoI, all stakeholders will be building on each other's experiences in order to create knowledge together as a learning community (cognitive presence, social presence). In addition, the emotional presence should be taken into consideration as emotions may promote or hinder effective learning. Now, let us change perspectives and focus not on collaborative leadership but on what Garrison (2016) calls "leading collaboratively".

Garrison (2016) expands on the importance of thinking collaboratively within communities of inquiry. In our present century, thinking collaboratively means that individuals should function as part of teams and structures: all teams and structures should connect and collaborate in order to find complex solutions to complex problems and challenges. As discussed earlier, the responsibilities of learning fall on both instructors and students, which implies an active role of agency and leadership. This is what Garrison (2016) labels "leading collaboratively": "Leading collaboratively creates an organizational culture where leadership is a shared responsibility. It is a culture where open communication creates the cohesion to address difficult organizational challenges" (p102).

For our concerns, responsibility in a CoI where leading collaboratively is implemented should be shared between teachers (teacher mentors) and students (teacher students). Open communication supported on confidence and democratic power relations (Freire) and the CoI framework (cognitive, social, teaching, and emotional presences) facilitated by ICTs will provide opportunities for complex exchanges (dialogue and debate according to Freire and Garrison), problematization (Freire), and proposing solutions to common problems (Freire and Garrison).

Although Garrison (2016) elaborates on working with academic bureaucracy and initiating and sustaining change, the most relevant issue for our research is the role and development of faculty as collaborative leadership. Therefore, faculty development programs ought to be based on the CoI model while incorporating students as part of collaborative leadership. As a result, CoI used for faculty development should transform teaching and learning in higher education (Garrison, 2016). To these principles of CoI and collaborative leadership, tenets of critical thinking and critical pedagogy such as problematization, democratic debate, and joint proposal of solutions may be added as they circumscribe the theoretical foundations of this research.

To have a more concrete perspective, we are talking about creating a culture where interactions between the CoI framework, Freire's pedagogy, and collaborative leadership can develop into a rich synergy for analyzing and solving problems in the academic preservice EFL teacher-education environment. Thus, establishing to what level this is currently possible or feasible was tackled as the main objective of this research.

Summary and Conclusions

In order to synthesize, a starting theoretical point to answer the question of how critical pedagogy, the Community of Inquiry framework, and collaborative leadership can conjugate in order to engender critical thinking in the distance preservice EFL teacher classroom, we needed to cover several issues that intertwined in our research topic.

In the first place, we have seen that Critical Theory, although it presents many branches today, in general terms emphasizes human agency as a means to change reality. Besides, Critical Theory is based on dialectical thought, that is, thinking that unfolds as thesis, antithesis and synthesis (suggested by Hegel and later expanded by Marx). As such, theory (thesis) stands on the same level as direct experience (antithesis), and both should be integrated into a new perspective (synthesis).

Second, in Latin America, Freire's Critical Pedagogy can be included as one of the most important applications of Critical Theory into education (Critical Pedagogy). According to Freire, education should be based on problematization in order to be liberating: students find their own voice, analyze common problems drawing from their direct experience, and all together find common solutions. Thus, the power differences among students and teachers could be overcome while giving birth to a new society based on democratic principles of equality, and where human agency actually generates changes towards a just society.

Consequently, by means of education and critical thinking, chronic social problems like violence, inequality, poverty, unemployment and others could be eventually mitigated as society

"humanizes" itself. Such is the mental, political, social, and economic "liberation" of Freire's Critical Pedagogy: educating and enabling those who require it most. According to Freire and for our own purposes in this research, such responsibility to improve society falls on the shoulders of teachers and students as agents of social change.

Since human agency, social change, and liberating pedagogy demand critical thinking, critical thinking should first be taught and learned in school and higher education. As the literature reviewed indicates, critical thinking can be fostered in preservice teacher classrooms by means of overt teaching, encouraging dialogue and debate, proposing solutions to common problems, open communication, and active collaboration (Almulla, 2018; Menachery, 2018; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2017; Peterson-Hernandez & Fletcher, 2019; and Uluçınar & Aypay, 2018).

Tightly related to critical thinking, metacognition is an individual and collaborative process (Garrison, 2016) which can be considered a reflection about one's own learning process. In the context of communities of inquiry, metacognition should also be explicitly taught to account for personal responsibility (Vaughan et al., 2013). In the language classroom, both metacognition and critical thinking have proven beneficial to the learning of thinking skills (Șchiopu, 2018).

On the other hand, critical reflection assists teachers in their process of analyzing their own teaching beliefs and actions, as well as their consequences (Mezirow, 1991). Such critical posture may be used as part of a transformative experience within and without the classroom

allowing for personal agency and social change. This means that critical ways of thinking, implemented as critical reflection, can prepare teachers to own their professional practice, and thus trigger individual and group change in the direction of democratic transformation in schooling (Moore, 2019), and the whole community.

Next, critical practice focuses on the causes and effects of persistent (and intentional) teaching beliefs as applied in the classroom. Regarding the EFL learning environment, Wallace (1991) and later Farrell (2016) widened the concept of reflective practice into critical reflective practice, where accepted views and usages in the classroom are openly questioned, challenged, and even acknowledged as part of the teacher curriculum if new, emancipatory tenets and practices are to be taught, learned, and applied by present and future language teachers (Carlson, 2019). In short, critical pedagogy, critical reflection, and critical practice are different roads leading to the same destination: individual and collaborative reflection and democratic transformation for teachers and preservice teachers as agents of social change.

Third, the next big topic in our research is the Community of Inquiry model. In a few words, the CoI framework provides a collaborative learning environment where the teaching, social, cognitive, and emotional presences come together in order to promote learning. Thus, learning becomes both an individual and group process. As everybody involved, that is, teacher mentors and teacher students are part of the community, all of them switch roles as learners, considering that the CoI has constructivist foundations, implying that knowledge is actually built as a shared experience. Emotional presence deserves special attention, as emotions in the

distance classroom should not be eschewed, but tapped by the instructor as boosters of group

cohesion, dialogue, social bonding, and cognitive achievement (Majeski et al., 2018) while

sharing responsibility about one's own learning (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

In this collaborative context, the CoI model caters for distance education (as it was

originally postulated) and also for collaborative leadership. Therefore, all people involved in the

CoI can play the role of teachers, learners, and leaders. Collaboration, enriched by Freire's

critical pedagogy (where communication and dialogue are key factors) may also flourish within

the CoI framework. The steps of the Practical Inquiry Model (triggering event, exploration,

integration, and resolution), resonate harmoniously with Freire's problematization based on

experience, dialogue, and proposal of solutions.

Besides, teachers and students can profit from the affordances allowed by the CoI

framework to promote critical thinking and metacognition as part of the constructivist exchange

that will take place in the distance education classroom (Vaughan et al., 2013). In brief,

collaborative leadership and critical thinking merge within the CoI model, as truly "Freirean

leadership" will only take place in an environment where critical thinking is promoted, such as

the CoI.

Finally, the last element in our convergent theoretical proposal for this research is

collaborative leadership. In our present times, due to the complexity of challenges and changing

social realities (Cleveland-Innes & Sangrà, 2010; Cortese, 2012; Keller, 2008; Vaughan et al.,

2013), higher education must aspire to finding joint opportunities and creating a culture of

sharing and constructivist leadership. In the case of collaborative leadership in education, it permits the interaction of different actors in order to reach solutions to common problems. Leadership, far from being the personal talent of a chosen few, should be considered a shared responsibility and coordinated process where collaboration enriches both thinking (collaborative thinking) and leadership (collaborative leadership), as Garrison (2016) suggests as part of the affordances of the CoI framework.

Thus, collaborative environments and a culture of teamwork in universities may be conceptualized as an augmented version of the CoI model: the four presences can unfold while assimilating the complementing contribution of Freire's critical pedagogy, and the intent of collaborative leadership. Technology, in this context, works as a means to an end: the integration of the CoI framework, Freire's liberating pedagogy, and collaborative leadership as Garrison (2016) conceives it in order to generate and enhance critical thinking. With such synergy, it is possible to aspire to nurturing critical thinking in a way that it can be taught and learned in the distance EFL classroom for preservice teachers. Critical thinking, supported by the CoI framework, Freire's critical pedagogy, and collaborative leadership could then become part of the new teachers' professional and civic assets, to be used inside and outside the classroom, as a lens to observe common problems and find shared solutions aimed at social change and progress. To what degree this is currently done was the objective of our research by proposing a convergent theoretical model. Such model is represented in Figure 12:

Figure 12

Proposed Convergent Theoretical Model Incorporating CoI, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and Garrison's Collaborative Leadership in the Distance Preservice EFL Teacher Classroom
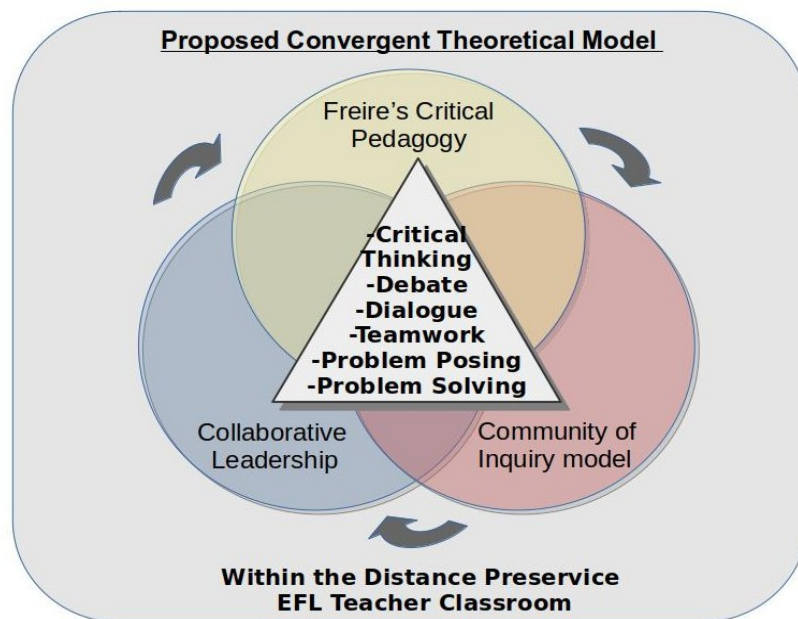
To summarize, the Proposed Convergent Theoretical model including the Community of Inquiry framework, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and Collaborative Leadership (according to Garrison, 2016) is offered as an original theoretical model. It is important to notice that the three constituting theoretical spheres come together and overlap as key concepts: communication as expressed in dialogue and debate; teamwork, as prescribed by Collaborative Leadership and the social, cognitive, teaching, and emotional presences in the CoI model as well as Freire's

approach of constant dialogue; problematization and finding solutions to common problems as part of the CoI model, Collaborative Leadership, and Freire's critical pedagogy tenets.

Thus, this research project made the following assumptions: CoI is present as a substratum since the context is that of a distance teacher training program. As such, it was expected that at least the three original presences of the CoI framework would be observable, as postulated by the course contents, design, or delivery. Over such CoI foundation, Freire's Critical Pedagogy might unfold, including critical thinking as understood by Freire's Critical Pedagogy. So, finding if this was the case, and to what degree, was the main goal of this research project. Furthermore, as a result of a complete CoI (where the three or even the four presences are evident), in addition to a truly Freirean pedagogical implementation, Garrison's "leading collaboratively" should also take place as CoI and Freire's Pedagogy was regarded here as theoretical preconditions for collaborative leadership as described by Garrison. Based on the literature reviewed, this could be expected as collaborative leadership implies role-switching among teachers and students, a key point that Freire mentions as part of his pedagogical practice. Therefore, this was established as a theoretical starting point as shown on my Proposed Convergent Theoretical model, in Figure 12 above.

Finally, technology in the form of ICTs is also present in the Convergent Theoretical model as new technologies synchronously and asynchronously offer the means to be used in the distance preservice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Interactions take place by means of emails, forums, LMS, or instant messaging clients, for example. In Figure 12, the

arrows indicate a continuous and iterative process of interaction and integration, where none of

the three spheres takes a dominant role, and where constant change and progress developed in

order to achieve the research goals and answer the research questions. In short, this proposed

model was by no means perfect and its relevance and potential applicability in the chosen

academic context is discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Introduction

As stated in the previous chapters, my research was guided by the critical theory paradigm, developed as critical pedagogy following the principles of Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogy (2005a). This means that the research subscribed to the critical paradigm, also called Transformative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this chapter, the main research methods and techniques used are presented: single case study, data collection procedures and instruments, and data analysis and discussion of results under the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The chapter also includes a brief reflection on ethical issues, and concludes addressing duration, strategic support, and resources used, as well as how validity and reliability, insider research, and voice were safeguarded.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to remind the reader that the context of the student-teachers was studied within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) of an academic training programme for preservice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. That is, their performance only as students rather than teachers (i.e., teaching their own primary-school students) was analyzed. First, CoI is defined as "a process of creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experience through the development of three interdependent elements – social, cognitive and teaching presence" (Garrison et al., n.d., CoI Framework section). These three presences, in addition to the emotional presence, were explored in the research, and observed through the prism of the paradigm. Thus, aspects like the preservice teachers' (teacher-

students') academic environment and challenges, social context, and interaction between themselves and their course instructor were studied, analyzed, discussed, and reported in a manner as trustworthy as possible as it will be discussed below.

Statement of the Problem

As stated in Chapter 1, starting in the 1970's, Neoliberal policies began to be implemented worldwide as a new focus on all fields of modern life and political administration: social security, fiscal policies, utilities such as electricity, telecommunications, and water supply, as well as education. As part of the context of the first quarter of the 21st century, from the Neoliberal perspective, all services, formerly run by the state, should be privatized in order to comply with the principles of "supply and demand", framed within a "free market". Such views, based on political and economic dogma rather than on actual data, have been reshaping education as a commodity rather than a human right. In the case of a small nation like Costa Rica, just like in many other countries around the world, higher education has been opened to the privatization of education, also putting pressure on public universities to become "attractive", "competitive", and "efficient".

In order to achieve this, however, important intellectual and ethical aspects like critical thinking, solidarity, and even a concept of nation or national identity have been eroded, since they turn into undesirable assets of education and graduates in particular. In spite of the increasing demand for English-speaking graduates and workers, critical thinking skills are still not sought-after although they may appear as part of most curricula. Nowadays, even if

bilingualism is required by many multinational companies settling in Costa Rica, how deeply have university curricula been stripped of critical thinking contents? Should education and English teaching in particular be subjected to the pressures of the market? Should important skills like critical thinking yield ground to more appealing characteristics of future graduates, such as teamwork, problem solving, and linguistic proficiency?

What is a stake here is the role of critical pedagogy and critical thinking in higher education in the particular context of preservice English teaching classrooms. How is critical thinking taught today to the new generations of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers? Are future teachers learning to think critically? These are key concerns discerned and assessed by this research project: to what extent is critical thinking taught and learned in preservice EFL teacher classroom in a public distance university?

Purpose of the Research

My intention with this research was to investigate the affordances for critical thinking found in a Costa Rican English as a Foreign Language (EFL) preservice teacher distance education classroom from a Freirean perspective, considering the classroom as a Community of Inquiry (CoI). For this, it was necessary to observe the teacher-students' reality from their own perspective, opening a dialogue with them in order to report and analyze their learning environment and their social environment in the way it determined their learning process, their interactions among themselves and their instructor. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I founded myself

on some initial assumptions as stepping stones for my data collection and data analysis, based on my proposed Convergent Theoretical model:

a) The course and class observed function as a Community of Inquiry. To what degree the three original presences (teaching, social, cognitive) are developed is unknown.

b) In the learning context created by such CoI, Freire's Critical Pedagogy may be taking place, either as part of course contents, or course delivery, or both.

c) If Freire's Critical Pedagogy is used in class, this implies that critical thinking is also being taught and learned. Establishing to what degree this happens was the main goal of this project.

d) If CoI and Freire's Critical Pedagogy are observable, they should be fostering collaborative leadership as well, in the terms Garrison (2016) described it, that is, where teachers and students switch roles and collaborate.

e) The points above may be confirmed, refuted, or complemented during data collection and data analysis stages.

f) The ultimate recipient of the positive influence of Freirean critical thinking and collaborative leadership within a CoI context are the preservice teachers' communities. Changes that unfold in the classroom should eventually benefit society as a whole. Nevertheless, this last element can only be probed in the future as it falls out of the scope of this research.

Having said this, my research methodology demanded a constant exchange where both participants and researcher were able build rapport and efficient channels of communication. Indeed, I intended to find out about their learning conditions, the problems they encountered

during their learning process, and then come to joint solutions with them. In this manner, I believed I was respecting critical pedagogy's intention (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), as well as Freire's views about the need to engage in a type of education (and exploration) where "with the objective of overcoming [the contradiction between teacher and student,] it reaffirms *dialogicity* and becomes dialogical" (my translation and italics, Freire, 2000, p.86). By "dialogicity" Freire means the capacity to establish dialogue that leads to a cooperative exchange of ideas bringing students and teacher together as cognitive actors in the learning process.

Research Method: Critical Discourse Analysis

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was adopted since it reflected in many ways my worldviews and the normal "reading" I make of reality. In this sense, Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a) includes elements pertinent to my Latin American experience. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out, "important issues of the day, issues such as empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression and alienation" are addressed in transformational approaches (p.9). In addition, power relations become a delicate issue not only as part the object of research, but also during the research process itself. Freire sees these relations within the frame of his pedagogy thus:

> The raison d'être of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. (Freire, 2005a, p.72)

Such type of research, however, could not be done "from a distance", but down on the field itself. This demanded participatory research requiring the researcher to talk on a personal basis with participants. In other words, both subjects and researcher were part of the research process in equivalent terms, as Cohen et al. (2011) add, "[Participatory research] is profoundly democratic, with all participants as equals; it strives for a participatory rather than a representative democracy [thus] the researcher shares his or her humanity with the participants" (p.37).

In the light of this, Freire's liberating pedagogy (2005a) fixes its gaze upon the problematization of education, trying to help participants determine what their problems are, and formulate potential solutions. It intends to foster the participants' active involvement in the research, in order to detect, discuss, and establish problems and solutions based on their true concerns and circumstances, from their own perspective. This is in fact, a transformative research which aspires to promote change since it "contains an action agenda for reform that may change lives of the participants, the institutions […] and the researcher's life" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.9).

Research Questions

Therefore, my research questions, based on Freire's critical pedagogy, the CoI framework, and collaborative leadership were the following:

Overarching question

To what extent are critical thinking skills (as understood by Freire, 2005a) taught and learned in Costa Rica's EFL preservice teacher distance education classroom?

Subquestions

- How is critical thinking incorporated into the syllabus?

- How is critical thinking incorporated into class activities?

- How is critical thinking assessed?

- To what extent is this preservice teacher distance classroom a Community of Inquiry?

- How does this CoI environment contribute to the teaching of critical thinking?

- How does collaborative leadership (as understood by Garrison, 2016) enrich this process of learning?

- What is the teachers' and students' attitude towards learning and teaching English? Should English be considered an "imperialistic" language? What is the role of EFL in the 21st century?

- How do participants describe their social environment?

- How do participants see themselves, as learners, classmates, human beings?

- How is the students' interaction with the instructor and the institution?

- What other social elements are influential to their social learning?

- What problems or contradictions do they perceive as related to the development of critical thinking in their teacher training program? What's causing them?

- According to the participants, how could these problems be solved in order to transform their reality as student-teachers and future teachers?

- What recommendations can participants and researcher design together in order to put into practice the solutions proposed, so as to transform their learning reality into a democratic and liberating experience as conceptualized by Freire?

Before I proceed to delve into the research methods, it is worth emphasizing the need for three basic tenets to Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a), which define it as a humanistic framework to be used during design, data collection, data analysis, discussion of results, and publication. According to Freire, and inspiringly summarized by Colazzo (2017), critical pedagogy, in order to carry out its function (which is humanizing education), must be inspired by these three principles:

a) Love, which for [Freire] means the passion for the teaching profession, the emotional choice of whose side to take;

b) Coherence, that is the capacity for putting into discussion the automatisms inherent to power and to assume ideal behaviours in order to live in conformity with those principles considered as just;

c) Humility, which helps not to impose upon others our love and our coherence. Passion cannot induce us to become collusive, [since] even in love we must keep the capacity to see reality and to assume behaviours oriented towards the truth. Coherence cannot be

used as a weapon to denounce the incoherence of others and then to try to pass judgment

[on them.] (p.22, the researcher's translation)

These principles implied a profound commitment on the researcher's part, in order to be

true, coherent, and nonjudgmental. In other words, the researcher had to be as "objective" as

possible (within the constraints of qualitative research), but able to build rapport with

participants in a one-on-one basis; ideally, where dialogue is constant, and where power

inequalities are brought to a minimum. This may sound overly-optimistic, eespecially when it is

considered that the researcher was not supposed to be moved by a partisan political agenda, "but

to be dispassionate, disinterested and objective" (Morrison in Cohen et al., 2011, p.35). As Freire

suggested, it is impossible for the teacher to remain neutral. However, my intention as a

researcher was not taking sides but remaining aware of my own bias, while observing,

interpreting, and giving voice to those who might find themselves silenced in their academic

context. This became possible within the research methods chosen, and by respecting criteria for

validity and reliability as will be discussed further below.

One last point regarding research questions: there was a possibility that they might

change and evolve during the research process itself, for new problems might have surfaced, and

fresh perspectives could appear as participants shared their points of view (gender or racial

issues, for example). In fact, this was something I was expecting to happen, although research

questions provided me with enough of a foothold to initiate my exploratory journey. Quoting

Agee (2009) on the matter, "good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in all

stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey" (p.432). More the reason to have expected

this, consequently, when questions could eventually be reformulated along with the participants themselves as suggested by Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a).

This was very probable as participants were able to provide feedback in the form of comments and critique of the researcher's interpretations. However, as the reader will verify in Chapters 4 and 5, only a few of the original research questions were actually expanded in order to accommodate new aspects brought up by the data, analysis, and discussion.

Research Method: Case Study

Within the theoretical framework of the Transformational worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I selected case study as the most convenient method for my research. In the first place, because case studies tend to be more "on spot" since they limit themselves to specific communities, situations, and moments in time. As Creswell & Creswell (2018) regard them, in case studies "the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity" (p.14). In addition, case studies were compatible with critical pedagogy such as Freire's (2005a) since they focus on the context of the case (Cohen et al., 2011). The reason for this is that contexts are "unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the real-life, complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.289).

This interest in complex interactions could be observed from the participants' point of view, in a process where the researcher assumed a democratic role and where power relations

were put in perspective in order to allow a free flow of information during data collection. In fact, Cohen et al. (2011) add, "events and situations should be allowed to speak for themselves, rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher" (p.290).

As Stake (1995) suggests, case studies are "noninterventive and empathic" which means that the researcher tried to preserve and present the complexity of the case study, that is, the multiple voices and realities (p.12). This vibrated in consonance with the issue of "humility" as reviewed by Colazzo (2017) in Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a) explained above. Thus, the researcher's role became that of a non-participant observer and a reporter of the participants' reality as they apprehended it. Following this, my stance as a researcher was nonparticipatory, in order to remain as unobtrusive within the observed CoI as possible.

Other aspects in which case studies show their advantages as a research method when using a transformational, critical pedagogy worldview are listed by Cohen et al. (2011) as based on Adelman et al. (1980) and discussed next. First, case studies reflect the "complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths" (p.292), that is, the diverse points of view and particularities of the phenomena and case observed. Second, case studies are "'a step into action' [because] their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development, from within-institutional feedback[...] and in education policy making" (p.292). Such were some of the goals of my research: exploring internal phenomena within a particular undergraduate program in my university, in a fashion in which the participants' voices could be heard, their problems portrayed, and solutions offered for future implementation and professional transformation.

Finally, case studies "may contribute towards 'democratization' of decision making [and knowledge itself]" (p.292). Once again, such democratization followed Freire's (2005a) positioning as I was hoping to carry out a research process where power relations became as horizontal as possible, different voices could be recorded, and various worldviews could be faithfully conveyed and taken into account. In other words, my ontological and epistemological positionings related to Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a), Community of Inquiry framework, and collaborative leadership among others could be developed, instrumentalized, and put into practice as I found fit in order to meet the objectives of my research.

In the case of this project, the single case study allowed me to capture the context and particularities of the participants as members of a CoI. In other words, I was able to become familiar with the way the course was delivered, the interactions that linked instructors and students, and the impact the experience had on them in the light of Freire's conceptualization of critical thinking. All of this provided evidence for understanding better how the CoI model served as a setting for social learning, and how this was enriched by collaborative leadership. My objective was to be able to analyze the course curriculum, and the participants' voices within the Teaching of English major at UNED, by means of data collection instruments such as video interviews, online questionnaires, class observations, and artifact analysis. This variety helped me put the whole picture together by offering complementary pieces of information, and by allowing the triangulation of data.

Critical Case Study (CCS)

For my project, I was willing to explore the Critical Case Study method, as proposed by Barlett and Vavrus (2017), as it permitted the integration with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in qualitative research. According to the authors, the concept of "context" should not be predetermined, but rather discovered by the researchers, as it is an unfolding, iterative, and process-oriented. Thus, CCS is flexible and adaptable depending "on the study's aims, the researcher's motivations, skills, and interests, and the available time and resources" (p.906). Such flexibility was attractive to me as a researcher, since I did not have a rigid road map, and it left open possibilities to make accommodations along the way as I found fit.

