HISTORY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Experiences of enacting critical secondary school history pedagogy in rural Zimbabwe
Promise Machingo Hlungwani

Abstract: Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of a critical approach in the teaching and learning, especially for candidates dealing with complex subjects as History. This study corroborates research in this field by reporting on the experiences of a teacher who taught secondary school History as a subject in rural areas. The findings from a teaching practice at one secondary school in Mwenezi District reveal that there are peculiar issues that are common among rural school learners. The major objective of the study is to give a critical reflection on the in-service teacher education programme for teachers deployed in under-resourced and remote secondary schools. Through action research, the paper demonstrates that teachers face distinct challenges of non-compliance and resistance in enacting a critical pedagogy. Engaging with history and historical evidence is made complex by material shortages in schools and skill gaps among the learners. Whilst exposing rural learners to sophisticated historical narratives is the rationale behind the implementation of a critical pedagogy, there are structural challenges that are evidenced by stringent syllabus requirements, time constraints and nature of learners that are found in the schools. The paper therefore recommends that there should be some flexibility in the history syllabus to allow learners and teachers to fully engage with history material. Resource mobilisation is critical and schools need to support teachers who intend to improve rigour and discourse analysis on the subject.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
This study examines the experiences of a teacher doing action research as part of professional development in teaching secondary school history in a remote, rural and under-resourced district in Zimbabwe. It also explores the viability of adopting a critical pedagogy methodology as a teaching strategy for non-professional students of history and upcoming historians amid increasing resistance from school authorities, syllabus requirements and the learners themselves. Using Budirirai High School as a case study, the study reveals that this teaching strategy is rich and enables critical engagement with texts, articles and other sources of history. It shows that the methodology empowers the learners so that they are able to question the status quo and so-called absolute historical facts. The paper recommends that teachers and learners should strive to engage with texts and reconfigure the understanding of history.
Subjects: Arts & Humanities

Keywords: Critical pedagogy; discipline of history; secondary learners; action research

1. Introduction

Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that invites educators to encourage students to critique structures of power and oppression (Shulman). It is rooted in critical theory, which involves becoming aware of and questioning the societal status quo (Jennings et al., 2006). In critical pedagogy, a teacher uses his or her own enlightenment to encourage students to question and challenge inequalities that exist in families, schools, and societies (Alsubaie, 2016). Such a teaching philosophy is critical in the discipline of history where nuanced criticism is the lifeline of history teaching. A cursory reflection on key tenets of critical pedagogy is important for this study, looking at the implementation of such pedagogy in the rural secondary schools. Table 1 gives a summary of the respondents’ preferences with regard to teaching methods.

Teaching history is understood to be an engaging process that calls for both teachers and learners to be co-creators of the learning environment (Dewey, 1938). There are calls to improve the engagement levels in order to realise a stage where the class will be doing the discipline of history. Accordingly, teaching and learning is seen as both problem posing and problem solving (Liljedahl et al., 2016). Seixas (1999) notes that there are two closely related aspects of ‘doing the discipline’ of history. The first is the critical reading of texts, both primary sources and secondary accounts of the past. Whilst this is plausible, there are challenges in implementing critical reading of primary and secondary sources in contexts where resources are limited. Therefore, this study looks at the practicality of implementing a critical pedagogy in the teaching of secondary school learners in remote areas of Mwenezi District.

History has been treated as a dangerous subject over the years and all over the world (Billington, 1966) especially in the United States of America and Europe. The interest of the state in what is taught is not confined to the Western hemisphere. In Zimbabwe, the state through the curriculum development unit (CDU) designs the curriculum as well as the subject syllabi (Chitate, 2005). Teachers are considered voiceless implementers of educational policies and materials prepared by others (Alsubaie, 2016). This has seen the teaching of the so-called patriotic history. Patriotic history is a much narrowed down version of nationalistic history. It focuses on the three “revolutions”—1896, the guerrilla war and the “third chimurenga” of land redistribution (Ranger, 2004). It divides the nation into “patriots” and “sell-outs”. The enactment of a critical pedagogy is a paradigm shift from the traditional teaching strategies that have been lambasted by curriculum theorists and revisionist scholars.

