THE FORUM

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Aspects of Process in an ESL Critical Pedagogy Teacher Education Course

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■ The second and foreign language (S/FL) education literature has featured a number of discussions of the content of critical pedagogy (Crawford-Lange, 1981; Pennycook, 1990a, 1990b, 1994), though there are few accounts of the processes involved in implementing it in a S/FL teacher education context (but see Auerbach & Wallerstein, 1987). In this brief account of our use of these ideas in S/FL teacher education, we would like to raise the profile of critical pedagogy in ESL/EFL a little higher and provide some suggestions particularly related to classroom processes that we hope will be of use to others working in this area.[1]

Critical pedagogy is an approach to teaching and curriculum informed by critical social theory that "seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society" (Pennycook, 1990b, p. 24).[2] A key distinction is made (originally by Freire, 1970) between two types of

[1] For reasons of space we have consciously, but with regret, restricted ourselves in the areas of contextual detail, student voice, and issues outstanding.

[2] Critical pedagogy, like many active traditions, cannot be pinned down in a single definition; this is simply a point of departure. Its principal line of descent is from Freire (1970) and, more distantly, the critical theory tradition, for example, Gramsci (1971); important representatives in mainstream education are Shor (1990), McLaren (1989), and Aronowitz and Giroux (1985); senior advocates in ESL are Auerbach (esp. 1991) and Wallerstein (1983); and for FL, Crawford-Lange (Crawford, 1978; Crawford-Lange, 1981). More recent prominent work of note is that of Pennycook (1994).

education: banking education, which occurs when teachers attempt to transfer the contents of their minds to those of the students (see Bartolome, 1994), and transformative education, which develops when education proceeds by means of dialogue between teacher and student concerning real-world issues meaningful to the students, with the intent of acting on the world in order to improve it and, in the course of this, supporting students' political and personal development.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN ESL/EFL

The institutional history of teacher training in ESL/EFL has often placed teacher educators and their students in university departments of linguistics or language or, alternatively, in independent units separate from other academic disciplines. Given the history of the field, with its strong attachment to language rather than to education, the moral and philosophical bases for teacher development have consequently not been strong. This characteristic, together with the dominant ethos in the social sciences and Western countries in the latter part of this century, has made possible a technocratic and individualistic orientation to teaching and learning as well as a tendency not to make the development of a teacher's moral philosophy a central part of teacher education in ESL/EFL. That is, ESL/EFL teachers commonly see themselves as contributing to general welfare simply by helping people to communicate with other people and as discharging their responsibilities if they attempt to teach as well as possible, meaning as efficiently and professionally as possible. In general, ESL/EFL teachers have not been encouraged to address sociopolitical issues that educators like Paolo Freire have placed within the very heart of educational purposes.

By contrast, critical pedagogy begins with "the basic assumption that the human vocation is to take action which changes the world for the improvement of life conditions" (Crawford, 1978, p. 2). Critical pedagogy in ESL/EFL, then, takes as joint goals the simultaneous development of English communicative abilities and the ability to apply them to developing a critical awareness of the world and the ability to act on it to improve matters (i.e., praxis; see Walsh, 1991).

One of the earliest extensive presentations of these ideas for S/FL instruction (Crawford, 1978) lists 20 principles as a basis for what might be expected of critical pedagogy in ESL/EFL. Ten of those principles were particularly important to the course we are reporting on.

1. The purpose of education is to develop critical thinking by presenting students' situation to them as a problem so that they can perceive, reflect, and act on it.

2. The content of curriculum derives from the life situation of the learners as expressed in the themes of their reality.
3. Dialogue forms the content of the educational situation.
4. The organization of curriculum recognizes the class as a social entity and resource.
5. The learners produce their own learning materials.
6. The task of planning is, first, to organize generative themes, and second, to organize subject matter as it relates to those themes.
7. The teacher participates as a learner among learners.
8. Teachers contribute their ideas, experiences, opinions, and perceptions to the dialogical process.
9. The teacher's function is one of posing problems.
10. The students possess the right and power to make decisions.[3]

OUR EXPERIENCE IN AN ESL GRADUATE PROGRAM

During the spring semester of 1995, we offered an orientation to critical pedagogy by way of a graduate course for ESL/EFL teacher preparation at a U.S. university in which we drew on the above principles, as expressed in the work of Freire and more recent exponents of this tradition. One of us (Al) had made use of the work and inspiration of Elsa Auerbach in critical ESL literacy instruction for a number of years. The other (Graham) had increasingly been trying to integrate a critical view of society with his teaching and research and had on one occasion been exposed to a traditional university course examining critical pedagogy ideas: In this, problems arose because the pedagogical processes and classroom interactions of the course were at odds with its content.