Besides, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) state that CCS is focused on exploring the historical processes that have resulted in "a *sense* of shared place, purpose, or identity" (emphasis in the original, p.907). This means that such an epistemological perspective was harmonious with precepts of the CoI model, such as social presence (creating of an identity as a community of learning), in addition to collaborative leadership (a common purpose, as proposed by Garrison, 2016). Therefore, tapping the participants' own background and their context was considered as well.

Furthermore, CCS is also compatible with CDA as mentioned above, and in particular, with Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a) in the sense that it "is guided by critical theory and its concerns and assumptions regarding power and inequality" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p.907). From this perspective, Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP) worked as a lens through which power relations, common problems, and solutions and change (agency) could be observed, analyzed,

and interpreted. Such process of analysis and interpretation was elaborated along with the participants to a degree, as FCP suggested by incorporating their points of view, contributions, and voice.

Another useful aspect of CCS was the importance of culture, as it sees culture not as a static structure, but rather as a process. Researchers, Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) say, should "pay attention to cultural repertoires and contestation [including] language discourse, texts and institutions as important social actors" (p.908). This translated as a focus on the context, which could be seen as an elaborate picture not determined a priori by the researcher, but in evolution and construction: "context is made, it is relational and spatial" (p.909). Bounding of the case study, as Stake (1995) or Yin (2018) advise, then derived into a more open, transactional process rather than merely bounded (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019).

Finally, this dimensional character of CCS was evident as context, not bounded a priori, "considers strings of relevant events and actors" (p.911). That is, context is more open, and gets defined along the way, not only by the researcher, but together with the participants (actors) themselves. Warranting comparison, as the authors claim, CCS is structured over three axes: a horizontal axis, which compares how similar phenomena develop in distinct locations that are "socially produced… and complexly connected" (p.911); a vertical axis, including scaling (the level at which phenomena can be observed, be it the classroom, the institution, the community, for example); and a transversal axis, which pays attention to the context and culture as the result of a historical process (p.911). It is important to clarify that in this case study the three axes were considered together, rather than offering a description or discussion of each one individually, for

example, by prioritizing depth over width of analysis. Next, I will address the ethical

implications of implementing a case study under which this project was developed.

Ethical Implications

As said above, the ethical implications identified required me to work directly with a

teacher-mentor, teacher-students, and two administrative authorities at my university. Since I

planned to carry out interviews, observations with field notes, and analysis of artifacts such as

the course program and students' papers, issues related to *discretionality* (the ability to remain

discreet), protecting participants, and gaining and keeping trust were of the utmost importance, in

addition to reminding participants that they were free to withdraw from the study if they so

decided (none of them did, however). This I had formulated in the following words: "I see it as

my duty to guarantee my colleagues that there will be no potential danger for any 'negative

research report' which may affect their careers, damage the institution's reputation, or impede

future research" (Díaz-Ducca, 2018, p.12).

Privacy, which means avoiding exposure of people beyond the intimate circles they have

decided upon (Stake, 1995) was also kept as far as humanly possible. As a result, I managed to

maintain participant students anonymous although the two EFL major authorities and the course

instructor were inevitably "named" by their position and role. This, however, did not prevent me

as a researcher to build trust and confidence during my video interviews, and to record their

points of view in a spontaneous way. I intended to be able to focus on them as members of the

community studied (my unit of study), while not putting their professional prestige or intimacy at

risk. In some instances the political approach prescribed by the transformational nature of Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a) could have brought up some issues previously ignored (this was indeed part of my objectives), and that might have certain repercussions on those involved. For this, the name of participating students was not shared with the authorities. Even though I have no knowledge of any negative consequences on participants by the time of this writing, if negative, they should fall on the researcher, and if positive, they should be of profit to the participants as part of the EFL major.

A final word related to ethical decisions is what Iphofen (2011) indicates: they all cannot be made in advance for there is a lot to be discovered along the way. In this case, this contributed to having a clearer mind about the fact that many elements that existed could not be controlled beforehand in spite of careful planning: "There is rarely ever one 'solution' to an ethical problem [...] There are so many times that ethical compromises and judgment calls have to be taken in the field" (p.445). Once again, I found no ethical problems, but I had to be sincere and tell the two EFL major authorities and the course instructor that it was more than clear that their identities would be traceable considering their roles at the university and within the major itself. In spite of this condition, they accepted their responsibility and agreed to participate without any objections, for which I am very grateful.

Data Collection

This section focuses on data collection strategies and instruments that were used in this case study, allowing me to frame the data collection stage within the perspectives offered by

Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a). Since case studies "can establish cause and effect ('how' and 'why')", they pay particular attention to context (Cohen et al., 2011, p.289). Besides, the researcher should make the context as accessible as possible to the reader as vicarious experiences, "a sense of being there" (Stake, 1995, p.63). Thus, describing context in detail meant gathering data that were rich, recording as many voices as possible, and also creating chances to delve deeper into meanings and interpretations. Plenty of vicarious experiences were recorded and the participants' voices can be found in Chapter 5 of this written report.

Furthermore, data collection should identify variables, a task that can be only achieved by instruments that are based on descriptions in a triangulated fashion: "to catch the implications of these variables requires more than one tool for data collection and many sources of evidence" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.289). In this sense, although I did not exactly work with variables due to the qualitative nature of the study, triangulation provided abundant points of comparison and contrast to dilucidate main themes and their interaction inside the CoI observed. The reader can find this reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

According to Stake (1995), there is no specific point at which data gathering starts since there has always been previous contact as backgrounding or impressions. However, as preparation I reviewed the advice given by Adelman et al., (1980, in Cohen et al., 2011) in addition to Yin's (2018), settling for the latter's description on how to plot my data collection strategy. Such steps included an inventory of prior skills and values of the researcher; training for the specific case study by designing instruments, reviewing literature about case studies, selecting and practicing with a CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

Software); the creation of a case study protocol; a brief screening of candidate cases; and the conduction of pilot interviews. In this manner, I was able to ask pertinent questions and listen with a receptive mind, adapt to unexpected situations while maintaining a "firm grasp of the issues being studied", and "conducting research ethically" (Yin, 2018, p.86).

Let it be added that training and preparation refer not to relying on rigid formulas but to making "intelligent decisions throughout the data collection process" (Yin, 2018, p.90). Developing a protocol meant creating a document that contained the instruments themselves as well as "the procedures and general rules to be followed" (p.95). Finally, a protocol helped me enhance the reliability of the case study research. This will be elaborated further below when reliability is discussed.

Another step that needed to be thought of carefully was the screening of candidates for the case study, as it had the goal of preventing confusion, retracing one's steps, having to discard painfully collected data, and making the right choices according to the researcher's objectives (Cohen et al., 2011). For this, I applied a purposeful sampling technique to maximize time and cost-efficiency during the data collection and data analysis stages.

Sampling meant in the first place contacting the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (to which the EFL major belongs), introducing myself and my project, obtaining her approval during a video interview, and requesting her collaboration to find a suitable group to study. Then, she referred me to the Department Coordinators in the major, to whom I presented my project again. After negotiating with them, I selected the Department of English Teaching for First and Second Cycles (primary education) to work with due to the Coordinator's collaborative

and easygoing attitude. At this point, being the last academic term of the year, the Department

Coordinator suggested waiting until the following year in order to have more potential

candidates available, as registration decreases during the last term but increases during the first

term each year.

In order not to waste time, through this mediation I was able to pretest my instruments

(interview questionnaires, online questionnaire) with current students of the Licentiate program

with the mediation of the Department Coordinator. This allowed me to tune up and improve my

instruments before their actual application during my data collection the following term.

When the coming term was about to start, I wrote again to the Department Coordinator,

who proposed working with a research skills course from the Licentiate Program as a potential

case study. After contacting the course instructor by email, she agreed to participate and

informed her students of my intentions and shared their emails addresses with me. So, I wrote to

them and sent them the participation letter which five of them signed indicating that they were

willing to cooperate with my case study. This way, thanks to the Department Coordinator's

collaboration, I was able to choose the actual participants based on a purposeful sample

technique in order to get the most out of limited time and budget. Thus, in addition to the School

Director and the Department Coordinator, I was able to recruit a course instructor and five

students from the EFL Licentiate program.

With regard to data collection instruments, I designed and implemented face-to-face

interviews (via videoconferencing), non-participatory observations of online sessions, online

surveys and questionnaires, and the analysis of documents and artifacts produced by the students

and the Department (course outline). For this, I selected instruments from Yin's "Six Sources of

Evidence" (2018) including both strengths and weaknesses for each data collection method, as

can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1

Yin's Six Sources of Evidence

Source of evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Documentation	Stable: can be reviewed Unobtrusive: authentic materials Specific: full of details and names Broad: extended time span	Hard to retrieve Biased selectivity Reporting bias of document's author Access: may be blocked
Archival records	Same as above Precise and usually quantitative	Same as above Accessibility due to privacy
Interviews	Targeted: focus on case studies Insightful: explain and offer personal views	Biased due to poor questions Response bias Inaccurate if poorly recalled Reflexivity: pleasing researcher
Direct observations	Immediacy: observes in real time Contextual: includes the case context	Selectivity: difficult for only one observer Reflexivity: the observed may act to please the researcher Cost: onerous in terms of time
Participant observation	Same as direct observations Insightful into interpersonal behavior and motives	Same as direct observations Biased if researcher manipulates events
Physical artifacts	Insightful regarding culture Insightful regarding technical operations	Selectivity Availability

Note. Adapted from *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (p. 114), by R.

K. Yin, 2018, Sage Publications.

As my rationale, I defined from Yin's "six sources" that email and videoconference interviews could provide deep insight and inferences rich for interpretation, although they might be affected by the researcher's bias. On the other hand, the analysis of documentation and artifacts allowed repeated and careful review, insights into culture or technical processes of the teaching environment, but could be subject to availability and biased selectivity. Finally, direct observations recorded phenomena "in real time" and context, which even though did not turn out to be costly in terms of time, might be prone to subjectivity either as bias or selectivity on the researcher's part. The advantage of online classes, however, is that they were recorded and then I could view them in detail.

To bring this section to an end, as data collection strategy I ran a round of videoconference interviews with the teacher-mentor and teacher-students in Spanish at the beginning of the course, conducted observations during 8 weeks, and then closed with another round of interviews near the course end (in Spanish, too), including one round only for administrative officials in high positions at the EFL major, as recommended by Nisbet and Watt (in Cohen et al, 2011, p.298). Afterwards, the instruments and data were translated into English and annexed to this research report. At a later stage, I incorporated class documents and artifacts (collected in English) as part of the data to be input. My data collection strategy is detailed in Table 2:

Table 2

Data Collection Time Table for a 14-Week Term

Stage of process	Time	Participants (purposeful sampling)	Justification (based on Yin, 2018)
Initial videoconference interviews (in Spanish)	Three weeks	Teacher, students	Targeted, as they focus on case studies Insightful, as they explain and offer personal views
Class observation notes (in English)	Eight weeks	Teacher, students, researcher (nonparticipatory observation)	Immediate, as observation happens in real time Contextual, because they include the case context
Final round of interviews (in Spanish)	Three weeks	Teacher, students, administrative staff	Same as above
Collection of documents, artifacts (in English)	Twelve weeks	Teacher, students, administrative staff	Stable, as they can be reviewed Unobtrusive, they are authentic materials Specific, as they are full of details and names Broad, because they extend the time span

Data Analysis

Discourse

For the data analysis stage, I was interested in applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a), as discussed above. First, a definition of discourse and a listing of its constitutional features come handy. Cohen et al. (2011) describe discourse as "meanings that are given to texts which create and shape knowledge and behaviour, not least by the exercise of power through texts and conversations" (p.574). As stated previously, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (2005a) seeks to evidence power relations among learners and students, in order to question them and establish a dialogical, democratic process of education and co-education, while aspiring to transform educational and social reality for the better. For Gee (1996), discourse is "an association of socially accepted ways of using language, other symbolic expressions and artifacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify yourself as a member of a socially meaningful group" (in Rogers, 2011, p.6).

Thus, such socially accepted ways of using language, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values can be found within the context of the distance language classroom and are expressed in oral and written form. This is present in both Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a) in the form of a dialogical effort towards learning, and also as part of collaborative leadership (Garrison's "leading collaboratively", 2016) within a Community of Inquiry in the form of social presence and teaching presences (Vaughan et al., 2013; Garrison, 2016).

In order to understand more clearly what a discourse is, for Renkema (2004) a written or oral text qualifies as discourse (such as those texts found in the classroom), if it meets the following criteria: grammatical *cohesion*, sequence and structure *coherence*, *intentionality* when uttered, *acceptability* for its intended audience, *informativeness* (it offers new elements), explicit *situationality* in its context, conditions and circumstances, and *intertextuality* (the text reaches the "outer world of the reader, interpreter, researcher and other agents". These features meant that I could only consider valid classroom discourse live exchanges, recorded videos, and transcripts of online sessions or classes, notes of observations, and documents and artifacts as long as they met such criteria.

Besides, there are elements particular to the Community of Inquiry (CoI) that refer to discourse. According to Garrison (2016), in a CoI connected by technology, there needs to be "common purpose, interdependence, collaboration, communication, and trust" (p.54). This implies that sustained discourse needs to develop, and it can only be nurtured by continuous interaction among the community in the terms described above.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

As Warriner and Anderson (2016) comment, discourse analysis in educational research should be understood as "an eclectic set of theoretical and methodological approaches to the systematic study of discourse, language in use, notions of context and contextualization, questions of power, and increasingly discussed issues of embodiment, spatiality, virtuality, and complex ecologies shaping educational contexts" (p.8). As a result of this emphasis on context, I

believe that within the environment of collaborative language learning, Constructivism, and

Community of Inquiry, context is outlined by the information provided by participants and the

interactions observed, among other sources.

Thus, a case study, due to its nature of being "bounded by time and activity" (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018, p.14), functions as an appropriate qualitative research design where Critical

Discourse Analysis can be put into practice. Such an educational context appears permeated by

power relations in the form of language in use, discourse, values, interactions, including

virtuality within the setting of preservice teacher distance education. As Warriner and Anderson

(2016) add, "classroom interactions entail the negotiation of roles, relationships, what count as

text and context, and how various forms of participation take shape and are differently valued"

(p.5). Before beginning data collection and discussion, it was my belief that epistemologically all

of these are variables could be addressed by Critical Discourse Analysis when looking through

the lens of Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a) and the Community of Inquiry framework.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is defined as "a problem-oriented and

transdisciplinary set of theories that have been widely used in educational research [as it]

provides the tools for addressing the complexity of movement across educational sites, practices,

and systems in a world where inequalities are global in scope" (Rogers, 2011, p.1). Analyzing

inequality, therefore, required a critical perspective which could comprehend the complexity of

the educational context.

In other words, CDA unfolds as "a critical theory of the social world, the relationship of

discourse in the construction and representation of this social world, and a methodology that

allows [researchers] to describe, interpret, and explain such relationships" (Rogers, 2011, p.3).

Such a critical perspective echoes Freire's critical pedagogy (2005a) in its ample outlook to

include both the teacher's and the learners' perspectives. As a result, this is compatible with my

ontological perspective, as I believe reality is a construct predetermined by objective educational

conditions, but also subject to social agency, and therefore, to transformation. Epistemologically,

it also fits with my views that "reality" as such can be studied, analyzed, and interpreted in a

critical way, where subjectivity becomes inevitable. In order to be faithful to the participants'

voices, for data analysis I used the original statements in Spanish (from the interviews), or in

English (from all other instruments) and included bilingual reporting whenever quotes or

verbatim fragments made it necessary to have a clearer understanding of statements or opinions.

The reader can consult these in Chapters 4 and 5.

   Therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis provided me with the affordances and tools to

examine power relations in the distance classroom stated as discourse, aimed to determine (along

with my participants) problems in the learning context, and reach agreements in order to propose

solutions, as indicated by Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (2005a). In order to elaborate the

model of CDA analysis followed in this study, Renkema's (2004) criteria as to what a discourse

is provided a structure over which a Freirean and CoI-framework superstructure was settled.

Collaborative leadership, as interpreted in Chapter 2 in the light of Garrison's (2016) "leading

collaboratively", also addresses these elements which foster sustained discourse. That is, such

superstructure was expanded by Freire's (2005a) pedagogical principles so as to make a truly

critical discourse analysis, incorporating the following criteria: democratic dialogue, analysis of

power relations, problematization of the community's context, and collaborative efforts towards solving them (social transformation).

Data analysis process

As the last point for this section, I will briefly discuss my data analysis procedures, as prescribed by Creswell and Creswell (2018). They recommend understanding qualitative data analysis as "a process that requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to the general, and involving multiple levels of analysis" (p.193). Consequently, they list these stages: organizing and preparing data for analysis (transcription of interviews including bilingual passages whenever necessary, scanning of documents, sorting of materials); reading all the data (assessing general ideas, tone, depth, credibility among others); coding the data (organizing data "by bracketing chunks" with an *in vivo* term into expected codes, surprising codes, or codes of conceptual interest) by means of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) due to its flexibility and richness of detail as a method for analysis; generating a description and themes (based on the previous coding); representing the description of themes (for example, as a narrative or presenting descriptive information about participants in a table in case studies); and interpretation (summarizing findings, comparing them to literature, discussing personal view of findings, member checking, stating limitations and future research). Based on this description, a calendar for the data analysis was generated following Creswell and Creswell's (2018) description on how to validate the accuracy of the information. The actual time used for my data analysis is shown below in Table 3:

Table 3

Data Analysis Time Table

Stage of process	Time	Activities
Organization, preparation	Two weeks	Assessing ideas, tone, depth
Coding	Two weeks	Bracketing, chunking, thematic analysis
Generating description and themes	Two weeks	Bracketing, chunking, thematic analysis
Describing and interrelating themes	Three weeks	Narrative (case study)
Interpreting themes and descriptions	Four weeks	Summarizing, collating to literature, discussion, member-checking
	Total: 13 weeks	

Note. Based on *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* (p.194), by J. Creswell and D. Creswell, 2018, Sage Publications.

Discussion of Results

In this section I will address some of the criteria referring to practical issues for my research project: availability of resources, time, cost, use of software tools, trustworthiness and

reliability, validity and credibility, and philosophical issues such as insider-outsider research and voice.

First, considering that my research was going to take place within UNED's teacher training program and the fact that I was going to use online strategies and resources such as interacting via Zoom and email mainly, in addition to WhatsApp instant messaging, and my university's Moodle platform with the participants frequently, I had no need to commute for face-to-face interviews, which effectively lowered my expenses but which may have hindered the building of rapport and even decreased levels of participation and involvement as the natural result of distant communication between researchers and participants (this is elaborated further in the subsection related to Voice below). By the time of this writing, due to the fact that all contact with them was established remotely, I can only speculate that distant communication could have affected my interaction with participants since I had no other point of comparison to verify or refute this assumption.

All in all, using technology extensively in order to interact with participants and dealing with possible restricted emotional rapport was inevitable considering the nature of UNED as a distance university, and perhaps more dramatically, the extraordinary circumstances due to the sanitary restrictions imposed as an official response to the COVID-19 panic. This made face-to-face conversations and meetings pointless due to this event and time and budget-saving factors. Conversely, face-to-face interaction might have had negative effects on my research process because of lack of comfort, reluctance on the participants' part, cost for them in terms of time and money, unattractiveness, etc. Once again, this is only a deduction in hindsight.

Although I had projected that in case of need I was going to request my university's support to access and train for the use of software for computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), such as NVivo or Atlas.ti to cope "with large quantities of text-based material rapidly and without the risk of human error in computation" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.544), such need did not arise. After looking at CAQDAS options and comparing costs, learning curves (based on online reviews and tutorials), easiness of access (hard drive or online), I settled for Dedoose (www.dedoose.com). This software offered advantages such as low monthly fees, being subscription-based rather than a software that I had to buy for a single project; low learning curve; 24/7 technical support; attractive and intuitive user interface; and even free synchronic introductory sessions for new users. This way, I was able to upload my instruments, data, and proceeded to code and analyze data directly online, which was practical and also safe in terms of backups and security (Dedoose guarantees absolute privacy and data protection as it requires a username and password to log in).

Regarding time, from my original plan of devoting two academic terms (eight months), I managed to reduce it to a single term (four months, approximately) to collect the information required to reach saturation of data, that is, "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.186). This was so because of the type of single case study I had selected (a single group and course during one semester) rather than two groups or two courses along two semesters.

Reliability

When dealing with reliability one of the clearest definitions found is in Cohen et al. (2011): "a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents. It is concerned with precision and accuracy" (p.199). Moreover, for Golafshani (2003), "reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm" (p. 604). This stipulates a close relation among reliability, validity, and trustworthiness, as discussed on a previous paper (Díaz-Ducca, 2018). To keep it simple, nonetheless, Creswell and Creswell (2018) conceptualize reliability as a "researcher's approach [which] is consistent across different researchers and among different projects" (p.199).

The way I see it, to be reliable means to be consistent as far as instruments and methods go, and thus, verifiable and replicable if needed in terms of procedures rather than results. I believe my research and the way methodology is described in this chapter, in addition to how instruments were designed and then attached to this report as part of the Appendices, illustrate that my intention was to present a reliable case study, easily replicable.

Validity

On the other hand, validity is defined by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as checking "for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p.199). As a researcher, I regard validity as remaining faithful to the participants' ideas and beliefs by means of using several validity procedures that guarantee the authentication of qualitative data, as summarized by

Creswell and Creswell (2018): triangulation (using different data sources); member checking (suggested by Freire's critical pedagogy, 2005a); thick descriptions (rich in details and multiple perspectives); clarification of researcher bias by means of reflexivity (stating "how the background of the researchers actually may shape the direction of the study", p.182); presenting discrepant information; spending "prolonged" time in the field; and recurring to an external auditor if necessary (p. 201).

Yin (2018) also suggests keeping a "chain of evidence" to construct validity, following the "derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study findings" (p.134) and recording all steps taken during the case study (also described in Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Besides, the author offers a series of tactics to enhance reliability and validity in case studies according to four "logical tests". This is shown in Table 4:

Table 4

Yin's "Case Study Tactics for Four Design Tests"

Test	Definition	Case study tactic	Phase of research
Construct validity	Correct operational measure for concepts	Use multiple sources of evidence	Data collection
		Establish chain of events	Data collection
		Have informants review draft report	Composition
Internal validity	Establishing a non-spurious causal relationship	Do pattern matching	Data collection
		Do explanatory building	
		Address rival explanation	
		Use logic models	
External validity	Establishing domain for generalization	Use theory in single case studies	Research design
		Use replication logic in multiple case studies	
Reliability	Repeatability of operations followed	Follow a protocol	Data collection
		Develop a database	

Note. Adapted from *Case Study Research by Robert Yin (2003)*, by S. Pavan, April 26, 2014.

(https://www.slideshare.net/pavan7soni/case-study-research-by-robert-yin-2003).

At the end of this section I must add that I expect my research to be valid because I have followed validity procedures for the authentication of data such as: triangulation by comparing and contrasting data through different instruments; member checking whenever I found necessary; thick descriptions that report different perspectives; clarification regarding my bias as a researcher (here and in Chapters 5 and 6); presenting discrepant information (in terms of participants' voices and data); and recording a basic "chain of evidence". Nevertheless, I also

acknowledge that this should be ultimately judged by the reader, including the application of Yin's logical tests if desired.

Insider-outsider research and voice

Before concluding, I will refer to insider-outsider research and voice. In the case of this project, since I worked with a teacher-mentor and teacher-students in my own university, I can declare that I enjoyed the advantages of doing insider research, in a manner that did facilitate the establishing of rapport as long as all possible anonymity was granted (see the ethical implications discussed above). Thus, according to Dwyer (2009), in insider research the researcher shares "an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants [allowing] more rapid and more complete acceptance by their participants [who] are typically more open [so that] there may be a greater depth to the data gathered" (p.58).

In opposition, the student-teachers who enrolled in the online course studied may have seen me as an outsider. Just like in the previous instance, this is a mere speculation considering the low response I received from students during the instrument pretesting as well as the actual study. For example, it was necessary to send several reminders to some students about deadlines for participation confirmation and the submission of online questionnaires. In general, however, once students agreed to participate in my case study, they maintained an enthusiastic attitude and were very cooperative. This applies also for the course instructor and the EFL major authorities.

At all times I was careful about ethical issues like protecting privacy, non-traceability (by means of confidentiality techniques), anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study in

order to gain their trust and collaboration. As addressed above, anonymity was easier to keep for

students, while administrative authorities and the course instructor herself understood that

although their names were not going to be mentioned at any time, it would be very easy for

students, teachers, and other administrative members of the major or the School who might

eventually read my report, to guess their name. Finally, it is important to emphasize that for all

three groups member checking and the benefits of my research were offered too.

Let us discuss briefly the concept of voice within the Constructivist language learning

classroom as implemented within the Community of Inquiry model. According to Giroux, voice

refers to "the discourses available to use-- to make ourselves understood and listened to […]

Critical pedagogy takes into account the various ways in which the voices that teachers use to

communicate with students can either silence or legitimate them" (in Rogers, 2011, p.454).

