

Critical Pedagogy in the Intensive Reading Class

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In the application of critical pedagogy in the intensive reading class, the students not only were taught to be linguistically literate but also critically literate. That means the students not only learned to read the reading passage and understand it's meaning, but also learned to read the world through the text.

This study shows how critical pedagogy was applied in an intensive reading class which English was taught as a foreign language. The purpose of the study is to enhance students' intensive reading skills and promote critical literacies. It should also promote the students' voices. The study emphasize the method of teaching and how students authenticate their ideas toward the reading text and the world around them and indicate the enhancement of their language ability and their consciousness toward the reading text and the world around them.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), it is very important for the Japanese to persevere English education in order to pursue globalization. The MEXT has constructed a nation-wide strategic plan that established a system for the purpose of cultivating "Japanese with English abilities" (MEXT, 2003). In order to promote that norm, universities in Japan apply the convention of English curricular and have their students fulfill English course requirements in their freshmen and sophomore years (Itoko, 2002). The MEXT plan stated that English should be taught as a mean of communication where vocabulary and grammar are essential. In addition it is clearly affirmed that English four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing should be fostered.

Reading is usually one of the core courses in the English language program. In Grabe's study, he stated that reading is the most crucial skill of second language

(L2) learning in academic framework (Ediger, 2001). Wyk (2003) who studied the effectiveness of academic literacy program through reading and writing courses indicated that after conducted the intensive reading instruction to her students in a university in South Africa, she found out that the students demonstrated 8.5% improvement of their language performance. Wertheimer and Honigsfeld (2000) also stated in their study that their ESL students whom were new immigrants with different languages and ethnicities evidently showed their English language enhancement and were able to catch up with their main stream classmates after participating in reading projects.

Correspondingly, reading is one of the effective compulsory courses to learn English for students in Universities in Japan. The students are also leaning English in English as a second (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL) circumstance. The reading curriculum is added and conducted with a hope to nurture a greater knowledge of English for its students. However, it should be noted that the method of teaching reading in different universities are varies according to their theoretical fashion and English language education policy.

INTENSIVE READING

Intensive reading is one of the mandatory courses for the intensive English program students at Ferris University. Consequently, the students in the intensive English program are required to complete 3 intensive reading courses along with other required language ones. The objectives of the intensive reading class, according to the school syllabi are to enhance students' reading necessary skills, strategies for reading and to build the students' vocabularies knowledge (Ferris University, 2010).

Intensive reading class usually is usually focus on learning reading strategies and the meaning of the text intensively. In the class, the students engage in reading activities that include previewing background knowledge, skimming and scanning the text for specific information, guessing and finding the meanings of the unfamiliar words, understanding the referring and inferring, monitoring understanding while

reading and answering the comprehensive questions after the reading.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy is the thought and the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. It was first remarked as a political theory based on the revolutionary thought of utilizing education to free the oppressed by the oppressor in Brazil (Freire & Macedo, 1998). It had its goal that went against the “Bank education” which says the teacher deposits knowledge in the students’ brain to educational pedagogy to an idea which promoted the learners’ critical consciousness through praxis and empowered students to take action for social transformation. It had been cited by many educators such as Wallerstein (1983), Giroux and McLaren (1989) Wink (2000) and Pennycook (2005).

Critical literacy is about learning to read the word and the world for the purpose of raising critical consciousness. It could bring people to understand in regards to the conditions under which they live, so they can take action and make possible social changes (Freire, 1970; Pennycook, 2001). In the study of Bee (Chaikul, 2006), she developed a program based on critical pedagogy. Her program was for helping immigrant women in Australia. She stated that the students in her program improved their literacy level, gained an understanding of the nature of gender oppression and realized their potential to change the situation. Another study which introduced the critical pedagogy to a feminist based curriculum had done by Lin (2004). She conducted a critical pedagogy course for female MATESL students in Hong Kong. Despite the difficulties in managing the curriculum, she stated that the students showed their critical realization toward the working circumstance and take action by publishing a newsletter for English language professionals in Hong Kong to let their voices be heard in their academic community (Lin, 2004).