Whilst studies in Canada and the United States of America have demonstrated that critical pedagogy can be implemented even at junior levels of learning, it is important to give a contextual reflection of what is being experienced in Zimbabwe (Parkes, 2007). As highlighted above, learners in both rural and urban schools have not been exposed to critical pedagogy, but this study puts to test the applicability of the learned concepts from a graduate diploma course in pedagogy. It is important to note that Seixas (1999) stresses that teachers can engage in the discipline of history through reading, selecting, and editing texts that offer students accounts of the past. Yet there are shortages of textbooks in rural schools and most learners fail to get their own copies. Therefore,

Table 1. Showing responses by learners on their preferred teaching and learning mode

| Teaching/Learning Method  | Number of Learners | Percentage |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Traditional/Lecture Method| 33                 | 67.5       |
| Critical Pedagogy         | 11                 | 22         |
| Blended learning          | 5                  | 10.5       |
this paper foregrounds that there is need to improve resource availability so that teachers and learners can construct an account of the past for their mutual learning.

Understanding the efficacy of this practice is important for an in-service teacher undergoing training in teaching methods. This is the reason why previous researchers in this field emphasise that teachers and learners need to approach the history instruction and learning using their critical minds (Clark, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This can be done by involving reworking, analysing and interpreting traces and accounts of the past to construct narratives that are contextually relevant to the learners and their worldview (Cowgill & Waring, 2017; Seixas, 1999). These skills need to be imparted to the learners as they begin their secondary school education. This enables them to think independently, criticise texts and formulate individual opinions that are not imposed by the teacher (Shor & Freire, 1987). This study is significant in that it sheds light on the particular experiences of a teacher undergoing in-service training in teaching methodologies. The fact that the teaching practice happens in a remote and rural context puts to test the efficacy of implementing a critical pedagogy in rural areas. It is also important to understand that learners were initiated into these concepts having done Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) history for 2 years. This study is guided by the overall question: what strategies can be implemented by in-service teachers to overcome challenges associated with trying to enact critical pedagogy for secondary school history in under-resourced and remote areas?

The results of the paper also contribute to the “scholarship of teaching, especially with regard to improving pedagogical content knowledge, integrating disciplinary inquiry into instruction, and engaging teachers and students in critical pedagogy” (Monfra, 2019). Whilst both rural and urban schools are not implementing critical pedagogy, the study seeks to assess the implications of this approach in a resource constrained environment. In doing so, it attempts to answer the question whether the implementation of critical pedagogy improves learning for young learners in secondary schools? Thus, the study foregrounds the need to adopt a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning of history in rural schools that face challenges of limited resources.

2. Literature review: educators’ malpractice in stifling critical pedagogy

Previous studies have noted the importance of adopting a critical pedagogy approach in the teaching of secondary school history (Cranston & Janzen, 2017; Failler, 2015; Parkhouse, 2016). However, it is noted that many classroom practitioners continue to implement the traditional teaching methodologies, focusing on meeting the requirements of the public examinations (-, Kellaghan & Greaney, 2020). A literature survey on the implementation of critical pedagogy showed that many researchers agree that the teaching strategy is effective in emancipating students. Wineburg and Wilson (1991) observed that it improves rigor in teaching and learning. They suggest that choices of topics that have historical significance to students as well as the knowledge of students’ capacity for understanding difference are critical for the teacher. It is also emphasised that the selection of documents to be studied should be appropriate for students’ levels of interest and understanding (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991). Teachers’ knowledge of their students is obviously crucial in dealing with concerns about implementation of nuanced learning in history. This observation is imperative in helping teachers to foreground critical pedagogy in their classes, especially for rural contexts.

In the interests of teaching appropriate history skills, teachers should expose their learners to a process of constructing warranted historical accounts so that students can arrive at their own understandings of the past through processes of critical inquiry (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Seixas, 1999). It is imperative for teachers undergoing in-service training to equip their learners with analytical skills so that they would go beyond the simple acceptance of teacher’s (or textbook’s) account (Clark, 2006; Omar, 2014). This process is important in that it makes both learners and teachers subject to criticism, thereby making the learning process interesting rather than rudimentary.
2.1. Tenets of a critical pedagogy in history

For effective teaching, there is a need to ensure that activities that are done in class resonate with active participation and should be learner centred. Such learning activities should constitute the delivery methods and should be very open ended and both learners and teachers need to be prepared for matters that arise in the class (Davies & Sinclair, 2012). These activities should be epitomised by learning by doing. This is premised on the decolonial foundations of learning where there are no canonical formats that are seen as epistemic and unchangeable. Historical pedagogy means leading students through the processes and making them question whatever decision will be made in class (Bhurekeni, 2020). It is argued that without such activities, there can be no critical historical knowledge at all and learning will be confined to traditional practices.