As a result, due to my intention to adhere to Freire's principles for critical pedagogy

(2005a), listening, recording, reporting, and helping students (and other participants) find their

own voice were all conditions for developing a dialogical process of communication. In addition,

the teacher's voice was also heard and reported as she interacted with students, in order to

understand different perspectives whenever they were expressed in the form of discourse inside

the class, during interviews, or in the students' final papers, for example. Based on the way that

their opinions, values, and testimony were recorded and analyzed, as well as reported in Chapter

4 and discussed in Chapter 5, I trust that the participants' voices have been faithfully conveyed to

provide the reader with thick descriptions, a rich social and academic context, and a complex

view of the multiple perspectives which shaped my case study.

Summary and Conclusions

To recapitulate, for my project I decided on a single case study because of the vast possibilities for description and interpretation required by my research problem. Critical Discourse Analysis was applied based on the three theoretical spheres discussed in Chapter 2 and synthesized in my Convergent Theoretical model: Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a), the CoI framework, and collaborative leadership (Garrison, 2016). Such approach allowed for a study where different voices from the three groups of participants (administrative authorities, course instructor, and students) had the chance of expressing themselves as spontaneously as possible. Data was collected during a single term at my university and then data analysis and discussion took 13 extra weeks in order to establish themes and interpret their relation within the classroom and how they answered my research questions (reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5).

Data collection

As depicted in Table 2 above, the data collection selection of instruments (questionnaires for videoconference interviews, criteria sheets to be used in class observation, and selection of documents and artifacts) took into consideration the dialogical aspect of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP) as a means to establish rapport, trust, and democratic power relations. In terms of the CoI, preparation allowed me to focus on the Teaching Presence (TP), Cognitive Presence (CP), and Social Presence (SP) along with the Emotional Presence (EP). In other words, each presence was addressed in terms of the items that I wanted to include in the

interviews. Likewise, collaborative leadership (CL) items were incorporated in regards to the purpose of education (Cleveland-Innes, 2012), "leadership in context" (Cleveland-Innes and Sangrà, 2010), cooperation for a common goal and shared responsibility (Garrison, 2016), and a common purpose (Vaughan et al., 2013).

Thus, for the design and the application of both the initial and the final round of interviews as well as the criteria sheets for class observation and document analysis, elements such as dialogicity, voice, rapport, democratic exchanges (based on FCP) were respected and applied. Related to CoI, the presences were catered for as the items and criteria in the interview forms (questionnaires). For CL, as explained above, the main criteria were also integrated into the instruments utilized. All of these instruments can be found in the Appendices section at the end of this paper.

Data analysis

Likewise, the main criteria for FCP, CoI, and CL were ingrained during the stages of preparation and organization of data (as criteria checklists, for example). For the second and third stages depicted in Table 3, that is, coding and generating description and themes, the main tenets for FCP, CoI, and CL as mentioned in this chapter and described in detail in Chapter 2 were addressed either as checklists, or the actual base for coding and thematic analysis. This process, preestablished and then adapted to the data gathered, facilitated coding, describing, and interrelating themes according to those theoretical categories in relation to my research questions.

The most complex stage was coding of data into themes, which then were used to "read" the data and establish relationships in order to describe and interpret the participants' voices and the context of the case study. This allowed for deeper exploration of elements related to FCP, the presences in CoI and collaborative leadership that required careful analysis and demanded member checking for clarification or validation.

Ethics and bias

Regarding reliability, instrument design and keeping track of my steps as a chain of events were used as strategies to make this a reliable case study, which could be reproduced by future research if desired. In addition, in order to guarantee validity, triangulation between instruments and data was implemented, as well as member checking for clarification and validation, and thick descriptions that emphasized depth rather than width of the case study, data, and context. The participants' voices were preserved as far as possible while aiming for anonymity, and spontaneity, as can be read in Chapter 5. For this process, distant communication and technology became the main means for contacting my participants, which may have affected to an undetermined degree the building of rapport, due to the particular time setting during which this case study was developed (COVID-19 governmental and institutional restrictions).

As a closing statement, I was aware of my bias as a researcher in a qualitative case study like this one, so I tried to distance myself from the data and participants' statements to be as faithful as possible to their ideas and opinions. Therefore, there are plenty of verbatim transcriptions in Chapter 5, and a summary of their main ideas as reported in Chapter 4. Despite

my efforts, it is the reader who will have the final word regarding validity, reliability, voice, and

reflexivity within my own research bias.

Chapter 4 - Results

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, the instruments used to collect data were video interviews with participants focused on critical thinking, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and collaborative leadership; an online survey with items related to the different presences of the Community of Inquiry framework; two non-participatory class observations; and the analysis of artifacts such as students' final project papers, and the official course outline. The summary of findings of all data types will be presented by instrument. More details on how data was coded was described in Chapter 3 (Methodology).

As presented in Chapter 3, the researcher interviewed by videoconference the course teacher, and five students two times each: once at the beginning of the term, and once at the end, to compare the participants' views regarding the main topics of critical thinking and collaborative leadership in the course and the class. Besides, the Director of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (to which the English Teaching major belongs) and the Department of English Teaching coordinator were interviewed once. The video recordings were later transcribed by the researcher, and excerpts were coded following the main topics suggested by the research interviews as well as new topics that emerged from the data itself. The data was then translated into English and is analyzed and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Regarding the online survey, it was a questionnaire with criteria related to the four presences that compose the CoI framework. The survey was designed as a True/False

questionnaire, that is, as closed questions, so participants could express agreement or disagreement, or confirm if an element was present in the online classroom. However, each item had a follow-up question with a comment box so participants could elaborate further if they so desired. As this survey was applied using Google Forms, the results were tallied by the Google algorithm itself, and those results were later coded using the same set of codes developed with the interviews, plus new any new ones that data suggested.

The course included only four synchronic sessions, and following the advice of the Department coordinator, only two were observed since those two were the most interactive instances out of the four, according to the course outline and design. These sessions were recorded by the course teacher who then shared the link with the researcher. The researcher then viewed the sessions, transcribed the most relevant fragments, and finally coded those excerpts using the same set of codes described above in addition to any new ones as needed. Most of these data was already in English.

Lastly, course artifacts such as the official course outline and the participating students' final project papers were shared by the course teacher. The researcher later proceeded to code those documents in the same manner described already. It is relevant to add that the researcher kept a journal during the process of data collection and analysis, to note down observations that could be used during the stages of analysis and discussion of results as well. These notes were not coded, but included the code set to use a language harmonious with the research questions and coding themes. Some of these notes will be used as assets for discussion in Chapter 5.

For qualitative data management, media storage, coding, and analysis Dedoose was utilized due to the advantages it offers in terms of its learning curve, easy use, easy access (as this is an online web-based service), security characteristics, and affordable rates.

Summary of Findings by Data Types

Profile of participants:

As mentioned above, the Director of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, and the Coordinator of the Department of English Teaching for First and Second Cycles were interviewed in their role of authorities in charge of the EFL major.

The other participants were the course instructor and five students who agreed to take part in the data collection process. The information regarding their background and teaching experience is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Profile and Background of Participants

Participant's position or role at UNED	Levels taught (in order of importance)	Years of experience:
School Director	Higher education	22
Department Coordinator	Higher education, secondary school, primary school	22
Course Instructor	Higher education, secondary school, language institutes, primary school	30
Students (5): 4 female 1 male Ages: 22 to 40	Primary school, language institutes, secondary school, immigrant centers	2 to 20

Interviews with School Director and Department Coordinator:

The results of the video interviews with the Director of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Coordinator of the Department of English Teaching for First and Second Cycles are included in Tables 6 and 7 below.

Table *6*

Summary of Interview Answers by Themes Reported by the Director of the School of Social

Sciences and Humanities

Questionnaire item (refers to theme):	Main findings:
(2) Definition of critical thinking	It is an opportunity for teachers to give students the chance to think, reason, discuss and defend positions, and thus, leading to improvement and growth.
(2) Definition of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP)	Freedom to teach, search, and do from a conscious and responsible framework.
(5) How critical thinking is incorporated into the course	It is all over the syllabus: contents and assessment. It is a guide towards goals and a "timely" way to develop skills and abilities in students.
(6) Type of power relations in the classroom	Teaching requires leadership so students can grow and be able to address issues and defend positions. It also requires being humble.
(7) Teachers as agents of social change	Universities in some political contexts are "discomforting" because they must raise awareness and lead to change. Education should be a constant revolution for the well-being of human beings and a better quality of life.
(9) Definition of Collaborative Leadership (CL)	No one is capable of carrying out a task authentically alone. There is a need for convincing and making the collaborators aware that their contribution should be constant. Collaborating is sharing and discussing with freedom to contribute with ideas and defend own views.
(12) Importance of leadership inside and outside the UNED classroom	It is difficult but achievable. Students contribute and lead in some university projects (social media production, for example), which helps

	other students and their communities. Likewise, teachers lead by doing extension and research inside and outside the university.
(13) Switching roles in the classroom among teachers and students	The teacher learns from the student and the student from the teacher. That is why many are passionate about teaching. People never stop learning and never stop teaching.

In a similar manner, a synthesis of the interview answers provided by the Department

Coordinator is presented in Table 7 below.

Table *7*

Summary of Interview Answers by Themes Reported by the Coordinator of the English Teaching

Department

Questionnaire item (refers to theme):	Main findings:
(2) Definition of critical thinking	Development of CT it is not immediate, but happens through a lifetime. It should originate from knowledge, relating and interrelating data to justify, defend, and deconstruct course contents.
(2) Definition of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP)	Acknowledged not being an expert on the subject, but guessed that FCP arises from a very social situation seeking to improve the conditions of the social actors from an intelligent, measured, and well-thought-out position.
(5) How critical thinking is incorporated into the course	It is an aspiration and is currently being standardized within the teaching major. If there is clarity in the syllabus and curricular design, that will show on the course itself, so the activities that are promoted will focus on developing CT. It is expected from the entire curricular approach, the description of the courses, and their delivery that students will be able to demonstrate CT.
(6) Type of power relations in the classroom	There are teachers with a very self-centered teaching style: being an expert and keeping others silent. It is in the evaluation where these power structures are most noticeable. Human beings cannot be completely objective, there is always a bias although it may be unconscious.
(7) Teachers as agents of social change	Teachers need to know what is happening in their community and country. This will lead them to reflect on how to foster changes and how to transmit this need for agency to students. Education is a mechanism to think about social interaction. By replicating those attitudes,

	situations can change.
(8) Views on classroom activities	They are important and necessary. They promote thinking and the opportunity for students to express disagreement and also make proposals. However, if such is the central objective, that is not being achieved in the major. There must be clear instructions for the activities, so that all team members will work, contribute, and produce.
(9) Definition of Collaborative Leadership (CL)	It is the ability to organize, develop, lead the way, and involve all the members of a group so as to have a participatory attitude. Such a leader knows how to promote and develop growth and benefits for all within what is being created: a proposal, an idea, a product.
(12) Importance of leadership inside and outside the UNED classroom	Some students are already leaders and some are not, but they must be encouraged, so that everyone at some point plays a role of proposing and participating. From the EFL teacher's perspective, it is necessary to promote spaces with dialogue not focused on error but on content. Eventually, recently graduated teaches will work in their own institutions articulating those attitudes.
(13) Switching roles in the classroom among teachers and students	Within the UNED learning model, students have a 100% active role, almost like their teachers'. The teacher's own role is to accompany rather than dictate or lecture, but sometimes that is unavoidable. Depending on the subject, eespecially those closely linked to expertise, a greater presence of teacher support will be needed, so that the students discover, explore, and self-criticize.

Interviews with course instructor:

For the course instructor, two video interviews were applied, one at the beginning of the course, and another once the course had ended. A summary of the most relevant data appears in Table 8, including the initial answers and the final answers, to compare and contrast if there were any changes from one interview to the other.

Table 8

Summary of Interview Answers by Themes Reported by Course Instructor

Questionnaire item (refers to theme):	Data from initial questionnaire:	Variations in final questionnaire:
(2) Definition of critical thinking	It is what education should develop in students, so they can understand contents and create their own vision of the world.	No variation reported.
(2) Definition of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP)	She could not remember the theory, but guessed that it was related to people's ability to generate their own ideas based on information received from different sources. It is not just about reading and understanding.	No variation reported.
(5) How critical thinking is incorporated into the course	After years of studies and experience, she described it as supporting and guiding students where they need it, which is precisely in the emotional, the critical, and creative areas in the classroom. In the course this was incorporated when students had to think, decide, choose, and imagine.	She hoped to have instilled enough in students the meaning of becoming authors and managers of knowledge through class activities. Thus, in the future they would be able to do research in the classroom in order to solve problems and find solutions. This, however, was achieved at an

		introductory level in the course.
(6) Type of power relations in the classroom	She was happy with UNED students because they are empowered, responsible, and ethical. UNED is a university that is accessible, and focused on making people like the country and the world need.	She tried to be flexible, to listen to students, and to communicate with them. Having only four workshops for synchronous interaction, she found this very challenging. In many cases, students were unresponsive to her asynchronous messages.
(7) Teachers as agents of social change	Teachers have to be agents of change, and if they do not have the possibility of speaking freely, they become useless because today people can find knowledge by their own on internet. Teachers should encourage people to think and listen to others so they can understand and question. Education should allow for such spaces of discussion.	She elaborated by questioning humanism's paradigms imposed at the institutional level and how they have created in students a false sense of reality and of knowing better than their teachers. There are many things a teacher may perceive but cannot change in society.
(8) Views on classroom activities	She felt happy about having the chance of implementing activities that motivated participation, dialogue, role switching, and critical thinking at UNED, although she wished she could have dedicated more time for longer and deeper discussions.	She gave detail on which activities were actually implemented during the course: there were no debates, but there were critical discussions, group work, problem analysis, and proposals of solutions. The last two mainly during the preparation of students' research proposals.
(9) Definition of Collaborative Leadership (CL)	She compared CL to what takes place at UNED: each person has a role, but everyone is ready to help and collaborate with others. In addition to	She stated that if leadership was present, that meant that students were working collaboratively. Collaborative work implies

	collaboration, she found trust and support at UNED in case of need. In the classroom, students feel their teachers' support and understand teachers are making their best effort.	leadership, somebody who takes the initiative by guiding others, setting an example, and even starting the project.
(12) Importance of leadership inside and outside the UNED classroom	She saw leadership taking place in the classroom when students take the initiative working together and even giving feedback to the teacher. Outside the classroom leadership should unfold as well, but that depends on each person's personality: some are leaders and some are followers.	She said she believed she had not changed her views, but that she hoped students had learned how to implement research in their professional practice.
(13) Switching roles in the classroom among teachers and students	Teachers learn throughout life. When people teach, they also learn, refresh, and "re-understand" topics in a broader, new way. Students who share this view will be the most willing to collaborate and participate in class. Teachers' and students' roles should be interchangeable at any time.	She reflected on her experience as a former UNED student, and how switching roles had always been "the student's part at UNED". What takes place during workshops is done by the students themselves. Thus, in their collaborative work, they assume leadership and prove they have learned. However, she found that the current way of conducting workshops was more practical and pleasant than in the past.

Interviews with students:

Following the same steps as with the instructor, participating students were interviewed twice. There was an initial interview in the first two weeks of the course, and then a final

interview during the last week of the term, or once the course was over. Due to obvious reasons, only a summary of representative statements will be reported here. Further examples and discussion can be found in the following chapter. This is shown in Table 9.

Table *9*

Summary of Interview Answers by Themes as Reported by Students

Questionnaire themes:	Data from initial questionnaire:	Variations in final questionnaire:
Critical thinking (CT): definition and importance	It meant going beyond the information or data they received. It required mixing theory and practice based on their own reality, creating an opinion of their own.	Most of them considered that CT was very important as students and teachers and that they developed it by becoming autonomous learners and when they related theory to reality.
Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP): definition and importance	Students could not remember or explain what it was about. One of them guessed that FCP meant regarding students as a whole in their social, economic, political contexts in order to break the teacher-centered views on education.	No variation reported.
How critical thinking was incorporated into the course	Answers rotated around the academic challenges the research course represented to them. Some of them, however, highlighted the degree of autonomy they had regarding their research topic and research process, while the teacher played a guiding role.	CT was present in activities like the article critique, and particularly in the last workshop, because students could provide critical feedback on course design and structure. The class allowed for plenty of "self-analysis" and reflection on their research project. Most mentioned that their research proposal helped them develop CT due to the focus on their professional reality and experience.

Type of power relations in the classroom	Some students remarked the teacher's weighty role as an evaluator within the context of the distance education classroom. They considered that in face-to-face environments, they would have had more chance of negotiating with the teacher. Two of them referred to previous experiences being too teacher-centered, but agreed on the importance of having a teacher that acted as a guide.	In spite of acknowledging that the instructor had been flexible and receptive, students found that the power balance was tipped in favor of the teacher, as she had the last word, basically during evaluation. Two of them dubbed students being in control as an "illusion".
Teachers as agents of social change	All agreed on the point that teachers are agents of change. For some, the teacher works as a role model for students, for others, the teacher should generate empathy inside and outside the classroom. One student reflected on her practice and how teachers could be positive or negative agents of social change.	Students coincided on the relevance of the responsibility teaching implies. As role models, facilitators, motivators, inspirers, and figures of authority, they influence their own students. This demands caution and awareness.
Views on classroom activities	They expressed interest in activities that foster debate, class discussions, and group work. For some, other options for asynchronous interaction like forums or Google Drive were also attractive. One student felt that during the course she was frequently told that she was not doing her work well.	In descending order of importance, students highlighted problem solving (research proposals), problem posing, critical discussions, and group work as the most useful activities for learning, tackling academic tasks and challenges, and fostering CT.
Definition of Collaborative Leadership (CL)	They described CL as a team effort to achieve a common goal. Also, they saw it as the	Most of them confirmed their previous definitions as a joint effort to reach goals, while others did not

	ability to "take action" without the need of having a particular person leading the rest. There was an emphasis on acting rather than talking. One student defined it as a "do ut des", because it was based on mutual understanding and sharing.	define CL a second time. The majority agreed that the stress and difficulty of the research project and the confusion caused by conflicting instructions had brought them together as a group since they needed to share and communicate more often. This was done basically through instant messaging.
Importance of leadership inside and outside the UNED classroom	Some students felt UNED's pedagogical model was restrictive because most of the work was individual rather than a joint effort. However, they that thought outside the classroom there was space for taking the initiative in their academic tasks. As teachers, they also added that their experience at UNED pushed them to become leaders in their own institution and in their community.	Students found that in a demanding course like this, teacher leadership as orientation and their own leadership outside the classroom were mandatory for success. Student leadership was reported as collaborative. As teachers, leadership implied responsibility as role models and figures of authority within their communities.
Switching roles in the classroom among teachers and students	This can be difficult because of the UNED model itself since it focuses on results rather than processes. This meant chances for role switching were limited. They concurred that there should be more opportunities for students to switch and assume a teaching role in the classroom in order to make their learning process more enriching.	Conflicting opinions were reported here. For some, the degree of difficulty of the course forced them to study by themselves, or teach themselves and their peers. For others, the course fell short in terms of offering students the chance of teaching and learning from each other. They blamed this on UNED's model rather than class management.

Online survey on CoI ("CoI Checklist Questionnaire") for instructor and students:

See Table 10 below for a selection of the most significant results of both online CoI questionnaires filled out by the instructor and five students.

Table 10

Selection of Community of Inquiry Presence Items Reported in Instructor and Student CoI Online Questionnaires

CoI presence and selected items (with original item number from students' online questionnaire):	Positive response reported by the six participants:	
Cognitive Presence:	Teacher	Students (%)
(7) Students in the course are motivated to explore content related questions.	Yes	100
(19) Online discussions are facilitated in a way that is valuable for helping students appreciate different perspectives.	Yes	60
(20) Teacher encourages course participants to explore new concepts in the course.	Yes	100
(23) Brainstorming and finding relevant information helps students resolve content related questions.	Yes	60
(41) Students develop solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	Yes	100
Social and Emotional Presences:	Teacher	Students (%)
(9) The instructor acknowledges emotion expressed by the students in the course.	Yes	40
(16) Students feel comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.	Yes	60
(18) Expressing emotion in relation to sharing ideas is acceptable in the course.	Yes	100
(24) The instructor demonstrates emotion in presentations and/or when facilitating discussions,	Yes	100

online.		
(26) Students feel their point of view is acknowledged by other course participants.	Yes	100
(30) Students feel comfortable interacting with other course participants.	Yes	100
Teaching Presence:	Teacher	Students
(6) Teacher's actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among course participants.	Yes	80
(10) Teacher clearly communicates important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	Yes	80
(13) Teacher provides feedback in a timely fashion.	Yes	60
(14) Teacher provides feedback that helps students understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the course goals and objectives.	Yes	0 (100% negative answers)
(27) Students in the course feel comfortable taking on the role of teacher when the opportunity arises.	Yes	100
(29) Teacher keeps course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	Yes	100

Class observation checklists (including researcher's notes):

For a quick view, a selection of the most significant results from class observations is presented in Table 11 below, including the same criteria as in Table 9. Both will be compared and contrasted in the next chapter.

Table 11

Selection of Community of Inquiry Presence Items Reported in Class Observation Checklists

CoI presence and selected items (with original item number from students' online questionnaire):	Summary of main findings:
Cognitive Presence:	
(7) Students in the course are motivated to explore content related questions.	In general, some of them were. Those who made presentations showed the most interest.
(19) Online discussions are facilitated in a way that is valuable for helping students appreciate different perspectives.	Forums were used for social and class management purposes. Students kept a WhatsApp group for sharing resources and perspectives.
(20) Teacher encourages course participants to explore new concepts in the course.	She was encouraging. However, because of time constraints, she motivated them to do so outside the class.
(23) Brainstorming and finding relevant information helps students resolve content related questions.	Only two instances of brainstorming were observed. Finding relevant information and student autonomy and independence were strongly recommended by the teacher.
(41) Students develop solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	They briefly discussed some solutions they found when tackling the academic tasks of the course. As teachers, they commented on how they might apply their classroom learning in their own teaching practice and through their research project.
Social and Emotional Presences:	
(9) The instructor acknowledges emotion expressed by the students in the course.	She was supportive, respectful, empathic, and built rapport through words and body language (nods, smiles, laughs).
(16) Students feel comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.	Although there were only a pair of instances where this took place, students were empathic and non-confrontational.

(18) Expressing emotion in relation to sharing ideas is acceptable in the course.	It was acceptable. Teacher and classmates were empathic, respectful, and supportive of each other.
(24) The instructor demonstrates emotion in presentations and/or when facilitating discussions, online.	She did by means of body language, praise, and telling personal anecdotes regarding her own experience as a learner and teacher.
(26) Students feel their point of view is acknowledged by other course participants.	Evidence of this was limited to teacher's acknowledgment rather than peer recognition.
(30) Students feel comfortable interacting with other course participants.	They showed some signs of this in a limited manner.
Teaching Presence:	
(6) Teacher's actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among course participants.	Yes, she was supportive and encouraged students to participate and take risks as individuals and as a group.
(10) Teacher clearly communicates important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	She was very clear about this.
(13) Teacher provides feedback in a timely fashion.	She did, to the point of "stopping" the class to make sure feedback and her message got through.
(14) Teacher provides feedback that helps students understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the course goals and objectives.	Yes, she focused on both strengths and areas that required more work.
(27) Students in the course feel comfortable taking on the role of teacher when the opportunity arises.	During presentations and "teaching moments", they looked confident, serene, knowledgeable, and were clear.
(29) Teacher keeps course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	She made an effort. However, the class was very rigid in general. Dialogue took place but interaction was limited.

Artifact - Course Outline:

To code the official Course Outline document, the codes or themes developed for the analysis of results were applied without the use of a specific instrument. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework is not included in the table since one of the initial assumptions for this research project was that the UNED EFL teaching major classroom functions already as a CoI.

Besides, although no overt mention of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP) was found, related themes (subcodes for the FCP parent code) such as power relations, teachers as agents of social change, and role switching appear in the table. Thus, the main findings are synthesized in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Summary of Main findings in the Official Course Outline

Questionnaire themes:	In document section:	Summary of findings:
Critical thinking (CT) in the course and activities	General Objective and Learning Objectives	CT was specifically mentioned and assessed.
	Activities: Research Project and Draft, WebQuest, and Article Critique, under their Description and Evaluation Rubrics	CT was specifically mentioned and assessed.
	General Instructions for Students' Independent Study	Students were encouraged to study contents in advance, participate in class, and support their arguments with suitable data.
Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP)	Not found	Not mentioned specifically
Power relations in the classroom	General Description of the course	Students were reminded their drafts were checked by the instructor for feedback and orientation.
	General Instructions for Students' Independent Study	Students were encouraged to be independent, but also were reminded of the importance of complying with deadlines in order to be considered "by the coordination".
	Activities: Research Project and Draft, WebQuest, Padlet activity, and Article Critique, under their Description and Evaluation Rubrics	Students were reminded of the importance of complying with evaluation criteria and deadlines.
Role switching between	Activities: Research Project	Students made presentations,

teacher and students	and Article Critique, under their Description and Evaluation Rubrics	shared with partners, offered examples, answered their partners' questions about theory and its application, and described their research problem.
Problem posing and problem solving	Learning Objectives	Students had to select a research topic and propose a research problem or hypothesis.
	Activities: Article Critique and Research Project, under the Description and Evaluation Rubrics	Students had to choose a problem to research about and propose solutions to it by means of their future research.
Teachers as agents of social change	Not found	Not mentioned specifically
Collaborative Leadership (CL)	Methodology	Leadership was not mentioned in the document. However, students were urged to do individual study, participate in class and via the Moodle platform, engage in cooperative work, share ideas, and provide feedback to their partners during the workshops.
	Activities: Article Critique and Research Project, under the Description and Evaluation Rubrics	In pairs or trios, students had to select, analyze, and present an article to the class drawing their own conclusions. For their research project, they had to individually present their topic, and offer feedback to their partners' proposals as a class.
Leadership inside and outside the UNED classroom	Not found	Not mentioned specifically

Students' final research papers ("CoI, FCP, CL Checklist"):

For the coding of students' papers, a CoI criteria checklist was developed (see Appendix J). However, since their final project was an individual proposal, the instrument focused on aspects related exclusively to the Cognitive Presence (in addition to Freire's Critical Pedagogy and Collaborative leadership).