Because critical pedagogy is a Theoretical scheme, not a teaching approach, there are many studies and debates of how to make the theory into a classroom practice. While many educators found it was hard to put critical pedagogy in to practice, several teaching approaches had been created to promote the pedagogy

for instance; praxis (Freire, 1970), problem-posing (Wallerstein, 1982), critical praxis (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999) and critical literacy through critical reading course (Wallace, 2001).

Consequently, the rationale behind this study is to (a) to create practical lessons based on critical pedagogy (b) to utilize the practice to the intensive reading classes and (c) to study how students voiced their idea and reflect their critical consciousness during and after the course.

TOWARD A PEDAGOGIC RESEARCH METHOD

The research has been conducted in spring semester of 2009. The participants were Ferris university freshmen. There were 14 students who were studying in an English intensive program in the first semester of 2009. The students were majored in international communication, music and English literature. Students in this program had TOEIC score between 327-393 points. The intensive reading class was a once-a-week ,90 minute class. The period of the study was one semester or 15 meetings. The intensive reading course had the enabling objectives as follows;

Enabling Objectives: Skill Goals

Reading

Introduction to previewing/pre-reading strategies & skimming

-Identifying the topic, main idea, audience, source, length & organization, etc.

Reading for a purpose

Identifying main ideas and key concepts

Marking texts

Vocabulary strategies

-Inferring meaning from context

-Ignoring words that are irrelevant

-Dictionary use

Introduction to scanning

Introduction to basic web searching

(Ferris University, 2010)

In this intensive reading, the Ferris Intensive Reading textbook for spring semester was used. The book consisted of 3 units which were relationship, inspired people and education. In the first 7 weeks, the students randomly studied the first 3 articles in the first units. Those articles are college life and new friends, women better at friendships, say survey and the five love languages. Basically, the class were conducted in a 3 Ps tradition, that are Pre-reading, while reading or reading process and post reading. Started with the pre-reading activity students did activities such as brain-storming, answer the questions according to their prior knowledge and discuss the matter with their classmates in pairs or in groups. Most of the reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, vocabulary strategies and dictionary used, for instance, were introduced and employed during the process reading stage. For the post reading stage, various reading strategies such as identifying the main idea, recognizing main points and details, inferring the meaning from the text and summarizing skills were implemented. The reading activities occurred in the classes include answer right-there and comprehensive questions, do the true-false activity, complete or match vocabulary with the meanings, and discuss the issue related to the article.

For the first 7 weeks of study, students were willing to read the articles intensively and complete the tasks. Most of the students listened to the teacher's instruction and took notes. In the first half of the semester the teacher played an active role in giving knowledge to the students. Evidently, it was clear that students were accustomed to the teacher-fronted 'Banking education' (Freire, 1970) style, where the teacher deposited the knowledge to the students' brains. The teacher had the absolute right to choose the reading articles, gave exact answers to the questions and utterly controlled the classroom. The following comparison was made based on Zepp (2000, cited in Chaikul, 2004) who differentiated the 'banking education' from critical pedagogy. It had put into a table as follows:

Table 1: Banking education VS Critical pedagogy (adapted from Chaikul, 2004)

Banking education	Critical pedagogy
- Teacher has absolute power and students are oppressed	- Teacher and students have adequate power balance
- Teacher as narrator and giver	- Teacher as co-learner and facilitator
- Students as recipients	- Students as co-investigators
- Students adapt themselves to fit into the context	- Students explore and reveal the world
- Teacher regulates	- Praxis regulates
- Little to do with critical consciousness toward self, society and the world	- Enhancing critical consciousness toward self, society and the world

In contrast to the banking education, critical pedagogy focuses more on giving more power to the students to control their own learning. The teacher's role is in fact a facilitator who co-learning and investigating matters with the students. It is crucial that the students explore and reveal the world through praxis or critical dialogue. During praxis process students will state the code, decode it and reflect aspects in and about the code. It is an ongoing process which leads to the critical consciousness which leads to taking action to improve matters. Then cycle of praxis will take place again the process will lead it to another process of reflection and taking action. During the praxis or critical dialogue, student's voice is heard and can be heard.