Our Approach

S/FL teacher education often shows characteristics of banking education. In our course, we wanted to do critical pedagogy in the process of the teacher education class itself. We followed, conceptually, a *double-loop* approach to SL teacher education (Woodward, 1991); the term denotes the simple idea that teacher educators should use the techniques and principles they hope their student teachers will use, as also advocated in Crawford's (1978) pioneering S/FL work in this area.

[3] We have abbreviated, paraphrased, and partially quoted these from the original.

> For those who become committed to this risky task . . . the simple acceptance of underlying philosophy does not guarantee the ability to act out the implications of that philosophy. Teachers teach the way they have been taught. For those who were taught by a banking method and who now find themselves committed to problem-posing, their experiential history with a banking method interferes with their ability to implement problem-posing. . . . The most effective means of training problem-posing teachers is to teach them by a problem-posing methodology and curriculum. (pp. 171–172)

However, in this we faced some challenges: Many of our students, as young EFL teachers visiting the U.S., were not teaching during the course itself but would be teaching upon their return to their home countries, so to a large extent they could not immediately act upon their teaching worlds as part of the course. In addition, just as the topic was new to many of our students, so was the whole idea of a critical view of society or the concept of education as a force for social change.

First, we made a point of having a couple of organizational meetings at the end of the semester preceding the course so that the students taking it might have some idea of its content and nontraditional format and could begin to negotiate their personal pedagogical interests as integral to the course's development in both content and process. Initial presentations and discussion concerning critical pedagogy were based on material we selected: Auerbach (1992), Kreisberg (1992), and McLaren (1989, chaps. 5–7).[4]

We were particularly concerned that the class should operate as a learning community. Among other things, that meant that responsibility for selecting, introducing, and presenting material was shared equally across members of the class, including the instructors. We negotiated the syllabus, not only during the first couple of formal meetings but throughout the semester. For much of the time, although there was a general sense of what was to be done, detailed planning of class content applied only as far as two or three classes ahead. Overall, our idea was that after developing an understanding of critical pedagogy through the reading and two texts we had selected, the class would move on to consider aspects of critical pedagogy as they applied to their own teaching concerns and interests.

In initial planning, we were very concerned that patterns of domination or oppression not be reestablished at the interpersonal level in a class that was supposed to be working to overcome them at a societal level. Related to this concern, we also were deliberate in establishing that the class as a whole had to determine the matter of grading and of what,

[4] Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987) emphasize the importance of initial structure for students unfamiliar with this approach.

if anything, was to come out of the class by way of product, subject to administrative constraints.

Recognizing that there can be no one critical pedagogy, we felt that the class would represent this specific group's understanding of critical pedagogy as applied to the members' own education. That is to say, we did not have the responsibility of trying to make the class take the form of our critical pedagogy. Such an approach would have been antithetical to the general understanding behind the class. Because the students were not particularly familiar with critical pedagogy and because neither one of us had taught a graduate class on this topic, we were prepared for the possibility that certain aspects of the class or certain sessions would not work. But in addition we were convinced that it was in the nature of the philosophy of critical pedagogy to accept such a possibility in a course using a double-loop technique. After all, because critical pedagogy implies a relationship of community between students and teacher such that they learn together and make decisions together, we could not continually steer the class from positions of authority.