A summary of the evidence of Cognitive Presence found (or its lack thereof) is shown in Table 13 below:

Table 13

Summary of Cognitive Presence Evidence Found in Students' Final Papers (as Related to CoI,

Taken from Appendix J)

CoI Criteria (for Cognitive Presence only):	Evidence present (per percentage of participant students)
1. Artifact shows evidence that student can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge learned.	100
1. Artifact shows evidence that student is motivated to explore content-related questions.	100
2. Artifact shows evidence of student's curiosity.	100
3. Artifact shows evidence that student appreciates different perspectives.	(no clear evidence)
4. Artifact shows evidence that student combines new information helping student answer questions raised in course activities.	80
5. Artifact shows evidence that student brainstorms and includes relevant information helping student resolve content-related questions.	60
6. Artifact shows evidence that learning activities help student construct explanations/solutions.	100
7. Artifact shows evidence that student utilizes a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in course.	100 (literature and direct experience)
8. Artifact shows evidence that problems posed increase student's interest in course content.	60
9. Artifact shows evidence that student can apply the knowledge created in course to own work or other non-class related activities.	100
10. Artifact shows evidence that student develops solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	100

Some unexpected but suggestive themes were emerged from the data, such as the way participants regard themselves in their role as agents of social change, power relations in the classroom, and how technology contributes to social learning. These are shown on Table 14 below and will be discussed under the research subquestions in Chapter 5 as expansions on research subquestions 9, 10, and 11 correspondingly.

Table 14

Unexpected Findings Related to Self-views as Agents of Social Change, Power Relations, and the Contribution of Technology to Social Learning

Theme suggested by data:	Summary of main findings:
Self-views as agents of social change	As teachers they can empower students when helping them develop CT skills. This is reflected as a positive attitude, empathy, commitment, and social responsibility. For the School Director and Department Coordinator, this is one of the key roles of higher education.
Power relations in the classroom	They should be democratic in order to provide spaces for dialogue, problem posing, and problem solving in the classroom. However, students found power relations to be unequal and "an illusion" since the course instructor always had the last word during assessment and grading.
Contributions of technology for social learning	Technology in the form of LMS, email, video classes, and instant messaging functioned as a substratum for social learning and the development of the three presences of CoI. Instant messaging, in particular, played a key role for the building of a tight-knit sense of community among students (SP), and allowed them to work together and exchange materials and opinions in order to face their academic challenges (CP, TP, CL, role switching). The School Director, Department Coordinator, and course instructor were wary about the misuse of technology and internet, as this may create in students a false sense of knowledge and hinder the development of CT skills.

Summary and Conclusions

As a conclusion for this chapter, the main findings related to the three theoretical concepts for this research project are presented here, that is, the data related to the CoI framework (CoI), Freire's Critical Pedagogy and Critical Thinking (FCP and CT), and Collaborative Leadership (CL).

These concepts and the most important themes will be analyzed and discussed in the light of the theoretical framework in Chapter 5. For the time being, however, it is my intention to emphasize and summarize them here before the reader moves on to the next chapter.

CoI framework:

Instructor and Student Online Questionnaires report predominant evidence of Cognitive, Social, and Teacher Presence. In addition to other instruments, the data shows that participants consider elements of the CoI framework were present in the course. Cognitive, Teacher, and Social and Emotional Presences can be found in the UNED classroom according to participants. SP in particular was developed also by means of instant messaging technology outside the classroom, as reported by students in order to succeed in their academic tasks (TP, CP).

Freire's Critical Pedagogy and critical thinking:

Although there was no explicit evidence as to Freire's Critical Pedagogy either in the course materials, students' proposals, or other instruments, on top of the stated ignorance of FCP's as such, there were clear data reflecting critical thinking in the course syllabus, class delivery, class activities, and research proposals. Participants also acknowledged the importance

of critical thinking within and without the UNED classroom, including the responsibility they have as role models and agents of social change.

Collaborative Leadership:

Hand in glove with critical thinking, collaborative leadership was mentioned by participants as part of the course content and delivery and the EFL major itself. Having a common goal, working together, and helping each other are relevant traits of CL detected in the collected data. Participants, and in particular instructor and students, consider that group work and mutual feedback are key elements for tackling academic challenges, in addition to sharing ideas and opinions. Besides, being able to work together while exchanging roles as teachers and students, and giving and receiving feedback are clear ways to exert collaborative leadership.

Further elements addressed above will be discussed in Chapter 5, as related to the connection between theory and practical data reported by participants, be it at UNED, the EFL teaching major, and the teaching and learning experience throughout this course in particular.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Introduction

After the presentation of the main findings of each instrument in the previous chapter, here I will delve into the discussion of data and how they relate and answer my original research question and the subquestions. For this purpose, as it was explained in Chapter 3, as part of the methodology for this research project the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be used from a theoretical perspective of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP), the Community of Inquiry model (CoI), and Garrison's Collaborative Leadership (CL). In addition, Comparative Case Studies (CSS), due to its focus on the "unfolding" and "iterative" nature of case study contexts (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) will also be applied, which will entail the discussion of some recurrent topics under different subquestions, as data and findings integrate in a truly iterative and complex manner rather than a linear path of analysis and discussion.

Both my research problem and my original research question will be reproduced next. Thus, my research problem was exploring how in a developing country like Costa Rica, where EFL education has been implemented for many decades now, constructivist teacher training in the distance classroom (understood as a CoI) has included the learning of Critical Thinking (CT) skills from the perspective of liberating pedagogical practices such as FCP. Therefore, my research problem addresses which aspects of (Freire's) Critical Pedagogy (if any) are taught and learned in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom for preservice teachers, when such distance classroom functions as a CoI that also includes elements from Garrison's CL.

An Answer to Our Overarching Research Question

The answer to our overarching question summarizes the main issues discussed below in detail under the corresponding research subquestion. It will also help the reader have a wider perspective of all the elements taken into consideration for the discussion in this chapter. Let us include this this project's overarching question one more time:

To what extent are critical thinking skills (as understood by Freire, 2005a) taught and learned in the distance EFL preservice teacher distance education?

CT skills were taught and learned during the course as the data revealed. CT skills were part of the Course Outline, they were included in the assessment criteria used in class, mentioned by participants during their interviews, observed by the researcher during the workshops, and their evidence was also found in the student's final papers.

Key elements to FCP were also in sight: plenty of deliberative dialogue, predominantly democratic power relations, an honest interest to assist students find and express their own voices, including the situations they perceived during the course and within their own institutions as EFL teachers. This translated into problem posing and problem solving, in the form of critical discussions and dialogue, negotiation with their teacher, teamwork, and the proposal of solutions inside the classroom (when talking to their instructor), and outside (students collaborating and leading together in the face of academic challenges).

In addition, the most important aspect of FCP was detected and overtly stated as well: the unequivocal conviction of the EFL program authorities, the course instructor, and the students themselves that their role as teachers was contributing to the improvement of their immediate

reality by working as agents of social change. Such position reflected commitment and social responsibility, and an adamant awareness that as EFL teachers, they play a key role as facilitators, models, motivators, instructors, and members of the learning communities in which they work and thrive.

With all these elements considered, are students acquiring and applying CT skills in the UNED EFL classroom? Yes, indeed. Moreover, are these CT skills compatible with FCP? Yes, they are. This begs the last question: in the EFL major and this course in particular was FCP put into practice? It was, if we examine the elements reported. But were there any hints or quotations as to what FCP and Freire's ideas are? No, there were not. Quite the contrary, none of them mentioned Freire nor Freire's tenets. There were educated guesses about them in the best of cases. Therefore, we can add that in fact, students do acquire CT skills as prescribed by FCP, but which cannot be truly qualified as Freirean since there is no awareness as to his theory and ideas. Would Freire mind such a thing? Would he regard this social learning environment as Freirean? This is a matter worth addressing in the next and last chapter as part of conclusions and recommendations. For the time being, however, let us proceed to discuss the data as pertinent to each research subquestion.

Discussion by Research Subquestion

Extracts from relevant data from each type of instrument are grouped below under each subheading, which corresponds to a research subquestion. Thus, themes developed for coding refer to main topics as suggested by each subquestion. Due to this manner of organizing and

presenting my data collection results and discussion, pieces of data obtained with each instrument will be mentioned, and as needed, they will be addressed in the light of the theory presented in Chapter 2, Review of the Literature.

In order to remind the reader, these are the research subquestions for this study as they will be individually discussed next:

1. *How is critical thinking incorporated into the syllabus?*

2. *How is critical thinking incorporated into class activities?*

3. *How is critical thinking assessed?*

4. *To what extent is this preservice teacher distance classroom a Community of Inquiry?*

5. *How does this CoI environment contribute to the teaching of critical thinking?*

6. *How does collaborative leadership (as understood by Garrison, 2016) enrich this process of learning?*

7. *What is the teachers' and students' attitude towards learning and teaching English? Should English be considered an "imperialistic" language? What is the role of EFL in the 21*[st] *century?*

8. *How do participants describe their social environment?*

9. *How do participants see themselves, as learners, classmates, human beings? (Including their views as agents of social change as a theme found during data collection)*

10. *How is the students' interaction with the instructor and the institution? (Including power relations within the preservice teacher classroom)*

11. *What other social elements are influential to their social learning? (Including technology as a substratum for social learning)*

12. *What problems or contradictions do they perceive as related to the development of critical thinking in their teacher training program? What's causing them?*

13. *According to the participants, how could these problems be solved in order to transform their reality as student-teachers and future teachers?*

14. *What recommendations can participants and researcher design together in order to put into practice the solutions proposed, so as to transform their learning reality into a democratic and liberating experience as conceptualized by Freire?*

In this manner, each subquestion will be introduced next as a subheading with the corresponding discussion of collected data by instruments with a selection of the most important themes, findings, or quotes as necessary. In addition, elements from the theory presented in Chapter 2 are added in order to support, extend, and enrich the discussion accordingly.

1- How is critical thinking incorporated into the syllabus?

Artifacts: CT appeared in the Course Outline under the general objective of the course, as it referred to analyzing theories and principles of research when designing a research project. It also showed on the learning objectives that dealt with examining, making distinctions, and using appropriate strategies to determine relevance of sources, and revising ethical guidelines. Also, CT was part of the course contents such as "Selecting and defining a research topic", reviewing

literature, and selecting a sample population. Furthermore, "organizational skills" that students should develop and apply such as previous study of class materials, preparation of questions, and active participation "during group sessions and oral presentations" were detailed.

Interviews: The School Director stated that CT could be found in different instances of the major as part of the curriculum, evaluation, and contents, and it had the function of giving direction to the curriculum itself. On the other hand, the Department coordinator considered that if there was clarity in the curricular design and the curriculum of the English major, the course should contribute to developing CT in students. This was a joint effort among the other departments in the English Teaching major, so that students would develop CT in order to "write down their own ideas, justify them, and support them with sources, so that classmates may question these ideas by means of dialogue", and thus, construct knowledge.

For the course professor, CT was part of the research skills that students acquired, allowing them to act as authors and generators of knowledge so as to find solutions to problems by looking for resources in a creative way. On the other hand, for students, CT was present when they had to reflect on what worked in their own teaching practice, and how to improve it. The teacher only gave guidelines but it was the students themselves who made decisions regarding their learning and research. They also reported that at the English Teaching major they had to take control of their own learning process, and thus, CT was gradually developed: "literally, it has been a tool to be where I am at this point" (statement by ST05). Also, at this closing point of their major, some of them considered their previous learning experience and their professional

experience to be very useful in order to think critically regarding how to tackle their academic and professional tasks.

Class observations: I could observe a fostering of CT when the teacher provided constant oral feedback, encouraged students to brainstorm, take risks, evaluate and self-evaluate, or when she asked confirmation questions or open questions for students to reflect and express their opinions and ideas regarding an academic challenge, which developed into short group discussions.

Previous research established some key activities to foment CT in the preservice teacher curriculum: for Franco et al. (2018), CT demands overt teaching in the curriculum in a way that it becomes "open to students' everyday life and real issues" (p.134). Besides overt teaching, there must be also instances that promote a "collaborative dialogic environment" (p.135), such as argumentative essays, use of case studies, "circle of knowledge" (small-group first and then general discussions), problem-based learning, oriented debates, etc. Mpofu and Maphalala (2017) consider the usefulness of explicit and implicit CT strategies like Socratic questioning, small group discussions, using relevant contexts, and evaluative discussions. Finally, Almulla (2018) focuses on encouraging dialogue, establishing a positive classroom atmosphere, incorporating critical thinking teaching into the curriculum, and providing students with problem-solving tasks.

Thus, in the light of the literature and the data, CT was present in the preservice teacher syllabus in terms of objectives, contents, class delivery, and skills to be taught and learned. Let us enrich this by looking at the class activities.

2- How is critical thinking incorporated into class activities?

CoI online questionnaire: Related to CT, ST03 expressed what many others considered, "learning activities help students construct explanations and solutions". This shows that for teacher and students, class activities were very productive in terms of problem posing and problem solving as strategies (Freire, 2005a).

Class observations: Activities such as the discussion about a TED Talk video, or their presentations as an academic article critique allowed the chance of discussion and dialogue, where CT was evident in their presentations as personal opinions and later during the questions posed by their peers. In other cases, more or less spontaneous discussions took place, related to situations, experiences, and issues related to their learning process, course contents, academic tasks, as well as some professional or career issues based on their experience as teachers. While some of these discussions were part of the planned class activities and syllabus, others occurred spontaneously when the teacher encouraged dialogue or when a student shared an opinion or asked a question. Again, elements as dialogue and deliberation meet the tenets of FCP.

Artifacts: CT skills were mentioned in the Course Outline as part of the objectives of several course activities, to be held both during the workshops, as well as out-of-class (in their individual or pair projects, and as study of course materials before each workshop), or both. For example, students had to carry out a WebQuest using Padlet (which had both synchronous and asynchronous stages), that required "critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information" and which provided contributions denoting "critical thinking and analysis". An example of this was their academic article critical discussion which included pair work, previous

reading and analysis (asynchronously), oral presentation of their findings and opinions on the article, and a period for answering questions posed by their classmates (synchronously). Such activities offered plenty of instances for the development of CT skills, democratic dialogue (Freire, 2005a) and the four CoI presences (Garrison et al., 2001; Vaughan et al., 2013).

Regarding students' papers, as the final projects analyzed consisted of proposals for their future research project, the documents reflected brainstorming, editing, and the incorporation of instructor's feedback. In addition to this, the research topic and the research problems were related to the students' professional sphere, that is, they referred to problems or issues in EFL they wanted to investigate in their institutions with their own students, in order to propose solutions to those problems or deficiencies. Some of the research problems we could list were how to develop conversational skills in first graders, the evaluation of EFL school readings and their effectiveness in developing reading skills in sixth graders, and the limitations of one-on-one learning from the Communicative Language Teaching Approach among others. This approach to problem posing and problem solving can be identified with FCP as well.

Interviews: Students considered that CT occurred in course activities such as the Article Critique, the WebQuest, and the research proposal. For the proposal, most of them mentioned that the instructor insisted on the students' own agency in regards to the topic, problem, and direction the proposal should take during the process of developing it. Also, they thought that the proposal and its process helped them become more critical about their own teaching practice and their own students' needs. For student ST03, CT was present all right: "(the instructor) allowed us to fully analyze, criticize the (course) structure in a healthy way, (and) also generate a

response for those possible (student) needs." In contrast, most agreed that more CT was required during the course so as to make the workshops more productive. Student ST04 stated, "time was wasted on activities that (had) nothing to do with (the course contents), like (talking about the) war (in Ukraine)." This last quote may seem paradoxical considering that talking about national or world contexts evidences critical thinking in the classroom, including problem posing, and probably, problem solving as well.

The most frequent observation, nonetheless, was that the order of the activities in the course as listed on the calendar could be rearranged. In the view student ST01: "we started with the difficult activities and then moved on to easier ones". These are all examples of CT, deliberative and democratic dialogue, teamwork, and problem posing for achieving common academic goals, can be considered indicators of FCP and CL (Freire, 2005a; Garrison, 2016). Let us look further into the causes of this dialogue and negotiation with their teacher and how this promoted SP and TP as well.

As reported, during several weeks it was not clear for students what the instructor expected them to do in terms of content and form for their research proposal drafts. In addition, all of them conveyed a sense of lack of direction and feeling "lost" because they found contradictions between the model proposals provided by the instructor, the theory in the course textbook, the teacher's suggestions, and their own drafts. This, however, was solved when they were able to address the situation directly by means of dialogue with the teacher. These situations, all students agreed, could have been prevented if the teacher had applied more CT in class since the very beginning of the term so as to have more realistic expectations, and to adapt

the course syllabus to the students' context in terms of needs, lacks, and wants. In the words of ST05: "a teacher without critical thinking is going to be handcuffed and have an inside-the-box thinking" ("pensamiento cuadrado") in regards to what the student is going to produce with the course contents." Such negotiation can be considered manifestations of SP and TP, as there was plenty of interaction and dialogue in order to foster trust, a sense of belonging, and projecting students and teacher as members of a community by means of facilitation (Vaughan et al., 2013).

On the same line, other expressions of SP, TP, and CP were shared by the instructor in her initial interview, when she stated that

As teachers we should be at a creative level, generate our own theories, argue with the contents that we are given to transmit…this book says this, but my experience says that, and we're going to complement it with this, or we're going to refute it with that because this shouldn't be so anymore… but it's not that easy. Sometimes our own work consumes us so much that we don't have time to think.

Considering the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and synthesized in the previous research subquestion about the importance of CT in class activities in the teacher preservice classroom, the data collected evidence that there were plenty of instances where CT was included in the class activities, or took place during their actual implementation such as dialogue, problem posing, problem solving, during the writing of their research proposal, the WebQuest, and the Article Critique, in addition to live class sessions (workshops). Thus, CT as part of FCP interacted with the four presences of the CoI model and included elements of CL (Garrison, 2016).

In order to round this off, the assessment of CT in the class is discussed under the next research subquestion.

3- How is critical thinking assessed?

Artifacts: CT skills were assessed in activities such as the Padlet WebQuest and the Article Critique by means of evaluation and self-evaluation. For example, on the Evaluation Rubrics for Project 1 (pre-final draft of their research project), evaluation criteria related to "Development of Ideas" include "There is evidence of analysis, reflection, and insight". Thus, although the Evaluation Rubric for the Final Project itself does not list any specific criteria related to "critical thinking", there is one that states "(document) reflects a thorough editing process after final feedback was provided for each section", meaning that there had been previous CT, analysis, and synthesis as part of the process to submit their Final Project (research proposal for next term). Such overt inclusion of CT to be learned and assessed correspond to what Franco et al. (2018) suggested as part of the preservice teacher curriculum.

Interviews: When I talked to the Department Coordinator, he said that although the official policy is to develop grading instruments as unbiased as possible, there will always be some kind of bias in class, sometimes in an unconscious way. Thus, CT sometimes had to be "spurred" out of the students ("como una puya"), as the rubrics used for assessment included a minimum grade of zero, meaning that "if they don't participate, they get a 0 in class". He admitted that although CT and participation should arise out of the students' own initiative, the Program had implemented this policy in order to motivate those students who would otherwise

desire to pass "with their heads bent down…unperceived" in class ("agachados… desapercibidos"). This could be regarded as a traditional approach to teaching (Freire, 2005a) and even contradictory to CL (Garrison, 2016) as this evidences asymmetrical power relations and a rigid leadership verging on coercion rather than collaboration based on dialogue.

Regarding such potential bias, the teacher mentioned in her initial interview that the research project was the students' "baby" and that whenever she was asked her opinion about somebody's project, she would respond, "everything you do has to convince me with arguments, quotes, and field work…" In her final interview she added that she had offered constant feedback by means of the Moodle platform and emails, although in most cases students had not responded to such communications: "I don't know if they're not used to reacting".

On their side, students alluded to feedback and assessment related to CT at different moments, most of the times when I asked them about power relations in the classroom. For example, student ST01 referred to this process of how they were the ones in charge of improving their own project: "at the end it is the professor who has the last word...there was this illusion that we (the students) had more control... however, we were being evaluated based on what the teacher considered right or wrong..." For others, there was flexibility and respect towards the students' views. ST03 stated, "I don't feel there was a negative power attack against the student" ("ataque de poder negativo"). In fact, some students pointed out that during the last workshop feedback was shared in both directions, so they found a respectful and receptive attitude in the teacher regarding their opinions and suggestions (an attitude that reflects rich TP and SP, as well

as a sense of community and democratic dialogue as prescribed by FCP). Power relations as a code will be addressed again under the research subquestion 10 below.

Class observations: My observations coincide with the data derived from the interviews with students. For instance, during the workshops, the teacher offered constant general feedback to the students regarding activities or their research projects. She also opened spaces for them to pose any questions they had and to comment on the activities, their proposal development, or even on her own feedback if necessary. At all moments she showed a respectful and receptive attitude towards the students. Student participation, however, was normally scarce and rested on the same three or four students. Once again, this reflects clear TP in terms of facilitation, and SP as communication that can be assessed as democratic (FCP) and as shown, it was also collaboration and shared responsibility (CL).

CoI questionnaire: Although no specific mentions of the evaluation of CT were found, nevertheless, some of the items dealing with Cognitive Presence shed light about SP and TP in particular in the form of feedback and facilitation. Thus, when students were asked about teacher feedback, the data complemented what was reported in the interviews. For example, ST05's comment reads, "at the beginning, students where struggle (sic.) since there were (sic.) no document evidence of feedback, just a few comments…it was necessary to express that to the professor…since students (needed) to go deeper with the corrections expected from the teacher" (student input was provided directly in English). ST01 reported, "comments were very general, and when students sought more detail, told (sic.) that it was up to them" (both original entries in

English). Based on this, TP as provided by the course instructor seems to have been insufficient for students to face the academic tasks ahead as the next paragraph elaborates.

When inquiring if the instructor had helped to identify areas of agreement and disagreement, ST04 replied that "they (the instructors) need to provide more accurate responses". This was again taken under a later item, when asked if the instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics, student ST02 stated that, "the guidance often confused more, since it did not match either the print material (sic)., or the refence-styled manual, nor prior evaluation indicators while stating it did."

In short, CT was assessed in the course in the different activities where there was evaluation criteria for that purpose. This reflected the Program's policy to instill CT in students. In activities such as the workshops, CT was evaluated in a more spontaneous way by means of teacher feedback. In the research proposal, assessment was present as well. However, for the students, the teacher's feedback was confusing or unclear, or even contradictory with the course theory, which led to confusion.

On their part, students also expressed their view that teacher CT was lacking at some points of the course, and also, that in spite of the teacher's flexibility and receptiveness, it was the teacher herself who had the last word. This could be interpreted as a mismatch between the "theory" (course design, syllabus, contents, rubrics), and its actual delivery (classwork, workshops, feedback). Such mismatch will be further elaborated when power relations in the student-teacher interaction are analyzed in research subquestion 10. For the time being, we can add that TP was lacking according to the students' perceptions, which influenced and aroused a

response from students in terms of SP and EP in order to succeed in their assignments and learn collaboratively (CL), as it will be shown below.

4- To what extent is this preservice teacher distance classroom a Community of Inquiry?

Considering that one of our initial assumptions was that UNED's EFL preservice classroom functioned as a Community of Inquiry, only a selection of data pertinent to the most representative elements of the Community of Inquiry framework is discussed next. For this, we will limit ourselves to the online CoI questionnaires, artifacts (students' final papers), and class observations since they addressed distinct CoI framework elements directly.

CoI questionnaires (online surveys): Related to the Cognitive Presence (CP), instructor and students reported key elements such as motivation to explore content, online discussions helping students appreciate different perspectives, teacher being an encourager for content exploration, brainstorming helping students solve questions related to content, and students solving problems than can be applied in practice. This can be interpreted, then, that UNED's preservice EFL teacher environment works effectively as a CoI where the CP is detectable and conducive to learning in terms of fostering curiosity, exploring course contents, and developing answers to questions and solutions to problems in the classroom and out-of-the-classroom practice.

Related to Social and Emotional Presences (SP, EP), instructor and students reported feeling comfortable while expressing disagreement, expressing emotion to be acceptable, feeling

their point of view was acknowledged by others. In the case of the instructor acknowledging

students' emotion, only 40% of students found this to be true. What are the implications of this?

Either the students did not feel their emotions to be accepted "enough" by the instructor, or the

instructor was not doing it in the actual practice. However, for the other criteria mentioned here,

students agreed unanimously (with the exception of feeling comfortable when disagreeing with

others, which was reported by 60% of students). In general terms, is fair to say that there were

plenty of SP and EP elements present to also consider the classroom as a CoI.

