

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CRITICAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

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INTRODUCTION

What is a language teacher’s job? Is our job to provide instruction using mainstream SLA methods proclaimed to best promote language acquisition? Is our job to provide what students expect in a language classroom in order for instructors to claim that her or his teaching is humanistic and student-centered? Is our job to empower students so that they feel encouraged to achieve their goals in and outside the classroom? Is our job to offer content-based language instruction that helps students pay attention to social issues and social inequalities? How should a teacher perceive language teaching? Although I consider it extremely important to promote effective language teaching to improve students’ language proficiency, in this paper, I will focus on the educational, ethical, and sociopolitical roles of a language teacher.

One of the most influential resources provided to language teachers is academic research in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). In her review of SLA research and teaching, Lightbown (2000) celebrated the expanding theories proposed by the field, saying “there is now a rich literature of SLA research which can help shape teachers’ expectations for themselves and their students, and provide valuable clues to effective pedagogical practice” (p. 452). Nonetheless, she argues that there still is “good reason to ask whether, and if so how, SLA research should influence pedagogy” (p. 455).

Recent publications (e.g., Davis, 1995; Hall, 1995; Norton, 1995 & 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Ohta, 2000; Breen, 2001; Block, 2002; Canagarajah, 1999 & 2002b; Kramsch, 2002) criticize mainstream SLA research for not being able to capture the complexity of language, the language learner, and the processes of language learning. Learner’s multiple identities (Peirce, 1995; Norton 2000), learner’s contributions (Breen, 2001), sociocultural perspectives of language learning (Lantolf, 2000; Ohta, 2000), sociohistorical perspectives (Hall, 1995), and language socialization (Kramsch, 2002) are

just some of the suggested areas for SLA to consider in conducting research and developing theoretical models of language acquisition. Canagarajah (1999) sees both the strengths and limitations of mainstream SLA research in its restriction of focusing on contexts for learning activity. SLA researchers view classrooms as detached from larger historical and social conditions, and the targets and stages of learning are also made narrower and clearer to provide a convenient means of measuring pedagogical progress. Yet these process results are likely to be over-simplified and possibly distorted. Hall (1995) argues that language learning theory and pedagogy need to give attention to the larger sociohistorical and political forces residing in both the meanings of the linguistic resources and the social identities of those who aim to use them.

Researchers, who are interested in complex, sociohistorical, and political aspects of language learning and teaching, suggest that an alternative approach, critical pedagogy, should be the vital essence of language teaching (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002b; Morgan 1998; Norton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2001; Ramanathan, 2002). Critical pedagogy in ESL maintains that both language learning and language teaching are political processes, and it sees language as not simply a means of expression or communication but as a practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways language learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

With this critical viewpoint in mind, this paper offers an overview of an ongoing qualitative study that found its inspiration in the recent critical pedagogy movement in ESL. The main goal of this particular paper is to investigate what sorts of learning can happen in content-based critical language classrooms. I first review the literature on SLA concerning the emergence of sociopolitical approaches to the field and then discuss what has been written about critical approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT).

PROBLEMATIZING SLA

SLA research has greatly influenced second and foreign language (S/FL) teachers throughout the world. The field has been instrumental in developing varied approaches to second language teaching over the past few decades, including the Audio Lingual

Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Content-Based Language Teaching, Focus on Form, Negotiation for Meaning, and Task-Based Language Teaching. These language-teaching methods have generally been developed through cognitive research using statistical analyses and popularized globally by publishing networks such as academic journals and textbooks as well as academic institutions, which include teacher training programs and professional organizations. It is not surprising that many teachers believe that SLA-promoted methods are the most effective, efficient, and authoritative for their classrooms. Yet researchers and theorists have recently pointed out that cognitively oriented SLA fails to consider the social and political complexity of language learning and, thus, does not offer the optimum multivaried approaches to language learning demanded by diverse learning conditions (e.g., Davis, 1995; Hall, 1995; Norton, 1995 & 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Ohta, 2000; Breen, 2001; Block, 2002; Canagarajah, 1999 & 2002b; Kramsch, 2002).

The question S/FL teaching professionals should be asking is whether the scientifically verified “facts” produced by SLA cognitive researchers are truly important in their own teaching setting. Block (2002) problematizes Negotiation for Meaning and Task-Based Language Teaching as rationalist activities devoted to the transfer of information without reference to the social context or the intervention of socio-psychological factors. Framed within modernistic and positivistic concepts such as efficient, calculable, predictable, controllable, and standardized negotiation for meaning, communication is only understood partially and, thus, inadequately (Block, 2002).

In the following section, I explore various models of critical pedagogy that address the social, political, historical, and situated nature of language learning.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH: CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES

When a teacher is not satisfied with the current methods suggested in SLA, what alternative options are available? Researchers (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002a; Morgan 1998; Norton, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 1999, 2001; Ramanathan 2002) have recently proposed that critical pedagogy is crucial to English language teaching. Given the importance of social, cultural, and historical perspectives on

language learning, it is unwise to claim any approach to be the ‘universal’ and ‘absolute’ answer. Yet it is worth considering how a critical approach understands learning as locally situated, personal, socio-historical, and political, and thus allows for teaching approaches which are appropriate to particular situations.