The chart below shows the process of critical pedagogy.

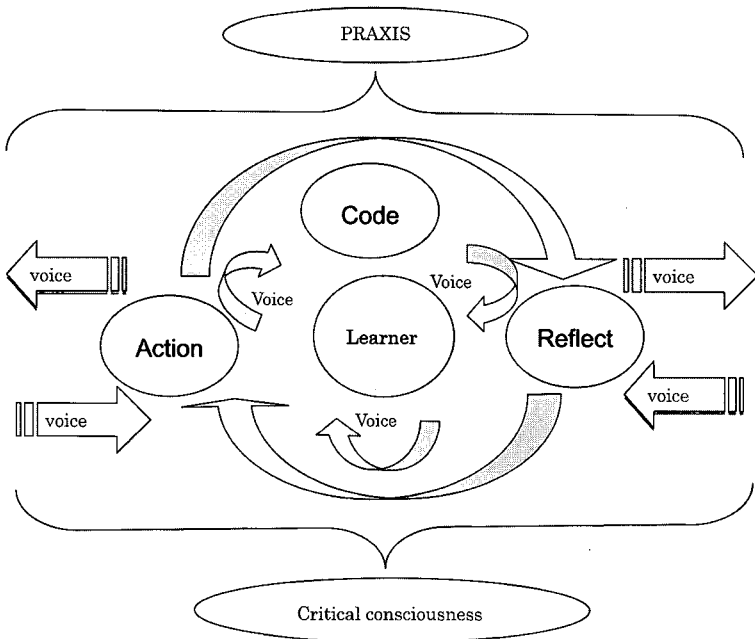


Figure 1: the cycle of praxis in critical pedagogy

The purpose of the critical pedagogy is self realization, social awareness and the empowerment to change the situation and willingness to take the chance to improve the situation at hand.

CRITICLE PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

For the second half of the semester, critical pedagogy was utilized to the intensive reading classes. Instead of 'banking education' which is mostly teacher-oriented, more students-centered instruction was conducted to create a well balance of power to control the classroom learning. Students were given opportunity to choose what they wanted to read and to learn intensively. The students were to choose articles from the textbook according to their preferences.

Why is reading an article here important? In this circumstance, the articles were treated as a code for problem-posing. The article the students chose from the Ferris Reader textbook were “Lance’s story”, “Alex’s Lemonade Stand”, “Danny and Betsy Nally”, “Founders of Turkeys ‘R’ Us”, “Sadako Ogata: Japan’s Special Envoy on Afghan Issues”, “Teacher Born without Limbs Teaches Children Acceptance”, “Respect”, “Safia Minney: A Biography”, and “Earth”, “Earthkeeper Hero: Wangari Maathai”, and “Behind the Search for the ‘Afghan Girl’”.

In addition to their regular reading strategies practice, the students were to decode the text and think and reflect of what it was and what related the code or the story to the situation around them. Since most of the reading were related to issues that were either new or unfamiliar to students who were in their teens, students were asked a set of questions such as why do you choose this article? Have you heard about it before? What did you heard about this matter? Have you ever had an experience that was similar to what happened in the article? At this stage, many students tended to realized that the issues were related to their lives and their society. Students started to actively participating in the dialogue. They expressed their thoughts about what was happening in the article, gave evidence to support their opinions and showed the realization of the existence of the issue in their society. The critical dialogue motivated students to discover information related to the issue.