On the other hand, Teaching Presence (TP) elements pointed out by both instructor and

students were the following: teacher's actions reinforce a sense of community, teacher clearly

communicates important course dates, students feel comfortable taking teaching roles, and

teacher keeps participants engaged in productive dialogue. All of these criteria were reported

unanimously by teachers and students or by the teacher and 80% of students. On the other hand,

teacher providing feedback timely was reported by 60% of students (some students' comments

are transcribed under subquestion 3 above), with two students pointing out that feedback was

"not enough", or that "we can write an email but answers are not given on time".

Let us elaborate a bit more, however: when asked if the teacher had provided feedback

that helped students understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the course goals and

objectives, 0% of students agreed with the statement. Some of the comments by ST02 expanded

on this: "during the first session, we need (sic.) a wider explanation about the development of the

course through the whole quater (sic.)"; "not completely, but it was mentioned at some point to

the professor" (ST05); or "comments were very general… (the teacher) told (sic.) that it was up

to them" (to improve their work) (ST01). These comments, which confirm what students discussed elsewhere in the interviews regarding teacher feedback, confirm that they felt that information and guidance was lacking in terms of when and how to improve their academic work.

In spite of this, and considering the other TP criteria listed above, it is possible to establish that important TP elements were present in the classroom and outside the classroom as well, in spite of the fact that students felt that TP was insufficient at times. To sum up, the UNED preservice EFL teacher classroom (as of this course) can be considered a fully functioning Community of Inquiry, since the four presences could be detected, including fundamental principles like the fostering of curiosity and exploration, questioning and problem solving, recognition of emotion in the classroom, engagement in productive dialogue, and students feeling comfortable when disagreeing, expressing opinions, or taking teaching roles.

For the sake of having a wider view, it is relevant to look at the main findings of my class observations: these coincide with the data obtained from the CoI online questionnaire. Although this was reported in detail in Table 9 in Chapter 4, some key criteria are worth retaking here in order to elaborate and triangulate data and results. For the CP, relevant criteria like students being motivated to explore was evident during students' presentations; teacher encouraging students to explore was also observed several times; and students developing solutions to problems could also be observed for both their academic tasks for the course and also for class discussions about how to apply what their learned in the classroom to their own reality as EFL teachers.

Related to SP and EP, I was able to detect criteria such as the instructor acknowledging students' emotions when she acted in a supportive, respectful, and empathic way; students feeling comfortable when disagreeing with others when students exchanged opinions while maintaining and empathic and non-confrontational attitude; expressing emotions when sharing ideas being acceptable when teacher and students supported each other with empathy and respect; and the instructor showing emotion when she used appropriate body language, oral praise, and shared personal anecdotes. In contrast, criteria like students feeling comfortable when interacting with others was harder to observe.

In relation to TP, it is important to highlight criteria such as the teacher's action reinforcing a sense of community by means of a supportive attitude; clear communication of dates and time frames by the teacher; teacher providing timely feedback when she devoted some minutes to this during the workshops; teacher providing feedback that helped students understand their academic strengths and weaknesses in terms of general comments; and students feeling comfortable when taking a teaching role, by showing a confident, serene, and knowledgeable stance. In short, from my class observations data it can be added that there were plenty of elements relating to the four presences during the workshops that illustrate the main characteristics of a CoI for this course. Further information about the Cognitive Presence was obtained by means of the analysis of class artifacts, as it will be seen next.

Artifacts: For the coding of students' papers, a CoI criteria checklist was developed (see Appendix J). However, since their final project was an individual proposal, the instrument focused on aspects related exclusively to the CP, as shown in Table 12 in Chapter 4. Once again,

data collected for this instrument coincided with those reported above, so in order not to fatigue the reader, I will address here only a few those criteria.

In 100% of the final papers these criteria were met: "artifact shows evidence that student can describe ways to test and apply knowledge learned"; "artifact shows evidence of student's motivation to explore and student's curiosity"; "learning activities help student construct solutions"; "student can apply knowledge acquired to own work and other activities"; "student develops solutions to problems to be applied in practice". In contrast, these criteria were met in only 60% of papers reviewed by the researcher: "paper shows evidence of brainstorming and includes relevant information that contributes to student solving questions"; and "artifact shows evidence that problems posed increase student's interest in content matter".

Finally, I could not find clear evidence for the "student's appreciation of different perspectives" in their research proposal papers. This last point may be harder to dilucidate, as different perspectives may refer to theoretical perspectives, or other people's opinions. In either case, the papers were straightforward in postulating theory, and then designing a research proposal to be implemented (in the coming research course in the Major). Thus, as no data had been collected yet, the papers I analyzed were lacking the necessary evidence.

Data from the artifacts, then, although harmonious with those collected through the other two instruments, also complement them: class observations, for example, reflected the group's workings as such, as a CoI in action in a synchronic fashion mainly, while artifacts and the CoI online questionnaire illustrated each student's individual learning and emotional process, as a member of the CoI. This begs the question for further research about where both spheres overlap

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and interact: the individual learner's process ("Private World" in the Practical Inquiry model) and the group's process as a community ("Shared World" in the Practical Inquiry model: Garrison et al., 2001; Stenbom et al., 2016; Majeski et al., 2018). In addition, the teacher's perspective reported in the questionnaire and the researcher's own observations helped triangulate the data by offering a non-student's perspective in the first case, and an "outsider's" in the second case regarding how the CoI functioned, thrived, and how its internal mechanics were suggested by the data that could be observed in contrast to those perceived by the members of the CoI.

5- *How does this CoI environment contribute to the teaching of critical thinking?*

Once the presence of CT in the course syllabus as activities and assessment has been analyzed, in addition to the discussion of whether or not the preservice EFL teacher program is a CoI or not, will be linked in this section. For this, I will elaborate on some relevant data collected when participants were asked about the importance of CT for both teachers and students, as this allowed them to share their views on CT inside and outside UNED's classroom. Further evidence and analysis on which problems or inconveniences to the development of CT were found in the classroom are addressed in the research subquestion 12 below.

Thus, the reader will find next the answer to this research subquestion, but considering that this one develops as a natural extension of what was discussed in the previous one, only the video interviews will be considered here as a way to enrich and relate both subquestions. This

will be done at length in order to convey better the dynamic and iterative context of the case study and to be faithful to the participants' feelings and impressions (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

According to the course instructor, CT is important for students because "(UNED) focuses… on people of all levels, from all places and circumstances, (for students is a must) having the ability to improve personally, professionally, culturally… to transcend and (to feel they have) such transforming capacity."

Students: ST03 defined CT as: "Freedom in learning… CT totally benefits that they can have a lot of freedom of expression… More than analyzing with arguments… CT is having a position on an issue." ST02 volunteered a clear instance of CT in the classroom: "in the last workshop, what critical thinking is was remarkable…thanks to the tutor's disposition, who allowed us to analyze and criticize the course in a healthy way, and to be able to say 'we did not like this' ".

Regarding how the course encouraged CT, ST05 considered that CT was "absolutely essential in this course. You have to do a lot of self-analysis… Much of it is comparing what you did, analyzing it, seeing it in depth (after their paper's submission)". For the sake of illustration, here is a quote by ST01 that describes this richly, and which is worth reproducing in its full length for its expressiveness:

> CT takes a central role because (we don't receive) regular classes, and when the teacher stops taking the central position of providing knowledge, it (rests on) the student, through critical thinking, to be able to develop these contents. At UNED they give us the textbooks, but students have to put the theory into practice through critical thinking.

To have a clearer view, let us review what the School Director and the Department Coordinator had to say about teaching and learning CT skills. First, the School Director gave her views about CT for teachers by describing their role: "The tutor must become a teacher, guide, inspiration… It will require leadership and (offering) students the opportunity to grow and be able to address issues and defend positions, being humble and admitting if they don't know." She added that CT means "empowering students… Our mission is to give them the bases to contribute from a positive criticality and contribute through evaluation and information to… have the ability to discern, search and reach the best ways to educate."

Likewise, the Department Coordinator considered that the teacher should have "the ability to judge, propose and criticize constructively, and reflect, question and propose, and (thus) take it to the (next) level of education (so as) to develop it with the students." Such teacher would indeed contribute to the education of critical citizens: "That is the key to having a society that does not surrender at the authorities' feet". According to him, this becomes a moral duty at UNED: "We have a responsibility to develop (this) in students. We must promote in students the ability to propose (solutions) based on arguments." Then, we can only add that for both authorities interviewed, CT skills in the classroom play a role that stems from education but goes way beyond it, and which has a considerable impact on society. A moral responsibility, as we saw in Chapter 1, that public universities have been exerting since their foundation in Costa Rica.

To summarize, it has been established that Critical Thinking was overtly incorporated (Franco et al., 2018) into the course as part of the course objectives, course activities, evaluation,

and delivery during the synchronic workshops. Besides, we have seen that UNED's preservice

EFL teacher classroom can be considered a Community of Inquiry as it shows plenty of elements

corresponding to the four CoI presences (Garrison et al., 2001; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer in

Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). With this in mind,

interviews for this subquestion demonstrate that for academic authorities, the course instructor,

and the students themselves, CT is present and necessary as part of their learning process and

tasks. They also pointed out that outside the classroom CT has a role to play as EFL teachers. In

other words, UNED's EFL classroom, as a CoI, can be described as fostering and setting the

conditions for the teaching and learning of CT skills in preservice EFL teachers.

As revealed in the interviews, UNED's classroom (for the case studied), as a CoI,

motivates students to develop CT since it promotes activities and moments of critical reflection

(Brookfield, 2017; Mezirow, 1991; Quesada, 2005). This is also instilled by the EFL teaching

major itself. The program nurtures a critical attitude and a critical awareness in students as

preservice (or current) teachers that may result in critical practice (Moore, 2019). However,

confirming that the whole EFL program functions as a CoI would require extensive research,

something clearly beyond the scope of the present document.

Having addressed CT and CoI, two of the three theoretical spheres on which this research

rests, we will look at the third one: Collaborative Leadership as understood by Garrison (2016),

what we described as "leading collaboratively" in Chapter 2.

6- How does collaborative leadership (as understood by Garrison, 2016) enrich this process of learning?

Here, the reader will find a discussion with references to theory and some quotes extracted from the data collected regarding collaborative leadership and its importance at UNED. In order to do this, excerpts from interviews, artifacts, and class observations are included.

During her initial interview, the course instructor pointed out that at UNED everyone had a particular role (professors, administrative staff), and thus, nobody could work "on their own". Everybody was "open to collaborate and help others". Furthermore, she told me, "collaboration is important...you can feel their trust and support if you have a problem or if you don't know what to do". Likewise, she thought that students could also feel their teachers' support. In her final interview, she pointed out that her role was not to tell students what to do, but to guide them in what they were doing. She did not regard this as "leadership", because she saw herself as a facilitator of this process (this intertwines with the ideas she had expressed elsewhere regarding problem solving and interaction between teacher and students).

Finally, she compared the classes she had received at UNED in the past as a student, with the way workshops were delivered: "It (is) important…because of the collaborative work, because (students) assume their leadership… they truly demonstrate and evidence everything they learn... (they) ask questions…and (then I) say let's stop (for a minute) and discuss this".

Students saw CL as the process of understanding and teamwork. ST05 stated, "I can cope with the academic workload by being open to the opinions of others and helping… generate a final process as a group. As a teacher… to help students understand that the teacher… is a guide,

but everyone can contribute." ST02 added that CL meant that everyone in the class worked as part of a team to reach a final result, which otherwise could not be achieved without the collaboration of those involved.

On the same line of thought, student ST03 regarded CL as the "ability to take action without the need for one person to lead others, but (generating) a synergy towards the same goal through joint work… generating action (and) not lingering in (mere) discussion". Such synergy also took place when students offered feedback to their teacher. One statement worth quoting is that of student ST05, who pointed out that sometimes the instructor "could not understand what somebody had said", so this student would intervene to clarify and "explain" to the teacher, until the teacher would understand and "change what we had to do". This is an example of what Garrison (2016) describes as shared responsibility and open communication.

One more instance was offered by student ST01, who described CL as a process of reflection. Rather than acting on the spur of the moment, but evaluating the pros and cons of the matter first, and then seeking other people's support in order to find solutions. In her words, this process meant that "only by having several people (involved), it would be possible to arrive at better proposals, better ways, within a shared space". As reported previously, there came a moment in the course when students felt confused and frustrated because it was not clear for them how they were supposed to develop their research proposals. This situation brought them together as a means to cope with their academic tasks. ST02 claimed that "adversity strengthened collaborative work between ourselves, because in a different course where everything had gone

well, that probably wouldn't have existed." For the researcher, CL was present here in the shape of teamwork focused on finding complex solutions to complex problems (Garrison, 2016).

What was the Program authorities' view on CL? This is relevant since it not only allows us to probe into the official discourse, but also to speculate how deep this is implemented in the actual syllabus and curriculum. However, the views they shared as former instructors and current authorities are their own, not the major's. Thus, the Department Coordinator characterized CL as the ability to organize and make a group effort: "a proposal is made and (the others) are asked what they think and what they have to contribute with. When that (leader) observes that (somebody) is not contributing, he approaches him and asks if he needs help, or more time". The School Director added, "we (shouldn't) convince, but rather make the group aware that each one's contribution must be constant… Collaborating is sharing, discussing with freedom…(and) thoughts, …defend our positions... Collaborative work, if achieved…is one of the most difficult things (laughs)". As we can see, key aspects of collaboration, teamwork, problem posing, problem solving, democratic dialogue (Freire, 2005a) and "thinking collaboratively" (Garrison, 2016) are evident as attitudes and values in their discourse.

A final set of data to be discussed are class artifacts because they reflect the official discourse in the way CL should, ideally, be put into practice in the teaching major. Some of the instances and criteria extracted from the Course Outline where collaboration was mentioned were activities like the article critique and its subsequent class discussion, and the presentations students made of their own research proposal to be followed by their partners' feedback. Also, collaboration among teacher and students was overtly stated with the recommendation to use the

"Ask & Answer Forum" for "questions regarding course's contents and assignments", and the explicit encouragement for students to participate via the course platform, "AprendeU", so as "to foster a meaningful and contextualized learning experience". All of this was to take place in addition to videoconference tools such as Zoom and Teams "to facilitate the organization of collaborative works (sic.)".

Moreover, synchronic sessions were described in the course outline in these terms: "the on-site component is carried out through workshops where students apply concepts through cooperative work with both their professor and classmates." In contrast, I found only one research proposal where collaborative leadership was hinted: "Enabling project-based learning involves the kind of leadership skills that allow teachers to help a group of learners to move in the direction that they want to go, pointing out potential pitfalls or making suggestions". In short, there were explicit mentions to collaboration, cooperation, teamwork, problem posing and problem solving. As a whole, we can regard these elements as part of the organizational culture where leadership becomes a shared responsibility (Garrison, 2016).

Was this put into practice, however? For this, class observations offered complementary data: During the synchronic sessions (workshops), I could observe that the teacher opened spaces for students to ask questions and comment on their research progress. Some sections of the class also flourished with students giving feedback to the teacher about some points that had not been clear to them. For example, they had doubts about the structure format for qualitative research (a mismatch between the one presented in the textbook, and the criteria their course required for submission). Thus, there was a joint effort and a two-way communication to tackle problems and

pursue goals together. This can be taken as evidence of a shared responsibility environment, constant communication and collaboration, teamwork, and dialogue in order to solve the tasks in a way that teacher and students were "leading collaboratively" (Garrison, 2016).

Briefly, it may be said that instruments recorded converging information from different sources and perspectives: the academic authorities', the course instructor's, the student's, and the researcher's. In all cases, there are clear allusions to leadership as a shared effort based on team work within and without the classroom. In addition to confirming the presence of CL as established by Garrison (2016), such organic perspective on teamwork and leadership walking hand in hand could respond to "leadership in context" (Cleveland-Innes & Sangrà, 2010).

Although there is cooperation taking place (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010) to some degree, more than that, there is collaborative work based on personal accountability in order to tackle "common problems" and thus, reach common goals (Garrison, 2016). Finally, I found evidence of a collaborative culture where negotiation, individual and shared responsibility, support, and feedback develop within the context of a "community of collaboration" within the classroom and within UNED as reported by the course instructor (Vaughan et al., 2013).

7- What is the teachers' and students' attitude towards learning and teaching English? Should English be considered an "imperialistic" language? What is the role of EFL in the 21ˢᵗ century?

In order to understand the context of this question, it is important to remind the reader of Freire's Liberating Pedagogy (or Critical Pedagogy) as an interpretation of reality that sinks its

roots in Marxist theory, as explained in Chapter 2. From such point of view (Freire, 2005a), traditional education has taken place within a political environment where oppressors (teachers) interact dialectically with the oppressed (students) by imposing a particular way of thinking and understanding the world. In our days, however, terms such as "oppressed" and "oppressors" may be delicate to handle, but the idea rings clearly all the same: teachers are figures of authority and keepers of knowledge, whereas students may at times be regarded as the submissive recipients of ideas and information. Making still a bolder read, English, being the native language of nations traditionally associated with colonization, Neoliberalism, and globalization (Wallerstein, 2004; Giroux, 2009, 2014) such as England or the United States, could be considered by some as an imperialistic language that is "imposed" upon students in other cultures as part of the Neoliberal policies and curricula of governments and states. Having said this, let us review the data gathered during interviews and the analysis of students' final papers.

During the interviews, participants showed a constant positive attitude towards EFL and the language itself. In fact, none of them referred to or hinted that English could be regarded as an "imperialistic" language. Quite the contrary, they expressed an affinity to teach EFL to children, adolescents, and adults. They also shared an interest to motivate students to learn, and sympathy when they recalled having worked with foreign students or foreign teachers from English-speaking countries in the past. For example, ST05, (a long-time teacher in primary school) alluded to an exchange cultural program where she had participated: "I had the experience of working at (a primary) school… for many years with a program… Cross-Cultural

Solutions, and I met (many) teachers from England, Canada, and the U.S. It was so nice. That opened up my perspective a lot…"

Related to our Costa Rican context and EFL teaching in Costa Rica, at UNED, and at their primary and secondary school institutions, student-teachers described the process of learning and piquing their own students' curiosity towards the target language and culture as a satisfying experience, and as an enjoyable process for all parts involved. This is evident in some extracts from students' interviews about how they encouraged students. ST03 shared a story: "(I had) a student who (initially) didn't like to read, (eventually) and after talking to her, (I realized) that she had read so many books... One (as a teacher, had) generated that little seed of curiosity."

Furthermore, as part of the role of teacher as agents for social change (to be addressed fully in subquestion 9 below) teachers can help students overcome negative dispositions towards learning English. Teacher-student ST03 reported on the way he promoted participation in the class as a non-threatening environment. He used to tell students: "Okay, let's make mistakes, if we don't want to talk, there will be time (for that later). All of this promotes teamwork, leadership, changing the fact that so many people hate English (laughs)." However, examples like this could be interpreted as a negative affective disposition rather than a political animosity in the students.

This can be confirmed by what the Department Coordinator referred to as attitudes towards English and the use of English within the context of the EFL teaching major. We include a quote here in its entirety because it touches upon other relevant themes like community building, emotional variables, and leadership as well:

When dealing with a second language, if someone in a group feels that their command of the language is inferior, they feel intimidated and do not feel safe to participate. In our field we need to develop spaces where students feel safe in that linguistic situation. I have seen (instances) where students with an almost native proficiency level give their opinion more, express themselves more, criticize more, speak more (often), so that others (feel inhibited)… It is necessary to promote spaces free of dialogue focused on error, (but rather on) how much (discussion takes place). It is difficult, but it must be promoted, to (acknowledge) that everyone has something to contribute with, to speak and to criticize in a constructive manner. In this way leadership is developed, so they (will) go to (their own) institutions with that attitude.

From her own perspective, the School Director elaborates on how a positive attitude impregnates the way preservice EFL teachers are prepared at UNED: "Having that spirit, that little flame of teaching is like a gift from God… I admire teachers for their ability to deliver, to learn, to transmit… to find a way to do things better".

In order to compare the data from the interviews, we found that students, in their final research proposals, had addressed the instrumental importance of English today as a means for improving the academic and professional conditions of their own students. ST05 wrote, "In the current Costa Rican economic environment, the fluent use of English or another second language in addition to Spanish has become essential to increase job opportunities". Student-teacher ST01 explains, "This foreign language would represent a significant economic development for the

country…This (means) Costa Rica's education is helping learners to get better benefits and opportunities for the new millennium" (sic.)

These excerpts illustrate that the English Teaching Program at UNED contributes to the creation of a positive and constructive attitude towards the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language in primary schools in Costa Rica. In this sense, preservice and in-service teacher-students at UNED through their positive attitude and their views reflected the skills (or qualifications) that the program requires of its graduates, as it was reported in Chapter 1: being "critical and constructive", as well as "promoting the well-being and improvement of society... interested in being an agent of change". Therefore, fostering a positive attitude towards the learning of English among primary school students could probably give birth to new generations of Costa Ricans who can speak the language and thus, improve and change their own conditions and the country's.

The theme of teachers as agents of social change will be addressed in subquestion 9 as related to the way participants look at their role as educators. For the time being, though, let us focus on some traits of the social environment of this case study.

8- *How do participants describe their social environment?*

A fundamental part to describing a case study is the actual context observed, as it provides unique and particular characteristics (Stake, 1995). As part of this discussion following Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Critical Case Study (CSS) method for analysis, elements reflecting the participants' as well as the institution's views and social environment are

valuable elements to describe and understand this unfolding context (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). As explained in Chapter 1, UNED plays a relevant social role in Costa Rica because it caters for rural or marginal populations which otherwise would not have the chance of obtaining a university degree.

In the particular case of the participants, be it authorities, the course instructor, or students, such context frames the social learning process studied and the observed evidence (or lack thereof) of theoretical elements like Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP), the Community of Inquiry model (CoI), and collaborative leadership (CL). Although social learning, as a process of influence and interaction of these three theoretical spheres is presented throughout this chapter, social context in particular is discussed next focusing on several concepts reported by participants and that enrich the description and discussion of social context: leadership in context, characteristics of current higher education, social responsibility, and social and academic problems detected by teacher-students. For this, we will quote from interviews and student papers. These two instruments have been selected because through them we believe that participants' voices could be heard more transparently.

Leadership, and how it influences the context of social learning was reported by both the School Director and the Department Coordinator as part of the aspects that must be taken into consideration within the EFL teaching major. The School Director shared an organic view of the matter: "The teacher learns from the student and the student from the teacher…The young transmit not only energy to us, but through them realities and needs that perhaps we do not know are perceived, and thus we learn."

In contrast, the Department Coordinator had a more specific stance regarding the role of leadership as significant part of social context: "Not all human beings can be leaders, but there are some who can develop this ability further… it has to do with their personality, background, their environment, the family, the opportunities that have led them to develop these abilities." Moreover, he gives some specific examples of this as part of the teachers' role within their social environment: "I have to know very well what is happening around me, in my community, in my country…we do not need to be experts to know what is happening in our communities and families…" Based on this, interaction where leadership is shaped and helps shape the social context of the social learning in the EFL teacher preservice classroom, we can argue that this is leadership in context, as Cleveland-Innes and Sangrà (2010) proposed.

From the interviews with the course teacher we can extract some more elements that complement the differences between the culture and practice of public and private higher education in Costa Rica, as it was analyzed in Chapter 1. Here, she contrasts working at UNED versus working at other universities, and how her student populations have varied through the years. This is part of the academic social context: "(Compared to what I have been doing) in recent years (at other universities), I felt very motivated with students at UNED…They are very responsible, they know what to do…" In opposition, she felt that the academic culture in private universities in general was business-like and that many students saw themselves as customers who should be satisfied by good service, which implied, in many instances, expecting passing and outstanding grades as a widespread practice. This confirms many of the extensive descriptions by Cuevas-Molina (2012), and Molina (2016), included in Chapter 1, related to how

private universities function in plenty of cases as commercial schools or institutes focused on customer satisfaction and graduate production rather than centers of higher thinking and professional education.

In addition, she conveyed her concerns about what she regarded as a common academic and intellectual issue with many current higher education students: "We've been taking our youth to the wrong levels… they demand a series of things as if they knew (better than their teachers, parents) what's right… we have stopped educating them…in many aspects to really have the strength, and (to correct them when they are wrong)".

Being critical to both the positive and negative reality of current higher education, as her experience shows, sheds a rich perspective about the differences between public and private higher education, as well as current curricula in universities. We dare say that the course instructor shows a discourse that questions the mainstream humanistic policies in many universities nowadays. Although the contributions of universities to knowledge and the improvement of younger generations' conditions are true, as it is reflected in UNED students, where values such as responsibility, commitment, and social inclusion are instilled, there seem to be also cases where the official discourse about student empowerment may have distorted students' views about their role as learners in the process.

From a constructivist perspective, even though knowledge is the result of both teachers and students working together, and although the role of teachers is to assist students in finding their own voices (Freire, 2005a), what is implied here is the possibility that those voices may become "absolute" and thus obliterate the teachers' or even the institution's. Could this possible?