That underlying meanings are hidden in the images and texts in history sources gives credence to the critical discourse that historians need to unpack in order to reach the bottom of issues. This is the reason why adopting Giroux (1997)'s argument that learners need to problematize their everyday experience is essential. He maintains that, this critical understanding by empowering students to develop the courage to participate in their self-formation and liberate them from the shackles of the four corners of the classroom. In this light, learners should be taught to take risks and pose challenges to those in power. The authority used in the classroom should not come from the teacher alone because the learners are part of the problem solving dimension of learning.

Challenges in implementing critical pedagogy include the limited availability of television, videos, movies and commercials that are regarded as authentic materials. These are considered representative of the culture that are to be examined by the students and which serve as the basis for discussion and critical reflection of the said culture (Ohara et al., 2000). In this light, remote rural schools are seen as handicapped in their attempt to expose learners to real material that should form the basis of primary sources. For a teacher doing in service training in education, this context should be understood, and they would need to plan accordingly. Some learners would have no access to videos outside the school or classroom environment and exposing them to such will likely have little impact on what they will understand as history.

2.2. Nexus between theory and practice in critical pedagogy

Whilst there are strong theoretical assumptions on implementing critical pedagogy, it is prudent to ensure their relevancy in the context and settings in which they are to be implemented. Previous studies have emphasised the need to link history content and the teaching strategies so that the lessons become comprehensive and respond to the immediate needs and expectations of learners (Bhurekeni, 2020). This can only be done if learners feel that what they are being taught is familiar and reflect their everyday experiences. Traditionally, teachers who manned most schools, especially in rural areas, had no prior training in both content and pedagogy. Most schools were utilising Advanced level graduates to teach secondary school history. The shortage in human capital was worsened by the fact that most people dropped History as a subject arguing that it was too complex. This mainly happened during the 2166 syllabus, which was also criticised in missionary schools for undermining the Christianity religion (Chitate, 2005). It is within this context that many rural schools are bereft of the trained human capital. Therefore, the training of graduate teachers represents an opportunity to amalgamate pedagogical and content knowledge. Shulman () contends that pedagogical content knowledge includes subject matter knowledge and curriculum. The teacher is also expected to have grounded knowledge of students and pedagogical knowledge.

That history and historical knowledge is riddled with subjectivity is very clear and learners need to approach the subject with an open mind (Breunig, 2005). Interpretation of history is very critical, and facts are moulded rather than given. Many producers of public historical knowledge, whether they are states, religious institutions, the market, or private individuals, deliberately mould historical facts and fiction into emotionally appealing narratives that exclude other perspectives, thereby contributing to group
identities (Block, 2005; Jonker, 2008; Lowenthal, 1998). This observation is informative for all parties that intend to do the discipline of history.

In line with the arguments above, Barton and Levstik (2004) as well as Barton (2006) find that history teaching should be directed at critical inquiry and dialogue about crucial historical events. This argument gives a presupposition that other events are not worth studying. This could be a challenge in terms of selection, especially on whose ideas count in accrediting certain events more important than others. However, the approach is seen as important in that it will serve to explore different perspectives and stimulate students to find mutual understanding before they agree on any historical narrative to be studied (Parkes, 2007). Whilst the process has several implications on the time spent during the lessons, it is worth the cause because it creates critical minds that are poised to be academics and theorists in future.

3. Theoretical framework
This study is informed by the critical social theory of learning which is built on the basis of emancipation for the oppressed (Jennings et al., 2006). As such, critical pedagogy is understood as an approach to history teaching and learning which, according to Kincheloe (2005), is concerned with transforming relations of power, which are oppressive and which lead to the oppression of people. In doing so, the process tries to humanize and empower learners so that they approach real-life issues with an empowered mentality rather than a weakened position (Breunig, 2005). This approach to teaching is most associated with the Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire, who advocated for an independent enquiry rather than a master and servant relationship in class (Freire, 1971).