Noteworthy Characteristics of the Class

Decision making. The degree of class decision making was extensive. Without fear that we are deluding ourselves, we can generally say that the class made certain decisions because in significant cases the class decided to do things that were contrary to how we had tentatively planned matters or were directly contrary to proposals we made. For example, at the beginning of the semester the class decided to spend far more time than we had expected on exploratory, definitional discussions of critical pedagogy. This may have been because insufficient organizational work was done initially and, as one student put it, "I think people sort of felt like they were diving into the deep end without really learning the strokes."

Content and form. Following the initial phases of negotiating format and content and work on the initial definitional understanding of critical pedagogy, the major part of the course consisted of students leading discussions and running workshop-style exercises on topics related to concerns or problems that students would face in implementing critical pedagogy, including topics such as feminism, power (drawing on the work of Michel Foucault), and even a critique of critical pedagogy (using Ellsworth, 1989); these sessions were based mostly upon readings that the students had come up with themselves and occasionally used material sought from us. Overall, the students viewed this arrangement positively: A representative student evaluation comment was, "The

instructor[s] gave us the freedom to decide what we want to do to fulfill the course requirement. All [this is] new to me. Most important of all, I felt like doing all I could to learn what I like to learn."

Pessimism. Freire on one occasion expressed greater optimism about the possibility of doing critical pedagogy in adult education than about doing it in the regular state sector. Nevertheless, North American writers in this tradition have steadily advocated the possibility of critical pedagogy in public elementary and high schools, and there are enough reports to indicate that the individual teacher's freedom of action in the state education sector of certain countries can make using critical pedagogy a possibility.[5] However, in our class, about half the members were from countries in East Asia, and a common, persistent refrain was one of pessimism concerning their freedom of action as teachers when they returned to their home countries. Some students initially took the position that they would be unable to engage in any kind of classroom practice in their future employment even approximating critical pedagogy and that they would prefer to be trying simply to develop critical thinking among their students. In various places, Freire makes it clear that critical pedagogy does not mean the teacher defers to the views of the students; rather, the teacher should continue to challenge them.[6] A tension must exist, however, if teachers and students are learning together; if at the same time cultural, gender, and power differentials exist between them; and, indeed, if the students do not hold the same view of society that the teachers do. Though as teachers in this class we challenged students' pessimism, we could not argue against this position too strongly, as it would have meant claiming extensive amounts of class time—something we could ordinarily and summarily do in our traditional roles of banking education instructors but not as teachers trying to take on different roles. Instead, we relied on brief examples of how a few of Al's former students from Japan and China had devised means to implement at least a modest critical pedagogy in their high schools (e.g., Uchida, 1996).

Resistance. Sanders (1968, as cited in Crawford, 1978) remarks, "Freire favors the frankness to eliminate from a training program for problem-posing teachers those prospective teachers who are not committed to the basic philosophy" (p. 172). We did not encounter quite this situation, but there were very considerable differences concerning the extent to which

[5] For the U.S. context, see, for example, the many informal accounts in the periodical *Rethinking Schools*.

[6] Elsa Auerbach (personal communication, June 1996) remarks, "Critical pedagogy and learner-centered pedagogy are *not* the same."

was some students' taking the floor from others because of their swiftness or assertiveness relating to culture, command of language, gender, and so on.[7] We had passed over responsibility for managing participation after the first few class meetings, but most students had not experienced chairing a meeting before and, as a result, were not always adequately firm with each other about setting an agenda, setting times for items, pulling in quiet speakers and limiting the verbose, and so on. (Neither are university faculty, of course.) "As for the fellow students, when they are facilitators, the rest of the class benefit from their points of view," commented one student, and another noted, "Student participation was most encouraged and students grew more comfortable and confident in class"; but at the same time "some were busy defending his/her stance while we could actually 'broaden' our interests," commented a third. There were many silences longer than what is common in university classrooms. These silences were a source of tension because they often arose when students were expecting the instructors to provide an opinion on or evaluation of an issue, whereas we were resisting being pushed back into banking education and away from a model reflecting the idea of a community of learners.

THOUGHTS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

Upon reflection, here is some of what we are going to remind ourselves as we go forward to future efforts in this area.