Fortunately, the class was conducted in a computer laboratory, the students were encouraged to search for more information that related to their articles on the Internet. Students showed their excitement of their explorations. The class atmosphere was noticeably different form the teacher fronted- banking education, when students played more leading roles in learning. Students showed their enthusiastic and their willing to read more. One student who chose the article about Danny and Betsy who were the founders of Turkeys ‘R’ us mentioned that,

“I never knew that people eat Turkey on Thanks giving in the USA. I read about Thanks giving (On the Internet) and I learned a great deal”

Other said that ,

“I leaned about the importance of fair trade”

At the whole praxis process, teacher played the role of facilitator who scaffolded students' knowledge and avoided judging or giving what was implied as a “right answer” to the students. Consequently, students were lost at first and tried to find the “right answers” which were not the terminal objective for critical pedagogy. Teachers had to explain the importance of reflection and encouraged students to impose their voices so that they would be heard. It was more essential to have students expose the text, explore the world and express their opinions.

After students found out which article mattered to them and how it related to them in various ways, students were asked to analyze the problems behind the issues addressed in their article. They were also encouraged to think of the causes of the problems. The pair-work discussion task worked well at this stage. Students showed their realization toward the problems and the issues around them that related to the article.

At the end of semester, the students were asked to reflect their thoughts during and after the presentation. These are some reflections that shared about their problems coming to realization about their articles.

One student mentioned that

“I learned about crisis in Africa and the importance of nature”

Another stated that

“I learned from Afghanistan, woman rights, refugees and so on”

And orther said

“ (I learned) about Otake’s positive thinking”

As it was mentioned above, most impotent was critical pedagogy’s principle to boost critical consciousness. Here are some evidence that indicates the students’ critical consciousness. The students in this intensive class showed the realization of self as a member of society. A student who chose to present about Sadako Ogata said that she works very hard in Afghan and the student straightforwardly stated that “ We must face the world.”

The problems and self realization were the first sign of their critical consciousness. The higher critical consciousness one can be recognized through the praxis. The voices of several students in this intensive reading class showed the speaker's willingness to take action to help improving different situations. Those were considered as indications of high-level critical consciousness (Chaikul, 2004). A student who presented the reading article, Alex's Lemonade Stand mentioned that she understood more about the situation of children who had cancer. She said they were many of those suffered children all around the world. She stated that "we should help them."

Another voice was heard from the student who presented on the same topic. She pointed out that

"It is important to help people. Alex had a great aim. I'll take a movement to do fund-raising."

DISCUSSION

There are some difficulties and possibility of applying critical pedagogy in a language classroom. This study reflected one possibility to utilize critical pedagogy in an intensive reading program. By applying praxis or critical dialogue to the intensive reading activities increases awareness of the learners toward the text, themselves and the world. And the result of the application was satisfactory. It boosted students learning motivation, helped them gain necessary reading skills, gave them chances to control their own learning, encouraged them to voice their opinions and enhanced their critical consciousness.

However, there were some drawbacks in applying this pedagogy to the reading class. One of the rigid limitations was that there was no concrete explanation of how to apply the critical pedagogy to the language classroom. Consequently, teachers were basically on their own. It is not an easy task putting critical pedagogy into practice.

Secondly, attributable to critical pedagogy, it was stated that the code can be any kind of text such as articles, songs, advertisements, complaints, or photos for

instant. It was acknowledged that using various texts as codes adventurous the students' learning. Applying critical pedagogy in the intensive reading class limited the kind of codes to only reading texts. However, in the research, it found that using the reading text as a code gave students some space to focus on the problems of others not on their own. Especially in Japanese context, people tend to avoid talking about their problems due to their concern of losing their face. To use reading text as a code for text analysis created a safe-ground for discussion and voicing their opinion.

Lastly, there is no definite right way to apply critical pedagogy. It is better to take it into consideration that since there are not certain solid methods or approaches to teaching critical pedagogy, there are still a lot of room for the better research and practice.

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