Critical pedagogy, like critical theory, tries to transform oppressed people and to save them from being objects of education to subjects of their own autonomy and emancipation (Shor & Freire, 1987). In this view, secondary school learners should act in a way that enables them to transform their societies, which is best achieved through emancipatory education (Freire, 171). For this particular study, rural secondary school learners should seek to change their situation. Through problem posing education and questioning the problematic issues in their lives, these young scholars learn to think critically and develop a critical consciousness (Barton, 2006). This enables them to improve their life conditions and to take necessary actions to build a more just and equitable society (Shor & Freire, 1987). Thus, it can be said that critical pedagogy challenges any form of domination, oppression and subordination with the goal of emancipating oppressed or marginalized people (Jennings et al., 2006). This is in-keeping with the decolonisation process where classrooms should not be seen as mini-prisons where the learners are under the subjugation and power of the teacher.

4. Methodology
This paper is based on an action research done during teaching practice at Budirirai Secondary school in Mwenezi District. The Action Research concept was developed principally by Kurt Lewin (1946). Broadly, Stenhouse (1975)viewed much educational research as “unable to ‘get at’ the complexity of what goes on in the classroom, because of its distance and its framing of research questions in the form of objective and external questions”. The intensive application of critical methodology was implemented from January to April 2015, when the researcher was a student undergoing training in education at Great Zimbabwe University. The period covered the beginning of a school term and academic year for learners transitioning from ZJC joining Ordinary level. These learners were exposed to the traditional teaching and learning approach that is conventional in all schools in Zimbabwe, where learners do not engage with primary sources.

The target population at Budirirai comprised 49 form three learners who were in one class that was used to assess the efficacy of enacting a critical pedagogy. Of these 49 learners, 20 were boys and 29 were girls. Six groups were created based on the surrounding villages where the learners were coming from and also constituting the catchment area of the school. These villages are
Musvoti, Zviwha, Marufu, Sitera, Timire and Mangezi. This class was chosen because it had learners of mixed abilities, and they were being initiated into the 2167 syllabus, which enabled the researcher to test the approach for learners who had not been exposed to other teaching methods before. Exposing the learners to critical pedagogy was done through a deliberate process where they were told that they need to engage primary sources, question evidence from textbooks rather than taking it as given. The idea was to make them comfortable in criticising their teacher and even the textbooks. In essence, the researcher encouraged the learners to do the discipline of history through active engagement. So instead of the traditional approach of providing and explaining notes to the learners, the researcher preferred to give them research activities to complete tasks in their groups. This was done as a way of encouraging them to visit elders in the villages, eliciting primary evidence and report to their colleagues. This enabled the learners to critique sources of history and engage with what their peers reported.

Whilst the History lessons of 40 min per day were done four times a week, learners were encouraged to work in six groups to complete given tasks in a fortnight. These groups based on the villages also enabled collection of data in the sense that learners would act as respondents during focus group discussions. The fact that the groups would be composed of learners coming from a homogenous location enabled coordination. Due to time constraints and the nature of the engagements, a few aspects could be covered during the normal lesson period.

It is important to note that theory and practice are not separated in action research. This is because the theory emerges from systematic and intentional reflection in practice (Loughran, 2002). Therefore, the methodology adopted in this study helped to build the theoretical underpinnings of action research. Teaching practice at Budirirai secondary school exposed the researcher to real-life challenges that in-service teachers experience in trying to engage in critical pedagogy. According to Hendricks (2009, p. 3), “Knowledge is something that action researchers do and it is their living practice”. For 13 weeks, the researcher taught form three learners, an attempt was made to discover and recover history through the learners’ lived experiences in the six surrounding villages, which constitute the catchment area of the school.

5. Findings and discussion
The study sought to explore the teaching and learning strategies that learners considered desirable in the teaching and learning of their ordinary level history. During a focus-group discussion, 15 respondents from 3 different groups gave the following response to the question, how best can history be learnt:

We cannot do without the notes that you give us. We do not understand the textbooks because the language used is rather complicated to us. Your notes are more simplified and we can easily identify the points.

The respondents in the Zviwha group added the following dimension on the same question:

We use the textbooks that you gave to us to work on assignments and group work. Although we face some difficulties in understanding the information in the textbooks, they help us to answer the assignment questions and researches.