This has been hinted elsewhere by the School Director, and here, by the course instructor as the result of their years of teaching experience in universities. Lacking further evidence and data, for the time being we can only wonder if critical thinking skills could be taken too far. Or, if such apparent student distorted self-perception may not qualify as CT in itself, or how CT may be impaired as a result of excessive student self-confidence. This will be addressed again in Chapter 6 as part of our conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

Regarding social responsibility, some students described their social environment in terms of the moral commitment they carry as teachers in primary or secondary school. For example, ST01 talked about how she may influence her students in a positive or negative way: "you have to be very aware that as a teacher… even passing comments that one makes about another matter, some social issue that is happening, can affect the population that is listening". Student ST03 added, "so many social challenges, globalization, even (the fact that) the student (learns) faster than the teacher… so one has to see those technological needs, complicated family conditions... many social factors. It is a huge, very heavy responsibility." As mentioned earlier, the implications of social responsibility and the role of teachers as agents of social change is detailed in the next subquestion.

To elaborate on this idea of social responsibility as an element that shapes the social context, one last excerpt is included, where a student vividly described the social context of the community where she works as a primary school teacher. For the researcher, it is unequivocal that teacher-students carry their social responsibility along with them as a central value in their daily professional practice. Student ST04 explained:

I try to give the best of me as a teacher, but putting myself in the current reality of each student and the country… I work in a marginal area with many foreign children, with families of six children or more. You'd be scared if you visited. It is better to be friends with those people than to be enemies.

Lastly, we will find here examples of how social problematizing, based on the previous values and attitudes of leadership in context and social responsibility are applied in practice as apparent precursors to social change (more on this in the next subquestion). The reader will be able to see how the students' final research proposals pay attention to their social context in terms of social and academic problems to be analyzed and solved, or as glimpses of their teaching reality in order to improve it (Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 2005a). For instance, student ST03 was interested in doing research about the limitations his students face in one-on-one classes to develop communicative skills, as a result of the students' demand for "new learning methodologies that indirectly are part of the educational context."

Student ST02 wanted to find out how communicative skills can be encouraged in first-graders in a public school located in a marginal community. Yet ST05 wanted to explore which resources may work better in order to develop reading competencies in a public primary school group, considering that "the use of textbooks is not permitted within the public educational system, and every teacher uses distinct (sic.) resources".

As a summary, from interviews and artifacts (students' final papers) it has been established that authorities, course instructor, and students are very aware of learning as an interactive, collaborative process that occurs within a social context (at UNED and other

universities, communities, and institutions where they work or have worked in the past). In addition, there is clear evidence that learning and teaching (for student-teachers and their own students) is a complex process that responds to and also influences their social reality (economic, social, academic, cultural, technological conditions among others). As we have seen, such influence may be positive or negative, and teachers are aware of those possibilities and have taken a personal and professional stance accordingly.

This implies that leadership in context (Cleveland-Innes & Sangrà, 2010) and social responsibility as a personal and professional moral duty go hand in glove and interact within the wider social context in order to impact it and transform it, as participants regarded themselves as learners and teachers, influencers, and even agents for social change and agency. Therefore, leadership in context and social responsibility may shape social context and promote social change as stated by Mezirow (1991), and Freire (2005a).

9- How do participants see themselves, as learners, classmates, human beings? (Including views as agents of social change as a theme found during data collection)

At this point of our discussion, subquestion 9 addresses elements from previous subquestions and allows us to integrate them into a wider view. For example, as found in the results, university authorities and the course instructor regard themselves as teachers and facilitators of learning in the EFL major, based on their perspectives and career as mentors (more than 20 years of experience each). They have conveyed that social learning is a collaborative process that combines critical thinking, collaborative leadership, and as we have seen above,

these elements take place within the context of the virtual classroom, which can be considered a Community of Inquiry. Although no explicit mentions of Freire's Critical Pedagogy were reported, there is an evident attitude to empower students by means of helping them develop critical thinking skills in order to contribute eventually in their workplaces (primary schools, mostly) and communities.

Related to their perception of teachers as agents of social change, some of the implications and values reported, also discussed above, are social responsibility and commitment. Thus, preservice teachers will, in turn, enable their own students to become agents of social change. For example, student ST04 stated, "we are 100% agents of change for better or worse. You have to be very careful…" ST02 reflected, "Starting with this course, I feel that the teacher (acts) as an agent of change… it is at this point that one really feels it, because the research is going in that direction: how to help improve the classroom." The School Director saw it in similar but deeper terms: "Having that spirit…of teaching is a gift from God… I admire teachers for their ability to give… to find the way to do things better… In higher education (being an) agent of social change must be one of our strengths".

Our data show that all teacher-students who took part in our study already work as teachers, including one with up to 20 years of experience. Thus, although no statements were found in the Course Outline about the role of teachers as agents of social change per se, both the School Director and the Department Coordinator considered that higher education is a way in which future teachers (and their own students) can learn key skills for social agency since positive attitudes and values may be replicated on others, that is, taught and learned in the

classroom. This meets one of Freire's Critical Pedagogy's main tenets, which is the role which education and teachers play precisely as social agents that will enable others to help them transform their own social reality (Freire, 2000, 2005a), as we saw in Chapter 2.

In the course instructor interviews, she went a bit beyond down this line of thought by elaborating on how teachers should be able to prepare their own students in order for them to learn how to listen and question reality. Having the chance of speaking freely in the classroom is a mandatory condition today because with access to Internet, she added, many students may not need a teacher to be able to reach their own conclusions. Thus, education and educators should provide such spaces for democratic dialogue, problem posing and problem solving lest they become obsolete as agents and contributors to social change.

This turns out to be an unexpected observation in the light of how technology offers resources to younger generations unavailable in the past for self-reflection and self-discovery. However, as reported under subquestion 8, in her final interview she pondered how humanistic approaches to education (when imposed as institutional policies) could in fact be detrimental to the acquisition of CT skills by distorting students' perception of knowledge and empowerment (more on this in subquestion 11 about technology and social learning, and subquestion 12 for problems to developing CT).

During student interviews, they unanimously thought that teachers should be agents of social change, which included performing as role models and generators of empathy in the classroom. Empathy, in fact, was mentioned several times in interviews as a condition necessary for effective democratic dialogue in the classroom, collaborative leadership, and social learning.

This, once again, can be linked with the EP and SP in the CoI model as a topic worth investigating further. Nevertheless, ST04 was wary in the sense that teachers could play positive as well as negative roles in the eyes of their own students. This rings with teacher responsibility and commitment as mentioned above. In their final interview, they added that teachers do wear different hats: inspirers, figures of authority, role models, motivators, and facilitators, which demand constant caution and good judgment. Establishing rapport with students and acting with a committed, respectful, and responsible attitude are also traits that teachers who believe in FCP should exert in the classroom (Freire, 2005a). Such reflective professional practice (Quesada, 2005) could become, then, truly liberating and prepare students for their own teaching agency (Freire, 2000; Allman, 2009), extending critical pedagogy like a bridge towards justice, democracy, and active citizenship (Giroux, 2011).

Regarding their self-perception as classmates, students reported that academic tasks pushed them to strengthen their bonds and thus, fostered a tighter community where they shared resources, and also improved their social links and communication. Thus, there is plenty of evidence of SP, EP, TP, and CP as per the CoI model (Garrison et al., 2001; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012) as we say from the online questionnaires, for instance. In addition, we found repeated occurrence of moments of communication with their course instructor (to be further discussed in the next subquestion). In this manner, they behaved as classmates who needed to work together and support each other in order to succeed in the course. This, although relatively common at UNED according to all participants, during this course flourished and developed more than usual due to unexpected challenges.

Students also had the chance of providing feedback to their instructor about course organization and lack of clear guidance or instructions. They also reached out for emotional support, which closed the circle of the CoI, collaborative leadership, and key elements from FCP such as collaboration, role switching, problem posing, problem solving, and having students find their own voice in the form of feedback, and to a degree, negotiation with their instructor (Freire, 2005a; Garrison, 2016).

Finally, as human beings, we can interpret all of the above as evidence to consider that instructor and students regarded themselves as individuals who were part of a learning community (CoI), which sometimes became a learning "team" and where conflict could be put aside or worked out in order to achieve the common goals of the course objectives (Garrison, 2016). As individuals and human beings, they were also capable of putting themselves in their instructor's place, in the teacher's role when necessary, and based on their research proposals and statements, they were also sensitive enough to put themselves in their own students' place, so as to be functional and useful members of other teams: the schools and institutions where they work (within the wider context of their own communities and Costa Rica as a nation).

Having discussed their views about their role as agents of social change, let us look deeper at some aspects revealed by the data: interaction between instructor and students, and the students' interaction with UNED.

10- How is the students' interaction with the instructor and the institution? (Including power relations at the preservice teacher classroom).

With the purpose of having a wider perspective of the case study, but also to go deeper into its description, here I will refer to power relations and hierarchy, dialogue in the classroom, teacher-student interaction, and "Studying at UNED" as themes and codes in our data analysis, as found in the interviews, class observations, and artifacts.

In Chapter 2 when presenting Garrison's collaborative leadership, it was stated that CoI if used for faculty development, could transform teaching and learning (Garrison, 2016). Since UNED's preservice EFL classroom can be described as a CoI, elements from Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2005a) like dialogue, among others, should also be present within this CoI, and in turn, enhance and get enhanced by collaborative leadership (CL).

In the case of interviews, as it was reported in Chapter 4, the course instructor and students mentioned instances of dialogue in the form of class discussions, role switching, clarifying of objectives and instructions, negotiation of meaning, and mutual feedback between teacher and students. Moreover, students found dialogue, problem posing and problem solving to be necessary among themselves to successfully tackle academic tasks and meet the course objectives. Such dialogue could be considered constructive, i.e., leading to the construction of knowledge and the enriching of the CoI), but also democratic, or in other words, as teacher and students exchanged information and addressed in-class problems in a horizontal fashion (Garrison et al, 2001; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; Freire, 2005a).

On the other hand, two students felt that power relations were unequal in the classroom. In this manner, despite that in general students explained in their interviews that there were plenty of instances for problem posing, problem solving, and constructive dialogue, and even the instructor's flexibility, power relations tended to be unequal because at the end it was the instructor who had the last word when she assessed students' progress and achievements in their assignments, and in particular, in their research proposal. This is what the two participants labeled an "illusion" since they found that discourse and practice did not match in the classroom. ST01 said, "I feel that it was…an illusion that the student…is the one who (sees) where… research leads, how to improve it. But in the end, the teacher still has the last word on whether (what) the student decided…is right or wrong."

Considering this, unequal power relations as perceived by students do not fit with FCP and may also distort and hinder the SP and EP in the CoI to a degree. However, as the data in their majority point in the opposite direction, when students acknowledged the instructor's role as a guide and facilitator in their own learning process, this exception related to unequal power relations is included as an example of conflicting evidence and unexpected findings.

Dialogue in the classroom was confirmed by class observations, where students not only discussed with the teacher in open dialogue, but received and provided feedback as well, and where they were able to address common problems inside and outside the classroom, both at UNED and in their own workplace (primary schools and institutes where they work). As it was mentioned above as well, students' final research proposals reflected an interest in posing and solving the problems they found in their teaching environments, and reflective teaching attitudes

on how to improve academic conditions for their own English learners (Freire, 2005a; Quesada, 2005).

In their role of students at UNED, participants evidenced a high level of commitment, teamwork, independence and autonomy, and responsibility, as it was observed during workshops, reflected on their research proposals, detailed in the course outline, and reported by the course instructor herself. In her final interview, she expressed, "I felt very motivated with (my) students…due to the idiosyncrasy of the university, it's up to them to get down to doing things." Such personal commitment, democratic dialogue, open communication, problem posing and solving, and collaborative leadership inside and outside the classroom illustrate what Freire (2005a) and Garrison (2016) have postulated. It also agrees with the findings of previous studies about fostering critical thinking skills in preservice teachers (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2017; Almulla, 2018; Menachery, 2018; Uluçınar & Aypay, 2018; Peterson-Hernandez & Fletcher, 2019).

11- What other social elements are influential to their social learning? (Including technology as a substratum for social learning).

So far, we have discussed the most important social elements such as the Social Presence in the UNED preservice teacher CoI, students' perspectives as figures of authority and influence over their own students, the social environment of the communities where they work, power relations and dialogue in the course, and some characteristics of what studying at UNED is like. However, in this section I want to address another aspect that has been touched upon but which

serves as a medium for social interaction and learning, in particular in the context of distance education at UNED: the role of technology.

As it was presented in Chapter 1, technology plays a key role at UNED because majors and open courses are offered by means of Moodle as a learning management system (LMS), complemented with videoconferences by Zoom or Teams, electronic mail, social media (Facebook for announcements), and instant messaging like WhatsApp (González et al., 2019, and our own data). This was confirmed extensively with the data obtained through interviews, class observations, and the CoI online questionnaire. Moreover, in the context of the CoI framework, technology serves as substratum on which the four presences are established and flourish, leading to social learning, enriching Communities of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2001; Quesada, 2011; Sangrà, 2011, Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes, and Garrison, 2013; Robinson, 2016). In the particular case of EFL preservice teacher training, technology also plays a key role in critical practice, as concluded by Quesada (2005).

In addition, as it will be illustrated next, technology in the context of the EFL CoI at UNED in addition to the development of the four presences (as reported in Chapter 4 and discussed here), also leads to the acquisition of critical thinking skills (with elements from Freire, 2005a) and collaborative thinking and leadership (Garrison, 2016; 2017).

In the CoI questionnaires, students and instructor predominantly considered that online communication in the course allowed them to express emotion, interact effectively, appreciate different perspectives, increase their curiosity, and develop a sense of collaboration, confirming the occurrence of CoI presences and collaborative leadership (Garrison, 2016). In this case,

online communication meant both the official LMS ("AprendeU", UNED's Moodle rendition), instant messaging, email, and Facebook to a lesser degree. One of the most striking exceptions found, however, was that students agreed on the lack of useful feedback from their teacher (by means of the LMS or email). As the interviews detailed, this was due to the students' confusion regarding unclear instructions or academic criteria and expectations, which, as discussed above, was eventually overcome by means of dialogue and negotiation between instructor and students. This was coherent with Freire's (2005a) tenets on democratic dialogue, problem posing and problem posing, and also with Garrison's (2016) regarding communication to reach a common goal in a collaborative manner.

In contrast, the instructor reported that students in general did not respond to her emails, evidencing a one-way communication. She speculated that students were not used to replying to such messages. Unfortunately, the researcher had no chance of asking students about this later since the issue appeared after the students' second interview.

Regarding technology, during the interviews, instructor and students mentioned it when they were asked about class activities, considering that these were either synchronous (workshops, WebQuest, article critique presentation), or asynchronous (online forum, final paper submission, preparation for the class). Here, students listed from the most important to the least important, the following: problem posing and problem solving, critical discussions, teamwork, and collaboration, which meet criteria from Freire (2005a) for critical thinking, Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) for CoI presences, and Garrison (2016) for collaborative leadership.

The reader will remember that students also referred to their frustration and confusion about guidelines, instructions, and expectations for their research proposal project, which forced them to support each other, share resources, and take the role of teachers outside the classroom in an asynchronous way, by means of the WhatsApp instant messaging group they created for academic purposes. Furthermore, they found that such online communication not only allowed them to tackle their tasks successfully, but also to develop critical thinking skills (such as deliberative dialogue, role switching, spontaneous discussions), collaborative leadership, and to strengthen emotional and social rapport as a group. In this sense, technology outside the classroom became a very important means to reach a successful end to the academic challenges of the course.

A final caveat about technology: In this final passage I want to resume several statements made in their interviews by the School Director and the course instructor about students' relation with technology and how it may impair the learning and teaching of critical thinking skills. This is presented here to contrast the positive aspects of technology in order to balance out the pros and cons in this particular case study of distance education. First of all, the School Director addressed an issue that she considers recurrent with the new generations of students who enroll at UNED and how this represents a challenge for teachers: "Today's youth have a very strong feeling on the idea that they know everything and that older people are already obsolete. It is difficult in the classroom to position yourself, because you must have many skills, leadership qualities..."

This, indeed, may suggest a preference towards a more traditional type of education, with more vertical power relations and a less constructivist approach. However it may be, it begs some of the questions that many teachers ask ourselves on a regular basis: Should the teacher be a leader in the classroom? To what degree? How can collaborative leadership and social learning take place if the teacher is challenged by the students? She adds, "because the changes in technology and globalization... (Many young people) think they know everything because they saw it on the internet."

These are intriguing interactions related to SP, EP, and TP in the CoI model, and how such challenges posed by easy access to technology and internet sources may motivate or impair social learning. For example, the effect of technology on EFL learning motivation was reviewed by Wei (2022), its negative effects on children's learning by Ahn (2022), teachers' perspectives by Beeri and Horowitz (2020), and teachers' attitudes in teaching technology by Nordlöf et al. (2019). Thus, overusing or misusing technology could create a false sense of knowledge and achievement among learners, which in turn may put collaborative leadership and even social learning in perspective, down to impairing the correct acquisition of CT skills. This is a topic which we believe should be explored in future research.

Second and last, during her final interview, the course instructor talked about the WebQuest as the activity that students "really loved and where they paid attention to all concepts…in a very interactive manner". This is worth contrasting with what she said next, "students don't like to read… That distraction (technology) is very dangerous for human beings: they sit us down and tell us what to do… Digital media are very powerful and they take

(students) from one button to the next". This can depict the younger generations' fascination with technology, which may help them learn and enjoy on the one hand, but also become docile and less critical on the other. Again, the effects of overusing technology on the development of critical thinking might be a valuable avenue for new research ventures.

Now that we have introduced the topic of difficulties to the development of critical thinking, let us have a deeper look at what the data revealed as reported in the instruments.

12- What problems or contradictions do they perceive as related to the development of critical thinking in their teacher training program? What's causing them?

Having mentioned the School Director's and the course instructor's statements, where they considered that the overuse of technology (or information) may lead to a false sensation of knowledge in students, and thus, a potential distortion or impairment of CT skills, in this section we will discuss some other elements found that may hinder the development of CT in the preservice teacher classroom.

Expanding on what the course instructor shared in her final interview when she narrated her experience with students in the course, she referred to students being intimidated by the prospect of learning how to do research: "The students brought that fear, it was very noticeable in the first class: 'we have never done research and that is very scary' ". Although anxiety as a negative affective variable falls out of the scope of this paper, its influence on online learning has been addressed as contained within the emotional presence (EP) in CoI (Campbell & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012) and also its role in EFL learning has been

explored (Díaz-Ducca, 2013, 2014, 2015; Rahmani & Hamidi, 2021), including the new reality

of teaching EFL in a post-COVID-19 world (Mohammed & Mudhsh, 2021).

For the record, the textbook used to teach research skills in this course was "Educational

Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications" by Geoffrey Mills (12th. Edition, 2019).

As reported earlier, students found a mismatch between the research paper samples in the book,

the ones suggested by the instructor, and the paper format requested in their course. Such

mismatch produced in them a sense of confusion and frustration and pushed them to work

together and cope in order to face the challenges, as reported above.

As it was discussed earlier, in his interview the Department Coordinator spoke his mind

about the acquisition of CT skills as a process not to be developed overnight or in a few years,

but as a life-time process due to its high level of intellectual demands (as per Bloom's taxonomy)

requiring judgment, analysis, and proposal of solutions. Beyond that, the Coordinator considered

that the course needed a teacher with strong expertise in research, because the EFL program

"does not have a foundation on research". This meant clear leadership to promote collaboration,

and skills in the SP, TP, and CP of the CoI model. In that sense, he said, the "instructor should

point out the (background) gaps detected in the classroom", because for a preservice teacher

without actual teaching experience, developing an educational research proposal would be

considerably difficult. Thus, strong leadership skills ("leadership in context"), and an emphasis

on the TP, SP and CP may be an implicit requirement.

Let us close this subquestion discussion with a final reflection from the Department

Coordinator regarding the present and the future of EFL teaching at UNED: "we are struggling

with generations of students who have not been exposed to processes that lead them to this desire

to be critical… it costs a lot (of effort and resources), to bring them to these processes." Once

again, the implications of this are related to the intellectual, social, and academic general level of

education in Costa Rica rather than at UNED. This can be understood more easily when

reviewing Chapter 1, considering that one cause might be that Neoliberal policies applied by

previous governments (Molina, 2016) may have resulted in the limitation of intellectual and

academic horizons. In addition, we can only speculate that this might also be due to the

phenomenon of private universities graduating professionals with certain academic and cognitive

deficiencies (Haba, 2002; Garnier, 2004) that in many cases public universities have needed to

shoulder as part of their solidary role in Costa Rican society (Avendaño, 2017).

13- According to the participants, how could these problems be solved in order to

transform their reality as student-teachers and future teachers?

In this section we will refer in the first place to the most relevant challenges to

developing Critical Thinking skills mentioned in the previous section, and what solutions were

invoked by participants during our data collection.

To start with, one of the most notorious problems in order to successfully foster CT in

preservice teachers detected was the fear and anxiety students felt when having to engage in

educational research (as reported in subquestion 12). In her final interview, the course instructor

elaborated on how this problem was dealt with and (apparently) overcome in the last workshop:

"we had a long conversation to (prepare them) for the second… course, to see how we feel,

where we are heading to and how we (can) improve (things)... it was like a catharsis." This

attitude and leadership on the instructor's part reflects her own CT and elements of FCP such as

democratic dialogue and problem posing, and problem solving. It also shows that she was willing

to listen to the students' concerns in order to further work on the obstacles they faced during the

course and which could impair their acquisition of CT skills: "I took notes and went one by one...

Then I talked with (the Department Coordinator) and it was very funny because we had the same

perspective… that everything was clear, yet it continues to be very difficult for them..."

Thus, within this CoI at UNED, the instructor tackled the situation from the angle of the

four presences: EP when listening and acknowledging their emotions; SP in terms of developing

effective communication in the class; TP as her role of facilitator for social learning; and CP as

she was focused on assisting students to acquire the target skills and succeed in their academic

tasks.

For their part, students had to deal with anxiety and confusion caused by the mismatch

between the research proposal models provided in the course and the criteria for their own

project. Students realized that working together as a team, sharing materials, offering support,

teaching each other, and exchanging ideas and impressions worked to overcome academic

challenges and built a tighter sense of Community of Inquiry, mainly by means of the EP, SP and

TP.

For example, the most experienced student pointed out that 20 years of teaching

experience allowed her to make decisions and take risks in her academic tasks, when instructions

or criteria had not been clear. It also had given her the chance to help her classmates by

providing samples of materials and forms that they could use as reference when having to develop their own approach to the program's assignments. This meant rich spaces for communication and exchanging, emotional support, collaborative leadership, as well as plenty of role switching and a constructivist approach to social learning, which in turn met key elements of the CoI model (SP, EP, CP, TP), Garrison's Collaborative Thinking (and Leadership), as well as Freire's dialogue, problem posing, and problem solving.

Regarding the lack of student experiences with educational research throughout the EFL teaching program, the Department Coordinator stated that eventually, with future syllabus and curriculum revisions, the program would incorporate and revamp other courses earlier in the teaching major, and educational research could be explored and put into practice both as a product and process. This weakness in the Major was recognized by several students in their final interviews, as they realized they had not undertaken any previous projects where educational research was required, and their skills could be developed. Even during this same course, some craved the opportunity to share the progress of their proposals with their partners, but were limited in doing so. Therefore, implementing such curricular upgrades might effectively provide new opportunities for students to acquire and hone their skills for developing CT. This could as well prepare them to design and conduct educational research within and without the UNED EFL teaching classroom.

In the next section, we proceed on to the joint recommendations formulated together by participants and this researcher.

14- What recommendations can participants and researcher design together in order to put into practice the solutions proposed, so as to transform their learning reality into a democratic and liberating experience as conceptualized by Freire?

The purpose of including this subquestion is to offer ideas for the eventual instrumentalization of some of the precepts of Freire's Critical Pedagogy such as deliberative and democratic dialogue, problem posing, and problem solving, with the intention of assisting participants find and record their own voice, as well as creating a series of suggestions that might be put into practice so as to change their academic and social reality. Due to its focus on suggestions and solutions, as well as on future possibilities, the answer to this subquestion will be included in Chapter 6 as part of my conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

CT is being taught and learned, although it cannot be described as a self-aware Freirean learning social environment but rather as a different type of Critical Pedagogy. Key elements identified were teamwork, dialogue, democratic power relations, problem posing, problem solving, and a defined position about the role of teachers as agents of social change (Allman, 2009; Freire, 2005a; Giroux, 2011). Each were evident in the interviews with all participants and also during class observations, but then again, none of the participants knew how to define FCP, who Freire was or what were his main ideas regarding education, CT, and pedagogy.

The EFL preservice teacher classroom functions as a CoI due to the abundant evidence of the four presences: Cognitive Presence, Teaching Presence, Social Presence and Emotional

Presence (Garrison et al., 2000; Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). There was a clear emphasis on Emotional Presence, as students and teacher found anxiety to have played a role that became positive, which fostered a tighter CoI in the EFL preservice teacher classroom. This was reported by the participants in the CoI questionnaire, interviews, and was observed by the researcher.

There was also plenty of CL taking place, which reflects Collaborative Leadership tenets (Garrison, 2016) such as teamwork, working for a common goal, shared responsibility, finding and implementing joint solutions to the problems encountered. At times this included the instructor (when they functioned as a "full" CoI), and at times it did not (when students switched roles with the teacher and became teachers of their peers themselves). We said that this could also be described in some cases as "leadership in context" (Cleveland-Innes & Sangrà, 2010).

Technology is an effective means for social learning and constructing knowledge (Moodle LMS, instant messaging, email) for both synchronous and asynchronous communication, teaching, and learning that supported critical teaching practice (Quesada, 2005). Nevertheless, some participants were cautious about technology in the classroom.