1. Within the context of teacher-student negotiation of both content and process, letting go of traditional expectations of neatly organized, teacher-centered lessons is an achievable and worthwhile goal. The nature of dialogue requires participants to be comfortable going in new and unexpected directions, though this way of proceeding may be unfamiliar in an academic setting.
2. A common understanding of what critical pedagogy encompasses is desirable as a starting point. Once this is achieved, then class participants can explore common understandings and their applications through doing and experiencing critical pedagogy within the context of the course. Critiques of the topic should be held until participants have obtained a basic understanding but are appropriate given the dialogic orientation of the class.
3. All class members need to explore class participation issues related to speaking (e.g., taking the floor).
4. Teachers must listen to what students are saying and pose their students' various issues as problems to be considered by the class.

[7] We also used an e-mail discussion list as a way of addressing this issue.

participants agreed with, or perhaps understood, the underlying critique of society that is implicit in critical pedagogy. Although the participants were interested in knowing what critical pedagogy is, some put up sufficient resistance to the language of the initial texts that we sometimes wondered to what extent critical pedagogy as a theory of education and social change resonated among the class. In evaluation comments, one student wrote, "I think the problem with the composition of this class is that quite a few students weren't quite convinced that traditional education is biased, discriminatory and perpetuates the status quo." As instructors, we were more interested in seeking to have the whole group of students work out their own responses to these positions rather than in advocating our own views as strongly as we could have (see Gore & Zeichner, 1990). Views in this area did shift, in any case: One final comment from a student was "I feel everyone in the class has evolved through the semester to less conservative positions about teaching and education."

Participation patterns. As a matter of technique, the hardest part about the course, for Graham, was not (always) taking the floor. He felt it was often necessary not to take a traditional teacher's role in the flow of discussion because it would cut the ground from under any student who was attempting to explain some aspect of the material to another in a whole-class setting or prevent one student standing up for some view when it was questioned by another. There was the danger that the students would, initially at least, take his remarks as the "correct" understanding of the topic. (This issue remained problematic: One student evaluation comment was "reluctant to exercise his authority where I think he should," though another wrote, "The instructor was nurturant and firm in trying to do things in a critical manner.")

Participation patterns differed markedly across our class members. Half a dozen were women from East Asia with relatively little teaching experience and no familiarity with any critical discourses. There were a couple of individuals who were quite familiar with such discourses and some very talkative individuals—both men and women—as well. Most students had not been part of groups sensitive to gender-related imbalances in participation, commonplace in social-change groups in some cultures. Graham introduced a reading on this topic after the first few class meetings but found it not easy to refrain from trying to guide class discussion so that less verbal members would have a chance to participate. We differed as to whether it was important for all individuals in the class to have and use an equal amount of class time—Graham thought this was important, but Al felt that silence was all right in whole-class discussions and that imbalances in participation indicated a need for more small-group work. Graham felt that the issue, more than silence,

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Neither teachers nor students should be complacent, nor should they fear raising issues. Teachers should reflect back student-generated issues (such as "that won't work in my country") to the students as problems they should work on rather than attempt to solve the problems for the students.

5. Teachers should emphasize the dynamics of how critical pedagogy classes can be designed and implemented so that all the participants know in what respects they have experienced and created a critical pedagogy. In other words, the immediate need is to establish a critical pedagogy within the parameters of a graduate teacher education course sufficient that participants can begin to look at the wider applications to their own cultures and teaching contexts. However, teachers should not expect too much from a first experiencing of this approach, particularly if participants' own lived experiences do not provide them with a critical understanding of their own cultures or prior socialization. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that the social action dimension of this experience of critical pedagogy will manifest itself as this group of graduate students begins to teach (or returns to teaching).

CONCLUSION

Although we have focused here on aspects of classroom or pedagogical practice, critical pedagogy should be seen as a social and educational process rather than just as a pedagogical method. It is more concerned about how language can effect personal and social change than it is with "how to teach language" more effectively or in ways that simply encourage critical thinking on the part of teacher and students.

To restate, critical pedagogy results from personal and social choices that reflect a desire to understand both the word (i.e., language) and the world and to act upon these choices. Within S/FL classrooms, language can become a primary medium by which this may occur; if this is an objective, teachers must experience and experiment with the processes involved themselves if they are to foster them in others.

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