The experiences of the researcher in the four different schools taught in Mwenezi District between 2009 and 2019 demonstrated that learners do not criticise the texts that they use. They simply regurgitate information that is provided in their notebooks, and the teacher tried in vain to motivate them to read in between the lines and formulate their own opinions. This is the reason why Kincheloe (2005) points out that texts and their themes should be provided by both teachers and history learners who bring their experiences for study and place that knowledge within the given context. The rationale behind this approach is to ensure that students are able to pick up themes that are most meaningful and most relevant to their
own lives. This makes learning closer to the lived experiences and therefore they will internalise the information a great deal.

Adopting teaching strategies that promote interaction among learners is critical for training future historians. The teaching practice enabled the researcher to test the effectiveness of groups, especially at Budirirai Secondary School, where learners from the same village were grouped together for improved cohesion. Although some members in the groups were hardly participating, it is clear that their confidence was boosted, and they identified with the points raised by their fellow learners. The learners dialogued in the groups and there was an in-depth engagement in discussions that were held during feedback. This enabled a higher level of nuanced discussions as they learned from each other and theorised how to question the authoritarian power of the classroom.

5.1. Meeting the critical pedagogy expectations in a rural history class

The action research sought to identify the preferred teaching and learning method by the learners when they enrolled for their Ordinary Level History course. To achieve this, learners were asked about the mode of delivery that they feel enhances the acquisition of critical historical insights. The table below indicates the responses from the learners:

As shown in the table above, the responses given by the interviewees indicated that 33 of the 49 learners preferred to be actively involved in the teaching and learning of their history lessons. They said role-plays, debates, group discussions and essay competitions were better modes of learning compared to passive lecture method. Eleven learners preferred the lecture method arguing that the teacher is a fountain of knowledge and as pupils they cannot effectively explore the grand narratives of history. Five of the respondents indicated that there is a need to combine both teaching strategies depending on the nature of the phenomenon under study.

These responses reflect the differences among the learners and the researcher employed the several strategies to ensure that a critical pedagogy is implemented. The strategies include research assignments, role-plays, reading and analysing primary sources as well as engaging in debates in class. The theoretical components of critical pedagogy in History enabled the researcher to understand teaching from a new perspective which espouses generative enquiry. Generative inquiry “embodies an underlying belief in children as learners whose natural curiosity leads them to explore their world in meaningful ways” (Manfra, 2019). Parallels can be drawn between these instructional and learning methods with the traditional approaches that emphasise the central role of the teacher (Freire, 1971). Indeed, the traditional thrust that sees the students as having no right to question, reject, or reconstruct what they are told to take as unobjectionable and absolute is no longer taken seriously by teachers who have been exposed to the pedagogical content knowledge. Yet in the language of critical pedagogy, the critical person is the one who is empowered to seek emancipation (Shulman).

As part of assessing the learners’ comprehension of key taught concepts, the researcher started each lesson by querying on learners’ experiences and worldview. This enables learning through sharing knowledge, which is in sync with the generative curriculum that believes that children can both learn and share their knowledge in multiple ways and that everyone has areas of strength that educational effort can capitalise (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). According to Manfra (2019) “this approach applies to both students and teachers as learners in the world and can lead to developing a broad repertoire of teaching strategies that enable children to approach their learning in different ways. In a generative curriculum, there is a continuous interplay between content learning and process learning. The two complement and enhance each other”. Before enrolling for the course, the researcher placed emphasis on content delivery through the lecture method.
Embracing blended teaching and learning method ensured that learners actively participated in the lessons. One of the learners aptly observed that:

When I participated in the role play on the historical experiences of economic organisation of pre-colonial states, it became easy for me to assess the relevance of history in the contemporary world. I managed to understand the trade interaction in the community as well as with foreigners.

In this light, lectures in critical pedagogy proved essential in that they made the researcher aware that he was not the fountain of history knowledge and historical facts. The experience clearly de-emphasised the issue of chalk and talk, which is characteristic of the traditional teaching methods (Dewey, 1938). In the same vein, Freire (1971) argued that people need to engage in a praxis that incorporates theory, action, and reflection as a means to work toward social change and justice. In this sense, it will be imperative for history teachers in rural secondary settings to grasp the critical pedagogic content knowledge for them to be able to enact critical history pedagogy, giving learners time to reflect and assess their experiences.