Thus, among the unexpected findings, technology, must not be regarded as a means in itself as it may have some downsides as well, detractive to the learning of CT skills. This was reported by the School Director, the Department Coordinator, and the course instructor mainly in their interviews. According to them, overusing and misusing technology and internet may in fact be hindering the acquisition of CT skills, because students may be developing a false sense of knowledge due to information found on internet that they accept at face value.

Besides, although there was plenty of flexibility on the instructor's part, including a permanent attitude for receptivity and dialogue, power relations were regarded as unequal based on what two students reported. They claimed that in spite of the teacher's collaborative attitude, in the end it always boiled down to the instructor making the final decision about the students' research proposals, for example, in terms of what was correct or incorrect.

One last item is how participants, that is, UNED authorities, course instructor, and students, were not aware of FCP and Freire's ideas. In the best of cases, they could only guess what FCP was about. This can be contrasted with the actual FCP elements that were found as part of the course results: deliberative dialogue, role-switching, problem posing and problem solving. Thus, FCP can only be described as "incomplete" or "insufficient". In other words, there are plenty of expressions of FCP without having a conscious FCP as such.

In the following chapter we will ponder the implications of the findings discussed, and what conclusions can be drawn from them. In addition, limitations to the study and some final recommendations for future research will be presented.

**Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations**

Some Conclusions

At this point, let us recapitulate our main arguments as supported by findings and the implications of such findings. This will be seen in the light of the research problem and how the purpose of this research paper has contributed to addressing that problem and expanding the area of study.

First, the purpose of this case study was to explore the teaching of Critical Thinking skills as described by Freire (2005a) in the form of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP) within a Community of Inquiry (CoI) that is also enriched by elements from Collaborative Leadership as understood by Garrison (2016). This research project was based on these three theoretical spheres. The distance EFL preservice teacher major classroom at UNED was assumed to perform as a CoI, originally presented in a Convergent Model, shown here again in Figure 13:

Figure 13

Proposed Convergent Theoretical Model Incorporating CoI, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and Garrison's Collaborative Leadership in the Distance Preservice EFL Teacher Classroom (Reproduced from Chapter 2)
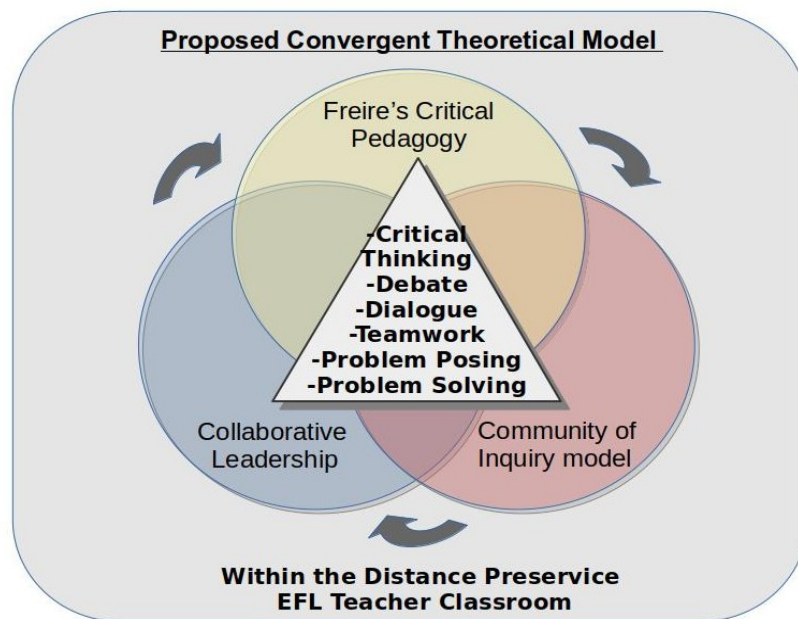
Based on survey data, interviews, and observation, we have established that CT skills were being taught and learned in the EFL preservice teacher classroom, including plenty of manifestations identifiable with FCP, such as democratic dialogue, problem posing, problem solving, as well as a sense of social responsibility that motivates teachers to become agents of social change. In addition, observation of the classroom confirmed its function as a CoI with evidence of four main types of presences (Cognitive Presence, Teaching Presence, Social

Presence, and Emotional Presence) in the course delivery, activities, and complex interactions recorded. In addition, important elements from Garrison's CL were also present: teamwork, shared responsibility, and collaborative efforts to solve problems and reach common goals.

Nevertheless, there were significant omissions in the data as to what was originally expected. The main absence was the lack of awareness among participants of Freire's ideas and FCP in particular, which implies that the CT skills being taught and learned, although compatible with FCP, cannot be acknowledged as FCP as such. Likewise, there was no clear or implied evidence of deliberative debate taking place during the course, which is also part of FCP as postulated by Freire (2005a) and previous studies by Guzmán (1999) and Harriger (2014). Also, power relations were predominantly democratic, with some exceptions mentioned by students, which in turn, only partially meet FCP's tenets as to the ideal type of power relations between teachers and students in the Freirean constructivist environment.

Despite these findings, our proposed Convergent Theoretical model remains operational, with the modification of lacking true FCP as one of the three theoretical spheres. Besides, from the triangle of expected findings seen in Figure 14, debate should be excluded as well. Therefore, while the main elements of CoI and Garrison's CL are present and FCP less so especially in terms of self-awareness about the author or his ideas, there is still reason to consider what kind of critical pedagogy we encountered in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Main Implications

Considering that part of my initial assumptions was that FCP may be taking place in the classroom, or at least some type of CT, the data collected did in fact reflect that CT was taking place, but on the other hand, such CT was not necessarily FCP. This could also be described as an absence in name only, because many elements belonging to FCP are present, such as concern for an education that engages issues of social change and community challenges; and concern for collective or shared leadership. Thus, terminology may vary (or be lacking) but many of the values and views are observable in the data.

In other words, in the absence of an awareness among all participants about Freire's ideas, we cannot hold the critical pedagogy implemented at the EFL preservice teacher classroom at UNED as completely Freirean. Would Freire consider it so, however? We dare speculate that his position, based on humanism and the constructivist interest of having teachers and students interact in a truly liberating experience, would have disregarded labels and theoretical specificities. Freire's real interest was to emancipate both teachers and learners from the traditional education shackles of theory and practice, while focusing on helping learners find their own voice and become agents for improving their own social reality. This was found in this case study.

For our purposes, then, certain key aspects of the theoretical definitions and characteristics in Chapter 2 remain relevant and instrumentalized in our methodology and the research itself. While the critical pedagogy we discovered cannot be identified as Freire's Critical Pedagogy, much of the data and discussion illustrated in chapters 4 and 5 that

participants share many of the tenets of FCP and put them into practice during the EFL research course and applied them to their own immediate reality.

Our research detected an as yet undefined type of critical pedagogy taking place in the preservice teacher classroom, but not a "complete" rendition of FCP. We decided to brand it post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy (pFCP) since we do not identify it with any particular branch of critical pedagogy described in Chapter 2. This potentially new critical pedagogy, as observed in this study, is however expanded by CL within the context of a CoI where social learning occurs in the same manner that it was originally assumed and presented in this project. As a result, as it was shown in our proposed Convergent Theoretical model as the role of FCP, the new pFCP can integrate and interact with the CoI model and Garrison's CL within the context of the virtual classroom described originally.

Thus, the data shows that this new convergence maintains the goal of fostering the teaching and learning of CT skills for preservice teachers who believe in dialogue, democratic power relations, teamwork, enabling of students, problem posing, problem solving, and their role as agents of social change. Regarding debate, although it was not reported in our research, we believe that it is a useful type of class activity which ideally should be implemented also in order to enhance the CoI presences (CP, TP), and therefore contribute to better problem posing and better problem solving among others.

That is why we have kept it as part of our theoretical model. In order to make this clearer, in the following Table 14, components of the original Proposed Convergent model are contrasted

with the data in order to show those to be included in the new Convergent model (more

information on the unexpected findings was synthesized in Table 14 in the previous chapter):

Table 15

Comparison Table Between the Components of the Original Proposed Convergent Model, the

Data Collected, and the Revised Theoretical Model

| Item in the original Proposed Convergent model:	Summary of data found or lacking:	Item in the Revised Convergent model:
Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP)	Plenty of elements were observed: deliberative dialogue, problem posing, and problem solving among others. However, none of the participants was either aware of FCP or of Freire and his ideas.	Post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy (pFCP) replaces FCP
Community of Inquiry model (CoI), including the four presences	Plenty of evidence of CoI and the four presences (CP, SP, TP, and EP)	CoI, including the four presences remains unchanged
Collaborative Leadership	There were plenty of instances of leadership, collaboration, teamwork, coordination towards a common goal among others.	Collaborative Leadership remains unchanged
Critical Thinking (CT)	Numerous evidence reported, observed, and found	Critical Thinking (CT) is kept
Debate	Neither reported nor observed	Debate should be kept as part of the model due to its theoretical and reported importance (by participants)
Dialogue	Plenty of instances reported	Dialogue is kept

	and observed	
Teamwork	Plenty of instances reported and observed	Teamwork is kept
Problem posing	Plenty of instances reported and observed	Problem posing is kept
Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP)	Plenty of elements were observed: deliberative dialogue, problem posing, and problem solving among others. However, none of the participants was either aware of FCP or of Freire and his ideas.	Post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy (pFCP) replaces FCP
Problem solving	Plenty of instances reported and observed	Problem solving is kept

Based on the relations among the original components of the Proposed Convergent Theoretical model, the data found during the research, its theoretical and practical (observed and reported) importance, most elements are kept, with the main exclusion of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP), which is now replaced by post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy (pFCP). Consequently, the new Proposed Convergent Theoretical Model, including pFCP, can be observed in Figure 14.

Figure 14

New Proposed Convergent Theoretical Model Incorporating CoI, post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy, and Garrison's Collaborative Leadership in the Distance Preservice EFL Teacher Classroom
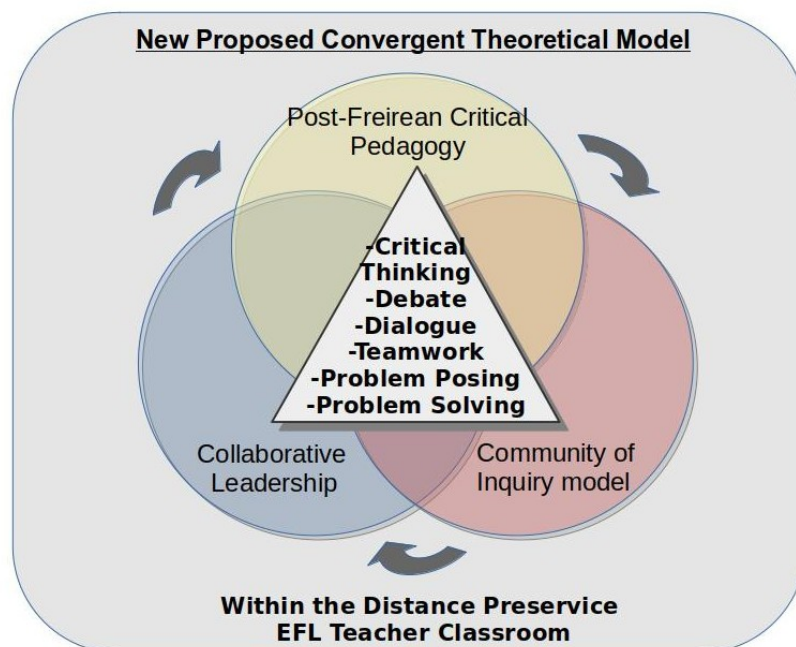
Lines for Future Research

Looking at the new proposed model, we must conclude that the theory that supports the Convergent model is functional as an iterative process and interaction in our case study. Is this something that can be proven or disproven in other EFL teacher training environments, or in other courses at the EFL major at UNED? Only further research could answer this and other

questions, including delving deeper into any of the three theoretical spheres, or how only two of them interact in richer detail.

In this sense, the direct relation between the CoI model and FCP, for example, remains only functional and instrumental, and may be described in terms of their observed interaction: CoI works as a support for FCP and CT in general. Could CoI be found in the absence of FCP? In this particular case study, this has been shown. Furthermore, might CoI be found in the absence of CT? We can only speculate that it might, but actual proof can only be obtained in new research. We can also ask ourselves, how did Freire influence the CoI model and CL? At this point, that would require a future study, considering that the reviewed literature did not throw any light about this.

For example, an interesting area to be explored further is how the individual learning overlaps or meets collaborative and social learning. This means that one of the possible lines of future research suggested by the data are the ways in which the CoI presences unfold and interact (as analyzed under subquestion 4 in Chapter 5) including the points where the individual learning meets the group learning (this is the "Private World" in the Practical Inquiry model) versus the group's process ("Shared World" in the Practical Inquiry model) as presented by Garrison et al. (2001). There were also complex elements and interactions within the Social Presence (SP) and the Emotional Presence (EP) detected in this research that merit detailed study such as reported empathy as an affective variable (Díaz-Ducca, 2013), and emotion in the form of anxiety and feeling "comfortable" in the classroom (Stenbom et al., 2016; Majeski et al., 2018), and how they influence the Cognitive Presence (CP) and the overall learning experience in the CoI model.

How does individual experience and learning extends on to social learning and social transformation? This is also a suggestive topic to investigate further in terms of the implementation of theory and assessing the emergence and possibilities of the CoI model and CL itself. Also, it is worth probing how FCP has influenced the CoI model and CL, where the individual learning transcends the personal sphere of education and growth and encompasses social worlds, and how the learners can influence their social contexts and also be influenced by them.

Besides, within the realm of CoI the phenomenon observed related to the development of an embedded tight student community within the bigger CoI of the course is also intriguing. As reported, students cultivated their social elements (SP) in the form of teaching each other (role switching, TP), and offered each other support (SP, EP) in order to solve their academic tasks (CP) and deal with stress, frustration, and anxiety (EP, TP, SP).

As far as our contribution to the study and possibilities of the CoI framework, we consider that this project has expanded the long list of CoI research in new directions. The exploration we intended to make was precisely about how CoI offers affordances for the teaching of Critical Thinking skills (as framed by Freire, 2005a) and Collaborative Leadership (Garrison, 2016) in EFL preservice teacher training. The three theoretical spheres have been integrated for the first time in a Convergent Model, which we hope will allow for innovative ways of looking at each theoretical sphere and more importantly, the need for an enhanced preservice teacher education that includes elements from pFCP, CoI, and CL in different combinations and nuance. Taking another look, this would be visually represented in our new Convergent Model by

varying the size of each sphere, as research focus and interest dictate. In this sense, we have achieved with this research new perspectives for further exploration of the teaching of Critical Thinking skills for EFL preservice teacher training.

Limitations Found

During the data collection, analysis, and discussion stages, several limitations were found. Although we consider that such limitations did not impair our research, they may have reduced our scope in terms of having a wider perspective about UNED's EFL preservice teacher classroom, as well as regarding some theoretical elements. However, being this a qualitative case study, we have intended to preserve the "multiple realities, the different and often contradictory views" (Stake, 1995) of participants and the whole case context.

Keeping this in mind, some of the main limitations encountered were the number of participants: two university authorities, one instructor, and five students. We can only speculate that having observed two groups, for example, and contrasting two instructors' and more students' views would have given us a more elaborated view of the research problem, and how the three theoretical spheres developed and interacted.

Another limitation was the number of live sessions (workshops) observed. Even though this is a limitation of the English major and the way the course was designed at UNED (only four workshops per course, and only two where social interaction of the group could be expressed), we believe that more sessions would have also provided us with a wider view of social interactions, collaborative leadership, and critical thinking skills being taught and put into

practice. This includes the kind of activities developed during the sessions, which, as we

mentioned above, excluded debate and more spaces for deliberative dialogue.

Lastly, having access to more students' papers or other artifacts might have shed some

extra light on how the process of learning and applying critical thinking skills took place

throughout the course in the context of the CoI afforded by the course itself. In fact, the absence

of more class activities where students could share their views about the evolution of their

research proposal, for example, was reported by the students as a missed opportunity to

understand better their own and their classmates' process of acquiring and applying critical

thinking and research skills.

Recommendations for Improving the Learning of CT Skills at UNED's EFL Teacher Classroom

One of the research subquestions discussed in Chapter 5 was postponed for this chapter

because it referred to collaborative recommendations to improve the teaching and learning of CT

skills, as a means to change their academic and social reality. The question read thus,

(14-) What recommendations can participants and researcher design together in order to

put into practice the solutions proposed, so as to transform their learning reality into a

democratic and liberating experience as conceptualized by Freire?

The objective of including this subquestion was to offer ideas for the eventual

instrumentalization of some of the precepts of Freire's Critical Pedagogy such as deliberative and

democratic dialogue, problem posing, and problem solving, with the intention of assisting

participants find and record their own voices, as well as creating a series of suggestions that might be put into practice for social transformation.

In this manner, their process of social learning in UNED's EFL preservice teacher classroom could be labeled as truly "liberating" (Freire, 2005a), and their own professional practice might allow them to play their role as agents of social change. With this in mind, we list next a series of ideas which may seem schematic, but which condense some of the solutions found or hinted at during this discussion. Others are the result of collaborative brainstorming with the course instructor and students after the data collection stage. Brainstorming was proposed as a way to overtly include FCP tenets in this project such as establishing democratic dialogue, discussing the problems found (problem posing), designing solutions (problem solving), and changing their reality.

- The most organic approach we found to solving problems to the acquisition and development of CT skills are the creation of spaces in class for dialogue, deliberation, CL, instilling an awareness of FCP and CoI tenets (which this very research may contribute to achieve) in higher education and in UNED Humanities School's authorities, instructors, and eventually, students.

- Fostering CT skills and reflective teaching practice (Quesada, 2005) by the incorporation of reflective practice assignments in the EFL program for in-service and preservice teachers such as teacher reflection and collaborative action research.

- Developing in-class, in-program and out-of-class solutions and leadership by means of research projects where students can deliberate, analyze, discuss, pose problems, and

propose solutions in a collaborative manner about their own academic context (as students) and professional reality (as EFL teachers). These projects could use action research as a means of inquiry because of the accessible and non-threatening combination of theory and practice they offer for teachers, or even EFL teaching students (Mills, 2003; Stringer, 2004).

• Incorporating overt teaching of CT skills in the program, and thus, potentiating students' raised awareness in a way that they can explore it in their own institutions and communities.

• Motivating students to apply and develop their research proposals in their own institutions at earlier stages in the Bachelor's and Licentiate's programs. Once again, action research can function as a practical tool (Mills, 2003; Stringer, 2004).

• Allowing instances for sharing experiences during the creation of a research proposal, both as a process and as a product in specific education courses in the Bachelor's and Licentiate's programs. This could be achieved by means of class and inter-class forums, where students enrolled in their major can post their projects, comment, and ask and answer questions. This would in turn reinforce TP, EP, SP, and CP within courses and within the EFL teaching major.

• Stimulating curiosity in students focused on independent and reflective learning. This would enable students to "own" their learning process when they reflect upon "what have I achieved with these contents, how can I apply them to my professional reality?" In turn,

this could potentiate critical thinking skills in preservice and in-service teachers enrolled in the major.

- Promoting intercultural studies would help EFL teachers raise awareness in their own students about the importance of learning English. Pondering on "Why English?" would also provide them with CT skills and promote independence and self-reliance as learners and teachers. This would also benefit students, parents, and relieve EFL teachers from the constant pressure to keep students extrinsically motivated to learn. Intercultural projects could be developed with English-speaking volunteers such as expatriates who live in Costa Rica, visitors, exchange students, and visiting teachers.

Corollary: Final Thoughts on CT Skills and CL for EFL Teachers

At this point, it is relevant to remind the reader of the underlying purpose of this research study: to contribute to the development of teacher training as a field that entails university responsibility as an institution where critical thinking must thrive and be brought to practice. Furthermore, teacher training, we believe, never ends. Even after graduating from college, teachers in their professional practice should engage in continuous self-realization. This can be achieved by means of graduate studies, short trainings, independent self-training, and classroom research. One of our joint recommendations for this as stated above is using action research in the classroom. As we discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, a means to do this is reflective professional practice such as proposed by Quesada (2005): reflective professional practice and teacher actualization as an individual or collaborative process where preservice teachers can develop

reflective action research projects in order to put theory into practice and thus, improve their own teaching. As a teacher and researcher, I can easily testify to the benefits of action research for reflective professional practice and independent improvement.

On the other hand, Garrison (2016) puts emphasis on the training of new faculty by means of thinking collaboratively as a milieu where common goals are reached, there is shared responsibility, and more importantly, there are changes in organizational culture that become sustained in time in order to truly create collaborative leadership. This view has elements in common with Freire's Critical Pedagogy, such as collaboration, dialogue and open communication, problem posing, and problem solving. For Garrison, faculty development programs should aim at developing collaborative thinking and learning within the context of a CoI. In order to potentiate collaborative leadership, such programs ought to include students. Can this be achieved in UNED's EFL preservice teacher classroom as it was presented and discussed in this case study? Let the reader decide at this point.

Before moving on to the final issue, we still need to address the topics brought up by the course instructor and the major authorities regarding the overuse and misuse of technology in the classroom, and how they can create an artificial sense of knowledge in students as the result of accessing information from online sources, and how this can affect the development of true critical thinking skills, collaboration, and the construction of knowledge as the product of social learning in the classroom. As Garrison (2016) points out, technology will not be very useful if a culture of collaborative thinking and leadership has not been established in advance. In this sense, we find that the best way to cope with the situation would be the teaching and learning of

collaborative thinking and leadership as a set of academic skills for preservice teachers since early in the EFL teaching major. Besides, this could be achieved by the design and delivery of courses as dynamic Communities of Inquiry where the four presences can flourish along each course and along the EFL teaching program as well.

From the perspective of our Convergent Model, this would mean that it would be the task of curricular designers, the School director, department coordinators, and teacher-mentors to provide teacher-students with the tools and chances for them to realize that they need to work as a team, within the environment of the CoI, in order to eventually acquire critical thinking skills by means of collaborative thinking and collaborative leadership implemented as problem posing and problem solving. This could be particularly useful in our post-Covid-19 times, when more and more teacher training programs have transformed into distance or virtual education experiences that demand the use of technology for preservice and in-service teachers.

In addition, further research that EFL teachers can conduct in their own communities (urban or rural, peasant, coastal, marginalized, or with populations such as indigenous or African-descendants) could also be promoted. For this, as reported by the participants and as we have discussed, teachers could undertake their own research. Action research is a flexible methodology that could be tapped in these contexts.

These perspectives about the growing importance of distance education and higher education in general match what UNESCO proposes as the role of universities in its 2021 report and the future of education: "Higher education needs to be a fierce advocate for free and open access to knowledge and science when it comes to academic scholarship, learning materials,

software, and digital connectivity, among others" (p.75) Hopefully, research like this case study will shed new light about the possibilities of active collaboration as part of the CoI model, critical thinking, and collaborative leadership taken as dynamic forces that interact in rich and complex ways in order to foster both individual and social learning in the distance education classroom and teacher training.

We cannot stress enough that this process of revamping teacher training programs has already started at UNED's EFL major, but demands restless and vigilant leadership to grow and constantly improve. This is also part of a bigger process of social learning and cultural changes towards collaboration within the university and society itself. In the words of Garrison (2016):

> Leaders in any community must be learners, and the best leaders are those who can think
> and learn collaboratively. The best leaders are those who are able to collaboratively
> reflect on the challenges of the community and then have the courage to make the
> necessary decisions. (p.115)

Post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy: Beyond Freire's Critical Pedagogy

One last element worth discussing is the relation between Freire's Critical Pedagogy with post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy, as mentioned previously. Viewing the results and conclusions of this research project, the main elements of FCP can be present without identifying them as Freirean per se: democratic dialogue and a perspective on power relations, teamwork, role switching, problem posing, problem solving, social responsibility, and an awareness of the teacher's role as an agent of social change.

Consequently, we can talk about post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy as a new, updated version of FCP for the 21st century. In this sense, we can describe pFCP as FCP which incorporates a stance focused on democratic and flexible views that does sever FCP from its original Marxist roots. This may imply that FCP has evolved in the current century and in the context of technology-mediated distance education. Moreover, pFCP, as a novel model, could also be characterized as "Freire without Marx", i.e., as a way to transcend any vestiges of class struggle and partisanship (the "oppressors versus the oppressed" dialectics) and zero in on what Freire (2005b) defined as a "force for change and liberty" (p.26), which translates into maintaining and nurturing a critical and liberating pedagogy in the preservice teacher classroom. Such independence from some of the original sources of Freirean pedagogy, such as Marxism and the Frankfurt School, could work as a democratic meta-tool where the most useful and up-to-date elements in Freire's Critical Pedagogy are salvaged, while at the same time it might allow FCP to put itself under the spotlight in order to examine itself critically (what we may regard as a "critical thinking about critical thinking").

To be more concrete, when the course instructor expressed her skepticism regarding the implementation of certain humanistic approaches as institutional policies without any kind of previous criticism or discussion, post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy could reach out and come close to Free Thinking, that is, a set of critical thinking skills that question all narratives indistinctly and as objectively as possible, be it traditional education, Neoliberal, globalist, or Neo-Marxist institutional and state policies.