It is critical that my conceptions of history teaching changed through my encounter with critical pedagogy. The changes were seen in the implementation of a critical inquiry in the classroom as the researcher and pupils engaged with the history discourse. In an attempt to find the effectiveness of the group work, learners were given some research areas to work on and then present later. The researcher realised that some learners did not make any contribution because when the time for feedback came, they had no subject matter knowledge to present. One group member had the following to say:

When we worked on the question, these (names supplied) refused to participate and they said they were too busy to make contributions. It is only when you were around that they appeared to be following the process.

This observation was disturbing because critical pedagogy demands that the learners’ experiential knowledge be valued and given as the basis for all the learning that takes place in the day-to-day engagements in the classroom (Breunig, 2005). Yet such an important ingredient in the day-to-day lessons was undermined by resistance by some learners.

5.2. Positive results of critical pedagogy for rural teachers and learners
After doing the course on the pedagogics in History the teacher had to change the teaching strategies that are teacher centred and demean the role of the pupils. Role-play is one of the methods employed in teaching the organisational aspects of the society. It is a strategy that introduces problem situation dramatically, provides opportunity for people to assume roles of others and thus appreciates another point of view, allows for exploration of solutions, and provides opportunity to practice skills (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012). In one of the learning activities, learners dramatized the roles of the king in the pre-colonial states. In the discussion that ensued after the role-play, the following emerged:

We noted that Simba (pseudonym) had a wide array of power, allocating land, solving disputes in the community, receiving tribute and leading various ceremonies. We also noted that he worked in consultation with advisors which was democratic.

This resonates well with the democratic perspective of critical pedagogy. By participating in the various roles, learners’ interests were entrenched, and the teacher was able to analyse from an outsider perspective how learners related to what they were involved in.

The course enabled us to employ the Socratic method of teaching history using a constructivist approach. Socratic teaching strategy is accomplished by asking questions instead of by “telling”
what the teacher intends to get across to learners (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012). In its purest form, the Socratic Method uses questions and only questions to arouse curiosity (Lam, 2011). Some of the questions posed in the History lessons include:

- In your village or families, how do people negotiate lobola issues?
- From your experiences, why would people migrate?
- Explain the challenges of believing an individual's personal account of events.

This strategy served as a “logical, incremental, step-wise guide that enables students to figure out about a complex history topic or historical issue with their own thinking and insights” (Davies & Sinclair, 2012). In a democratic class environment that the researcher taught, the pupils were afforded the opportunity to express themselves in their most comfortable language since the teacher believes that they relate their own experiences in the discussions held. This was done during role-plays and debates to enable learners to freely express themselves.

As a result of the exposure to critical theory, the teacher imbibed the various teaching strategies that are in line with making pupils do the discipline of history. The idea is that the teacher should have big ears to listen instead of a big mouth to talk during the learning process. Good teaching is about caring, nurturing, and developing minds and talents. It is about devoting time, often invisible, to every student (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012). In this environment, learners assume the role of history researchers who engage in dialogue with both living and non-living historical sources. For example, learners manage to interact with communal leaders, such as kraal heads (Sabhuku), Headmen (Sadunhu), Chiefs (Vashe) and Councillors to reflect on the political organisation of pre-colonial states and making some informed comparisons with contemporary experiences.

Elsewhere, it is noted that a trait which is synonymous with teachers who have experienced critical pedagogy in their studies is self-evaluation. Buchanan and Jackson (in Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012) assert that self-evaluation refers to the fact of assessing one's strengths and weaknesses, one's successes and failures. As a practicing history teacher, the researcher had to make diagnostic evaluations of the lesson transaction. The evaluation done in both the lesson plan and scheme of work enabled the implementation of cogent evaluation of the researcher, noting weak areas and areas that needed improvement. Self-introspection suggests that the individual is involved in reflection and critical analysis, that the teacher makes plans to impact on the future—plans that will make them “self-developing professionals” (Howard, 2006). The habit of reflecting on one's weaknesses enabled the teacher to become aware that teaching is rather a complex phenomenon.

An attempt to turn the theories of a Freirean critical pedagogy developed and debated in the university course seminars into pedagogical practices in history lessons done at a rural school like Budirirai is putting theory into practice. The old adage in China which says “if I see I remember, if I read I forget but if I do I know” illustrates the importance of doing the discipline of History (Parkes, 2007). Indeed, listening is the last thing in the sequence of learning. This is because it assumes a slave–master dichotomy, which flies in the face of democratisation of school experiences (Giroux, 1997). Therefore, as part of emancipating learners, the researcher devoted most of the time to activities, which were learner centred.

In essence, the course in pedagogics transformed the researchers’ vision on how the act of teaching should be done. It became clear that subject matter knowledge alone is not enough to make one a good teacher. The chalk and talk teaching strategy as well as the idea of getting into class bombarding pupils with notes was highly discouraged. This is so because it presented an assumption that the teacher is a reservoir of all history, yet history is a discipline of contestations. The teaching strategy also exposed the interest of the state in the content of history that has to be done by the pupils at school. This became eminent when learners were given the syllabus to evaluate its composition as well as the topics covered. This was done to enlighten learners on the
aspect of interests best served by history and historians. This confirmed the observation by Clark (2006) that the “resultant ‘History Wars’ need to be seen, however, within the longer trend to see history in schools as being part of nation building”. In this context, the numerous inquiries into school history, civics and citizenship and values take on a problematic character and a particular view of the discipline of history.

5.3. Challenges of implementing a critical pedagogy in rural schools

Whilst it is prudent and ideal to move from the traditional lecture method in the history classes, implementing a critical pedagogy at ordinary level is riddled with several challenges. The course emphasised the use of inquiry in doing the discipline of history. Using inquiry-based learning in history takes a lot of time, energy, and planning, but it is often very effective in the long term (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012). During focus group discussions concerning the effectiveness of the new learning methodologies, one learner had this to say:

But sir, you are not giving us notes that we need to use in our preparations for examinations. So how are we going to show our guardians that we are learning?

This revelation demonstrates that some learners had misgivings in the approaches that were being emphasised in class. The resistance was cemented by parents and guardians who still hold on to the traditional view that teachers are the fountain of knowledge.

Whilst the argument above demonstrates the progress with which critical pedagogy facilitates strong and empowered learners, there were misgivings amongst some members in the class. Some learners indicated that the workload demanded by critical pedagogy was rather incompatible with the expectations in other learning areas and balancing these was a big challenge for them. Besides time constraints, the exercise also demands both learners and the teacher to increase their analytical skills. Rethinking and reimagining historical experiences is not something that can be easily done over a short period of time. The amount of rigor also meant that some learners with low abilities in terms of critical thinking ended up contributing virtually nothing. One learner said:

I am not sure if I will register for this subject next year if this is the kind of analysis demanded in the subject.

Thus, whilst it was clear that when learners are exposed to critical pedagogy, they practice problem solving and critical thinking skills to arrive at a conclusion in history, it also created some backlash. This is despite the fact that the teaching method is student-centred and student-directed, and can be modified for students studying history at ordinary level.

Although the teaching method empowers learners to work as professional historians who deal with primary source documents, it was badly received by some learners. They claimed that exposing shortcomings of given texts, photographs and statistics was beyond their abilities. Another challenge was that the previous 2 years of traditional teaching and learning had left an indelible mark amongst learners.

5.4. Critical pedagogy as a source of transformation and empowerment

The thrust of engaging in critical pedagogy was to emancipate the learners as well as enrich the teacher’s teaching strategies. Therefore, history teaching practiced after the engagement with critical pedagogy was transforming and empowering. The traditional vestiges of authorities were not only challenged, but they were also questioned by the practitioner. Indeed, the traditional image of teachers as voiceless implementers of educational policies and materials prepared by others became anachronistic. Teachers become aware of the limitations of the set standards within the institution espoused by the curriculum through the syllabus (Alsubaie, 2016). In the case of Zimbabwe, the current 2167 syllabus limits the potential of history in generating
knowledge that questions the established structures by promoting rote learning and memorisation of given facts.