In times when Neoliberalism is degenerating into Globalism and Transhumanism, as preached in the shape of the "Great Reset" promoted by the World Economic Forum, (Schwab & Malleret, 2020), Posthumanism, and imposed policies sponsored by foundations like George Soros' Open Society or Bill and Melinda Gates', or even unpopular agendas pushed by intergovernmental organizations, critical thinking skills should allow teachers and students to evaluate curricula, official policies, and organizational and media narratives from an independent point of view, that is, from a critical perspective free from economic, political, or ideological compromise. Moreover, in times when fake news, illegal mandates, and even the scientific and academic discourse have been manipulated for political and economic interests that threaten the very future of free thought, civil rights, and democracy in the world, post-Freirean Critical Pedagogy could become a truly problematizing and liberating practice that searches for the truth and defends freedom by means of collaboration and leadership within a Community of Inquiry, deliberative dialogue, problem posing, problem solving, and social change.

Returning to Freire (2009), however, critical thinking as liberating pedagogy rests on a bedrock of dialogue and love, such as he described,

Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (p.89)

Indeed, I could not agree more with Freire in this regard: love for the world and for people, that is, for God's creation and for ourselves, made in His image, must be present as the

lying foundation for all teaching training and practice. The challenges ahead of us are huge, nevertheless. In the wake of the authoritarian turn politicians throughout the world have taken in the last few years, and the looming project of "Shaping Future Government" (Forbes, 2022), the prospects for critical thinking in the coming years do not seem to be the most optimistic.

Then, in addition to the Neoliberal assault on universities, we are witnessing a Globalist menace to democratic rule of law. Truth and critical thinking are under siege by a "dictatorship of relativism", and a "new intolerance", in the words of Pope Benedict XVI (2010). For him, "a new intolerance is spreading… There are well-established standards of thinking that are supposed to be imposed on everyone… we are basically experiencing the abolition of tolerance" (p.52). In order to face such challenges, the aspiration towards love for humanity, truth, and liberty should be the unequivocal goal of universities, teachers, and teachers-to-be in the 21st. century if higher education and democracy are to survive.

At the end of my doctoral research, I believe more firmly than ever that love, the quest for truth, and freedom need to be regarded as permanent ideals in our educational and professional practice as critical academicians in opposition to ignorance, mendacity, and manipulation if we sincerely wish for a society that continuously engages in dialogue and transformation for the advancement of justice, equality, and authentic democracy. It depends on all of us that it may be so for the present and future generations of independent and critical teachers, critical students, and critical citizens as well.

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Appendix A: Initial Interview Questionnaire

(Critical thinking, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, Collaborative Leadership)

Instructions: *This information will be kept confidential and used only for purposes of this research regarding critical thinking in the classroom. Please answer the items with your information as clearly and sincerely as possible. For any questions, you can write to teacherjenaro@yahoo.com*

Role in this course: Instructor _____ / Student _____. Age: _____. Sex: _____.

Part I. Critical Thinking and Freire's Critical Pedagogy

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. What is critical thinking for you? What is Freire's Critical Pedagogy?

3. What is the importance of critical thinking for teachers in the classroom at UNED?

4. What is the importance of critical thinking for students in the classroom at UNED?

5. How is critical thinking incorporated into the course (syllabus, activities, assessment) at UNED?

6. What kind of power relations do you see in the classroom at UNED? (equal, unequal, etc.)

7. Should teachers be agents of social change? How?

8. How do you feel about doing the following activities in class at UNED?

- Debates:_____.

- Critical discussions:_____.

- Working in teams:_____.

- Analysis of local/national problems:_____.

- Proposing solutions to problems as a group:_____.

Part II. Collaborative Leadership

9. What is leadership for you? What is collaborative leadership?

10. What are the traits of a good leader?

11. What is the importance of leadership in the classroom at UNED?

12. Can teachers and students be leaders inside the classroom at UNED? Outside the classroom?

13. Can teachers and students switch roles, so that students teach and teachers learn in the classroom at UNED? How?

Notes / further comments:

_____.

This instrument is intended to be used as a videoconferencing/email interview, in order to establish both teacher-mentors' and teacher-students' initial attitudes and beliefs regarding critical thinking, dialogue and problematization (Freire, 2005a), and collaborative work (Collaborative leadership as understood by Garrison, 2016). It will be administered in Spanish for purposes of clarity and facilitating clear responses, and later translated into English for coding, analysis, and reporting.

Appendix B: Initial Interview Questionnaire (Spanish Version)

Cuestionario de entrevista inicial (Pensamiento crítico, Pedagogía crítica de Freire,

Liderazgo colaborativo)

Instrucciones: *Esta información se mantendrá como confidencial y se utilizará únicamente para los fines de esta investigación con respecto al pensamiento crítico en el aula de la UNED. Por favor responda los ítemes con su información de la manera más clara y sincera posible. Para cualquier consulta, puede escribirnos a* teacherjenaro@yahoo.com

Rol en este curso: Instructor _____ / Estudiante _____. Edad: _____. Sexo: _____.

Parte I. Pensamiento crítico y pedagogía crítica de Freire

1. ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva enseñando?

2. ¿Qué es el pensamiento crítico para Ud.? ¿Qué es la pedagogía crítica de Freire?

3. ¿Cuál es la importancia del pensamiento crítico para los profesores en el aula UNED?

4. ¿Cuál es la importancia del pensamiento crítico para los estudiantes en el aula UNED?

5. ¿Cómo se incorpora el pensamiento crítico a este curso de la UNED (programa de estudios, actividades, evaluación)?

6. ¿Qué tipo de relaciones de poder aprecia Ud. en el aula UNED? (iguales, desiguales, etc.)

7. ¿Deben los profesores ser agentes de cambio social? ¿Cómo?

8. ¿Cómo se siente al realizar las siguientes actividades en la clase en la UNED?

• Debates: _____.

• Discusiones críticas: _____.

• Trabajo en grupo: _____.

• Análisis de problemas locales / nacionales: _____.

• Proposición de soluciones a problemas en grupo: _____.

Parte II. Liderazgo colaborativo

9. ¿Qué es el liderazgo para usted? ¿Qué es el liderazgo colaborativo?

10. ¿Cuáles son las características de un buen líder?

11. ¿Cuál es la importancia del liderazgo en el aula UNED?

12. ¿Pueden los profesores y los estudiantes ser líderes dentro del aula UNED? ¿Fuera del aula?

13. ¿Pueden los profesores y los alumnos intercambiar de roles, de modo que los alumnos enseñen y los profesores aprendan en el aula UNED? ¿Cómo?

Notas / comentarios adicionales:

_____.

Este instrumento está destinado a ser utilizado como videoconferencia / entrevista por correo electrónico, con el fin de establecer las actitudes y creencias iniciales tanto de los profesores-mentores como de los profesores-alumnos sobre el pensamiento crítico, el diálogo y la problematización (Freire, 2005a) y el trabajo colaborativo (liderazgo colaborativo tal como lo entiende Garrison, 2016). Se administrará en castellano con fines de claridad y facilitará respuestas claras, y luego se traducirá al inglés para su codificación, análisis e informes.

Appendix C: CoI Checklist/Questionnaire – Instructor Version

(adapted from Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2019)

Instructions: *This information will keep confidential and used only for purposes of this research. Please check the criteria that are true for you. You may add any extra information on the second column. For any questions, you can write to* teacherjenaro@yahoo.com

Criteria (circle the number)	Comments:
1. Students in my course can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge learned.	
2. My actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among course participants.	
3. Students in my course are motivated to explore content related questions.	
4. Course activities pique students' curiosity.	
5. I acknowledge emotion expressed by the students in my course.	
6. I clearly communicate important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	
7. Students in my course are able to form distinct impressions of some other course participants.	
8. I clearly communicate important course goals.	
9. I provide feedback in a timely fashion.	
10. I provide feedback that helps students understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the course goals and objectives.	
11. I help to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics in a way that helps students to learn.	
12. Students feel comfortable disagreeing with other	

course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.	
13. Reflection on course content and discussions helps students understand fundamental concepts.	
14. Expressing emotion in relation to sharing ideas is acceptable in my course.	
15. Online discussions are facilitated in a way that is valuable for helping students appreciate different perspectives.	
16. I encourage course participants to explore new concepts in my course.	
17. I clearly communicate important course topics.	
18. Combining new information helps students answer questions raised in course activities.	
19. Brainstorming and finding relevant information helps students resolve content related questions.	
20. In my role as instructor, I demonstrate emotion in my presentations and/or when facilitating discussions online.	
21. Learning activities helps students construct explanations/solutions.	
22. Students feel their point of view is acknowledged by other course participants.	
23. Students in my course feel comfortable taking on the role of teacher when the opportunity arises.	
24. Students utilize a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in my course.	
25. I keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	
26. Students feel comfortable interacting with other course participants.	
27. I provide clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	

28. I find myself responding emotionally about ideas or learning activities in my course.	
29. Getting to know other course participants gives students a sense of belonging in my course.	
30. Students feel comfortable conversing online in my course.	
31. Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for interaction with and among my students.	
32. Problems posed increase student interest in course content.	
33. Students feel comfortable expressing emotion through the online medium classroom.	
34. I help to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helps students to learn.	
35. Students can apply the knowledge created in my course to their work or other non-class related activities.	
36. Students feel comfortable participating in course discussions.	
37. Students develop solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	
38. I am helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helps students clarify their thinking.	
39. Online discussions can help students to develop a sense of collaboration.	
40. Emotion is expressed online among the students in my course.	

Appendix D: CoI Checklist/Questionnaire – Student Version

(adapted from Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2019)

Instructions: *This information will keep confidential and used only for purposes of this research. Please check the criteria that are true for you. You may add any extra information on the second column. For any questions, you can write to* teacherjenaro@yahoo.com

Criteria (circle the number)	Comments:
1. I can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge learned.	
2. The instructor's actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among course students.	
3. As a student, I am motivated to explore content related questions.	
4. Course activities pique my curiosity.	
5. The instructor acknowledges emotion expressed by the students.	
6. The instructor clearly communicates important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	
7. I am able to form distinct impressions of some other participants.	
8. The instructor clearly communicates important course goals.	
9. The instructor provides feedback in a timely fashion.	
10. The instructor provides feedback that helps me understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the course goals and objectives.	
11. The instructor helps to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics in a way that helps me to learn.	

12. I feel comfortable disagreeing with other participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.	
13. Reflection on course content and discussions helps me understand fundamental concepts.	
14. Expressing emotion in relation to sharing ideas is acceptable in the course.	
15. Online discussions are facilitated in a way that is valuable for helping me appreciate different perspectives.	
16. The instructor encourages participants to explore new concepts.	
17. The instructor clearly communicates important topics.	
18. Combining new information helps me answer questions raised in course activities.	
19. Brainstorming and finding relevant information helps me resolve content related questions.	
20. The instructor demonstrates emotion in lectures and/or when facilitating discussions online.	
21. Learning activities helps me construct explanations/solutions.	
22. I feel my point of view is acknowledged by other participants.	
23. I feel comfortable taking on the role of teacher when the opportunity arises.	
24. I utilize a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in the course.	
25. The instructor keeps students engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	
26. I feel comfortable interacting with other participants.	
27. The instructor provides clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	

28.	The instructor responds emotionally about ideas or learning activities.	
29.	Getting to know other course participants gives me a sense of belonging in the course.	
30.	I feel comfortable conversing online in the course.	
31.	Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for interaction with and among my classmates.	
32.	Problems posed increase my interest in course content.	
33.	I feel comfortable expressing emotion through the online medium classroom.	
34.	The instructor helps to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helps me learn.	
35.	I can apply the knowledge created in the course to my work or other non-class related activities.	
36.	I feel comfortable participating in course discussions.	
37.	I develop solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	
38.	The instructor is helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helps me clarify my thinking.	
39.	Online discussions can help me to develop a sense of collaboration.	
40.	Emotion is expressed online among the students.	

Appendix E: CoI Checklist - Coding – Instructor Version

(adapted from Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2019. Reproduced with permission).

1.	Students in my course can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge learned.	CP – Resolution
2.	My actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among course participants.	TP - Facilitation
3.	Students in my course are motivated to explore content related questions.	CP – Triggering Event
4.	Course activities pique students' curiosity.	CP – Triggering Event
5.	I acknowledge emotion expressed by the students in my course.	EP – (Teaching Presence)
6.	I clearly communicate important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	TP – Design and Organization
7.	Students in my course are able to form distinct impressions of some other course participants.	SP – Affective (Personal) Expression
8.	I clearly communicate important course goals.	TP – Design and Organization
9.	I provide feedback in a timely fashion.	TP – Direct Instruction
10.	I provide feedback that helps students understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the course goals and objectives.	TP – Direct Instruction
11.	I help to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics in a way that helps students to learn.	TP - Facilitation
12.	Students feel comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.	SP – Group Cohesion
13.	Reflection on course content and discussions helps students understand fundamental concepts.	CP – Integration
14.	Expressing emotion in relation to sharing ideas is acceptable in my course.	EP – (Cognitive Presence)
15.	Online discussions are facilitated in a way that is	CP – Exploration

	valuable for helping students appreciate different perspectives.	
16.	I encourage course participants to explore new concepts in my course.	TP - Facilitation
17.	I clearly communicate important course topics.	TP – Design and Organization
18.	Combining new information helps students answer questions raised in course activities.	CP – Integration
19.	Brainstorming and finding relevant information helps students resolve content related questions.	CP – Exploration
20.	In my role as instructor, I demonstrate emotion in my presentations and/or when facilitating discussions online.	EP – (Teaching Presence)
21.	Learning activities helps students construct explanations/solutions.	CP – Integration
22.	Students feel their point of view is acknowledged by other course participants.	SP – Group Cohesion
23.	Students in my course feel comfortable taking on the role of teacher when the opportunity arises.	TP - Facilitation
24.	Students utilize a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in my course.	CP – Exploration
25.	I keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	TP- Facilitation
26.	Students' feel comfortable interacting with other course participants.	SP – Open Communication
27.	I provide clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.	TP – Design and Organization
28.	I find myself responding emotionally about ideas or learning activities in my course.	EP – (Cognitive Presence)
29.	Getting to know other course participants gives students a sense of belonging in my course.	SP – Affective (Personal) Expression
30.	Students feel comfortable conversing online in my course.	SP – Open Communication
31.	Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for interaction with and among	SP – Affective (Personal)

	my students.	Expression
32.	Problems posed increase student interest in course content.	CP – Triggering Event
33.	Students feel comfortable expressing emotion through the online medium classroom.	EP – (Social Presence)
34.	I help to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helps students to learn.	TP – Direct Instruction
35.	Students can apply the knowledge created in my course to their work or other non-class related activities.	CP – Exploration
36.	Students feel comfortable participating in course discussions.	SP – Open Communication
37.	Students develop solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	CP – Resolution
38.	I am helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helps students clarify their thinking.	TP – Facilitation
39.	Online discussions can help students to develop a sense of collaboration.	SP – Group Cohesion
40.	Emotion is expressed online among the students in my course.	EP – (Social Presence)

Appendix F: Final Interview Questionnaire

(Critical thinking, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, Collaborative Leadership)

Instructions: *This information will be kept confidential and used only for purposes of this research regarding critical thinking in the classroom. Please answer the items with your information as clearly and sincerely as possible. For any questions, you can write to*

teacherjenaro@yahoo.com

Role in this course: Instructor _____ / Student _____. Age: _____. Sex: _____.

Part I. Critical Thinking and Freire's Critical Pedagogy

At the end of this course, how do you…

1. See the importance of critical thinking for teachers in the classroom at UNED? Of Freire's Critical Pedagogy?

2. See the importance of critical thinking for students in the classroom at UNED?

3. Consider critical thinking was incorporated into the course (syllabus, activities, assessment)?

4. See power relations in the classroom at UNED? (equal, unequal, etc.)

5. See now the roles of teachers as agents of social change?

6. Feel now about doing the following activities in class? Which ones took place?

- Debates:_____.
- Critical discussions:_____.

- Working in teams:_____.

- Analysis of local/national problems:_____.

- Proposing solutions to problems as a group:_____.

Part II. Collaborative Leadership

At the end of this course, how do you…

7. Define leadership?

8. Define "collaborative leadership"?

9. See the importance of leadership in the classroom at UNED?

10. See leadership inside and outside the classroom for teachers and students?

11. See your experience about teachers and students switching roles in the classroom at

UNED?

12. See the role of teachers as agents of social change?

Notes / further comments:

_____.

Appendix G: Final Interview Questionnaire (Spanish Version)

Cuestionario de entrevista final (Pensamiento crítico, Pedagogía crítica de Freire,

Liderazgo colaborativo)

Instrucciones: *Esta información se mantendrá como confidencial y se utilizará únicamente para los fines de esta investigación con respecto al pensamiento crítico en el aula de la UNED. Por favor responda los ítemes con su información de la manera más clara y sincera posible. Para cualquier consulta, puede escribirnos a teacherjenaro@yahoo.com*

Rol en este curso: Instructor _____ / Estudiante _____. Edad: _____. Sexo: _____.

Parte I. Pensamiento crítico y pedagogía crítica de Freire

Al final de este curso, ¿cómo…

1. ...ve la importancia del pensamiento crítico para los docentes en el aula de la UNED? ¿De la pedagogía crítica de Freire?

2. ...ve la importancia del pensamiento crítico para los alumnos en el aula de la UNED?

3. ...considera que se incorporó el pensamiento crítico al curso (programa de estudios, actividades, evaluación)?

4. ...ve las relaciones de poder en el aula de la UNED? (igual, desigual, etc.)

5. ...ve ahora el papel de los docentes como agentes de cambio social?

6. ...se siente ahora acerca de realizar las siguientes actividades en clase en la UNED? ¿Cuáles se llevaron a cabo?

• Debates: _____.

• Discusiones críticas: _____.

• Trabajo en grupo: _____.

• Análisis de problemas locales / nacionales: _____.

• Proposición de soluciones a problemas en grupo: _____.

Parte II. Liderazgo colaborativo

Al final de este curso, ¿cómo…

7. ...define liderazgo?

8. ...define el "liderazgo colaborativo"?

9. ...ve la importancia del liderazgo en el aula de la UNED?

10. ...ve el liderazgo dentro y fuera del aula para profesores y estudiantes?

11. ...ve su experiencia sobre el cambio de roles de profesores y estudiantes en el aula de la UNED? 12. ...ve el papel de los docentes como agentes de cambio social?

Notas / comentarios adicionales: _____.

Este instrumento está destinado a ser utilizado como videoconferencia / entrevista por correo electrónico, con el fin de establecer las actitudes y creencias iniciales tanto de los profesores-mentores como de los profesores-alumnos sobre el pensamiento crítico, el diálogo y la problematización (Freire, 2005a) y el trabajo colaborativo (liderazgo colaborativo tal como lo entiende Garrison, 2016). Se administrará en castellano con fines de claridad y facilitará respuestas claras, y luego se traducirá al inglés para su codificación, análisis e informes.

Appendix H: CoI Class Observation Checklist

(adapted from Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2019)

Instructions: Circle the number of the observed criteria. *Extra information may be added on the second column. Note: This form is to be used by the researcher.*

Session observation number: _____ Session date: _____.

Criteria (circle the number)	Comments:
1. Students in the class can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge learned.	
2. Teacher actions reinforce the development of a sense of community among class participants.	
3. Students are motivated to explore content related questions.	
4. Class activities pique students' curiosity.	
5. Teacher acknowledges emotion expressed by the students in the class.	
6. Teacher clearly communicates important due dates/time frames for learning activities.	
7. Students are able to form distinct impressions of some other class participants.	
8. Teacher clearly communicates important class objectives.	
9. Teacher provides feedback in a timely fashion.	
10. Teacher provides feedback that helps students understand strengths and weaknesses relative to the class objectives.	
11. Teacher helps to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on class topics in a way that helps students to learn.	

12. Students feel comfortable disagreeing with other class participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.	
13. Reflection on class content and discussions helps students understand fundamental concepts.	
14. Expressing emotion in relation to sharing ideas is acceptable in the class.	
15. Online discussions are facilitated in a way that is valuable for helping students appreciate different perspectives.	
16. Teacher encourages participants to explore new concepts in the class.	
17. Teacher clearly communicates important class topics.	
18. Combining new information helps students answer questions raised in class activities.	
19. Brainstorming and finding relevant information helps students resolve content related questions.	
20. Teacher demonstrates emotion in presentations and/or when facilitating discussions, online.	
21. Learning activities help students construct explanations/solutions.	
22. Students feel their point of view is acknowledged by other class participants.	
23. Students feel comfortable taking the role of the teacher when the opportunity arises.	
24. Students utilize a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in class.	
25. Teacher keeps participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.	
26. Students' feel comfortable interacting with other participants.	
27. Teacher provides clear instructions on how to participate in learning activities in the class.	

28. Teacher responds emotionally about ideas or learning activities in the class.	
29. Getting to know other participants gives students a sense of belonging in the class.	
30. Students feel comfortable conversing online in the class.	
31. Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for interaction with and among students.	
32. Problems posed increase student interest in class content.	
33. Students feel comfortable expressing emotion through the online medium classroom.	
34. Teacher helps to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helps students to learn.	
35. Students can apply the knowledge created in class to their work or other non-class related activities.	
36. Students feel comfortable participating in class discussions.	
37. Students develop solutions to relevant problems that can be applied in practice.	
38. Teacher is helpful in guiding the class towards understanding class topics in a way that helps students clarify their thinking.	
39. Online discussions can help students to develop a sense of collaboration.	
40. Emotion is expressed online among the students in the class.	

Appendix I: Class Observation Checklist (CT, FCP, CL)

(Critical thinking, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, Collaborative Leadership)

Instructions: Circle the number of the observed criteria. *Extra information may be added on the second column. Note: This form is to be used by the researcher.*

Session observation number: _____   Session date: _____.

Criteria (circle the number)	Comments:
1. Overt mention of critical thinking in syllabus, class plan, activities, discussion.	
2. Overt mention of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (FCP) in syllabus, class plan, activities, discussion.	
3. Critical thinking is stated in class plan, class delivery, objectives, instructions.	
4. Power relations show a Freirean approach (equal, dialogical, horizontal, democratic).	
5. Overt mention of social change or students/teachers role to change reality in syllabus, class plan, activities, discussion.	
6. Debates take place.	
7. Critical discussions take place.	
8. Work in groups/teams takes place.	
9. Analysis of local/national problems takes place.	
10. Proposing solutions to problems as a group takes place.	
11. Leadership is stated in class plan, class delivery, objectives, instructions.	
12. Collaborative leadership takes place (role switching between teachers and students).	
13. Collaborative leadership takes place (role-switching between teachers and students).	
14. Any other type of leadership takes place.	

15. Leadership is encouraged outside the class.	
16. Some other elements of leadership, FCP or collaborative leadership are observable. Which?	

Appendix J: Community of Inquiry Framework, Freire's Critical Pedagogy, and

Garrison's Collaborative Leadership Coding Checklist for Student Artifacts

Note: These items are based on Freire (2015), Garrison (2016), while CoI items were adapted from Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, (2019). Reproduced with permission.

Student's artifact codename: _____

CoI Criteria (for Cognitive Presence only):	Yes or No? Comments:
1. Artifact shows evidence that student can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge learned.	
2. Artifact shows evidence that student is motivated to explore content-related questions.	
3. Artifact shows evidence of student's curiosity.	
4. Artifact shows evidence that student appreciates different perspectives.	
5. Artifact shows evidence that student combines new information helping student answer questions raised in course activities.	
6. Artifact shows evidence that student brainstoms and includes relevant information helping student resolve content-related questions.	
7. Artifact shows evidence that learning activities help student construct explanations/solutions.	
8. Artifact shows evidence that student utilizes a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in course.	
9. Artifact shows evidence that problems posed increase student's interest in course content.	
10. Artifact shows evidence that student can apply the knowledge created in course to own work or other non-class related activities.	
11. Artifact shows evidence that student develops solutions to relevant problems that can be applied	

in practice.	
FCP Criteria:	**Yes or No? Comments:**
12. Artifact shows evidence of reflection about student's own learning or teaching practice.	
13. Artifact shows evidence of interest or concern about social issues in student's institution or community.	
14. Artifact shows evidence of interest or concern about learning or teaching issues in student's institution or community.	
15. Artifact shows evidence that student poses problems about own institution or community.	
16. Artifact shows evidence of student's interest in finding solutions to problems posed.	
17. Artifact shows evidence of student's views about role as an "agent of social change".	
18. Artifact shows evidence of student's interest in transforming conditions in own institution or community.	
19. Artifact shows evidence of student's interest in helping own students find "their voice".	
CL Criteria:	**Yes or No? Comments:**
20. Artifact shows evidence of student's views on leadership.	
21. Artifact shows evidence of student's views on collaborative leadership.	
22. Artifact shows evidence of student's views on leadership for social change.	
23. Artifact shows evidence of student's views on leadership inside or outside the classroom.	
24. Artifact shows evidence of student's views about switching roles with own teachers or students.	
Notes:	

Appendix K: Certification of Ethical Approval

Athabasca University
RESEARCH CENTRE

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 24426

Principal Investigator:
Mr. Jenaro Diaz-Ducca, Doctoral Student
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Doctor of Education (EdD) in Distance Education

Supervisor:
Dr. Marti Cleveland-Innes (Supervisor)

Project Title:
Critical Thinking in Preservice English Teacher Training: Affordances of the CoI Model for Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Effective Date: September 10, 2021   **Expiry Date**:   September 09, 2022

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year.* An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date: September 10, 2021**

Davina Bhandar, Chair
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

_____

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
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