Teachers with no pedagogical content knowledge relate learning more to curriculum content and academic achievement (Breunig, 2005). This system conditions teachers’ classroom behaviours to teach for examinations and not for lifelong learning. When learning is too dependent on the curriculum, it becomes “narrow for quality life-related learning outcomes and flexibility in teaching” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Besides, teachers’ perception about “learning look only at the rituals and routines that ensure effective learning is taking place” (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012). This attitude is worsened by the school system which is examination dominated. Too much focusing of learning on prescribed curriculum content limits the scope of classroom discussions (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2020). This is tantamount to enslavement, and the type of learners is equated to the congregation in a church who weekly listen to the priest’s sermon without making their own input.

In the traditional teaching set up that the teacher engaged in before undertaking to study the course on pedagogics in History, the prime time was to try and drill pupils for the examinations. This resonates well with the findings of other researchers who realised that the focus in the traditional teaching strategies is on teachers’ insistence on learning concentration for pupils to the teacher-directed teaching that is concrete (Dunne et al., 2007; Kellaghan & Greaney, 2020). The university course enabled me to realise that for learning to be a conscious and deliberate activity, it requires effort from both teachers and pupils as co-constructors of knowledge. This is because it is not all that is said by the teacher that makes historical knowledge. Indeed, some of the knowledge is constructed in the experiences of the learners at home and in the life in general.

Having done the course on the pedagogics in History the teacher now knows how to control and attend to individual differences in the learners from various cultural backgrounds. The teacher was made aware that every history classroom is a multicultural context, even within the same ethnic community due to class differences and personal experiences. This enabled the teacher to make informed decisions on the comments to make to the pupils' work. Understanding the learners' pattern of development and the importance of individual differences enabled the teacher to make wise decisions concerning the choice of teaching methods and culturally appropriate illustrative examples. This was also made possible by the fact that the pupils themselves were given an opportunity to work in groups in doing research work. This enriched the discussions through diversity. This also resonates well with the democratic inclination of the transformative education.

After gaining the pedagogic content knowledge through the studies, the researcher was developed professionally and also capacitated to deliver lessons in a way that liberates and empowers the history students. The teacher becomes well equipped to enhance the optimal development of the student and knows, and is ready to expand the knowledge base of teaching and learning through research (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2012). It has been noted that emphasis on content matter knowledge and pedagogical skills usually ignores the socio-political and cultural constraints that affect the teacher’s work. Teaching in Mwezeni district enabled me to access the history that the pupils were prepared to share with me through dialogue, research presentations, class debates and drama.

Whilst the course in pedagogy at Great Zimbabwe helped in transforming the researcher’s approach to teaching secondary school history, developing the ability to think historically is counter-intuitive and has been described as an “unnatural act” (Wilschut, 2019). It can seldom be acquired from everyday experiences. Rather, it requires systematic instruction in how the discipline of history operates (Parkes, 2007). Teachers exposed to critical history pedagogy are, however, expected to develop better historical understanding and how to transact business in their history classes compared to their counterparts without such exposure.
6. Conclusion and recommendations

Whilst teachers are expected to be transformative intellectuals who have the knowledge and skill to critique and transform existing inequalities in society, their experience may not be in sync with the realities in the community. In this regard, as a practitioner, I had to learn from the learners in order to appreciate their viewpoints. However, the culture of silence and lack of exposure limited the efficacy of this practice. Although an attempt was made to make the learners talk in groups and give feedback, some of the learners could not understand the aspect of critiquing the texts and their teacher.

Beliefs that are placed at the core of the definition of knowledge are tested and indeed acquire meaning only through the interaction between the believer and the environment. This implies that the content that is taught in schools needs to be reflective of the learner’s experiences. The course of critical pedagogy enabled the researcher to remodel the lesson transactions so that they met these basic requirements. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers implementing critical pedagogy need to embrace these strategies.

This paper also recommends that there should be some flexibility in the history syllabus to allow learners and teachers to fully engage with history material. Following the letter and spirit of what is written in the official 2167 syllabus does not do any justice to nuanced discussions and the teachers and learners are severely limited in their attempts to delve into critical pedagogy. Besides, resource mobilisation is critical and schools need to support teachers who intend to improve rigour and discourse analysis on the subject through enacting a critical pedagogy. The researcher also suggests that teachers should adopt reflexive approaches in their day-to-day delivery of lessons. This practice enhances self-introspection and can improve the teaching of history at an early stage.

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