Critical pedagogy has its origin in the field of education. A Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire, has probably been the most influential person in adult education as well as community development and is considered to be the founder of critical pedagogy. In the 1960s, Freire challenged the then predominant view of literacy as mastering a set of cognitive skills. He proposed that when literacy is taught as a collection of decontextualized, meaningless skills, starting with letters and sounds divorced from any significance in learners’ lives, the learners cannot be reflective or bring their own experiences to the learning process, and therefore literacy becomes the object rather than the means of instruction. Freire calls this the “banking model” of education. He suggests instead that a “problem-posing” process makes literacy immediately relevant and engaging by focusing on problematic issues in learner lives. This process also creates opportunities where ‘common-sense’ knowledge is examined in an uncommon and critical manner (Simon, 1992). From this theoretical position of sociopolitically situated learning, Freire created a grass-roots movement within Brazil that trained college students for work in a critical literacy campaign. The campaign teachers engaged adult literacy learners living in poverty in dialogue about key words representing problematic issues in their lives in order to foster critical analysis of these issues. In addition, being a learner along with the students, the teacher showed how knowledge is constructed and shared by the group through dialogue. In this way, learners become the creators rather than the recipients of knowledge. They became subjects as opposed to objects of their world and learned to recognize hegemonic forms of control for what they are and together find ways to resist them. The Freirian approach to education both contributed to a reconceptualization of literacy as socially constructed rather than skill-based and initiated “problem-posing” as a model for enabling learners to become active agents in shaping their own realities.

In the field of second language learning, a critical pedagogy approach has attracted considerable attention and rapidly gained momentum (Norton & Toohey, 2004). In the

special issue of *TESOL Quarterly*, which was devoted to critical approaches to TESOL, Pennycook (1999) reviews several important shared critical pedagogical concepts as well as different approaches to critical pedagogy for second language learning. He maintains that a critical approach to pedagogy needs to “aim at transformation, a way of shifting pedagogical relations to give students more curricular control, and ways of engaging with difference not merely in terms of inclusivity and issues but also at the level of desire” (p. 341). Pennycook cautions us that we need to see critical approaches not so much a static body of knowledge and practices, but as always being in flux and involving a complex cluster of social, cultural, political, and pedagogical concerns. Taking the locally-situated-ness and particularity seriously, some critical pedagogues (Canagarajah, 2002b; Kumaravadivelu, 2001) problematize language teaching methods and suggest postmethod pedagogy. Some (Skarin, this volume; Her, this volume) hold a critical approach to the microrelations of pedagogy, which focuses on the educational process where issues of power, discourses, and knowledge are addressed. Through appropriate content selection, others (Morgan, 1998; Benesch, 2001) take “on a critical approach to the larger context in which the students find themselves” (Pennycook, 1999, p. 337). In the following sections, I review postmethod, critical learning processes, and consciousness-raising content-based approaches to critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy and Second Language Teaching Methods

Canagarajah (2002b) has taken a strong position against Western language teaching methods, considering that classroom realities rarely correspond to any recognizable methods. Scrutinizing the Communicative Language Teaching approach, he suggests the immense complexity of the social, cultural, and historical contexts that can mediate the use of the method in classrooms and advocates for a pedagogy of postmethodism where language acquisition doesn't get reduced to any particular method. Rather, Canagarajah argues for the negotiation between teachers and students of a suitable teaching approach that operates progressively as contexts and purposes change. Furthermore, he argues that methods are not value free instruments validated by empirical research for purely practical reasons, but cultural and ideological constructs with politico-economic consequences.

Similarly, Kumaravadivelu (2001) theorizes alternative pedagogical principles: namely, particularity, practicality, and possibility. He advocates “a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularity” (p. 544). His critical pedagogical suggestions deny the dichotomy between theorists who have been assigned the role of producing the methods and teachers who have been assigned the role of consuming and employing the methods. Instead, his post-method pedagogy encourages teachers to theorize their practice and practice what they theorize. Finally, it reminds us of the impossibility of separating students’ linguistic needs from social needs and the teachers’ social responsibility for identity formation in the classroom.

Language Learning and Dominant Discourses

Canagarajah (1999) reviews two critical theories that underlie critical pedagogy. First, the concept of reproduction captures “how students are conditioned mentally and behaviorally by the practices of schooling to serve the dominant social institutions” (p. 22). He explains a vicious cyclical process where the dominant social arrangement passes on its values to the school; the school, through its curriculum and pedagogy, passes on those values to the students; and the students subsequently uphold the status quo. So the first step in the implementation of critical pedagogy is to help make students aware of this reproducing process of an inequitable status quo in schooling and other societal institutions. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) maintain that a teacher must seek to empower his or her students by helping to raise their awareness of such systems so that they can challenge them. Her (this volume) shows an example of consciousness raising among TESOL international MA students who draw on critical pedagogy notions of deconstruction and agency in resisting positioning by those from the dominant Discourse. Although instructors weren’t directly instrumental in the process, Her describes how they indirectly fostered agency through including critical studies readings in courses and promoting discussions of critical issues in class.

Taking a post-structuralist perspective, the concept of resistance sees subjectivity as fluid and negotiable and, thus, it gives subjects the possibility of forming new identities and gaining one’s voice by resisting dominant discourses. Canagarajah (1999) maintains

“resistance theories explain how there are sufficient contradictions within institutions to help subjects gain agency, conduct critical thinking and initiate change” (p. 22). So the next step in the implementation of critical pedagogy is to encourage our students to develop strategies that allow us to resist and even to subvert such reproduction. Skarin’s curriculum (this volume) is intended to help college language learners acquire the abilities needed to succeed in mainstream schools while at the same time making choices about acceptance or resistance of the status quo.

Consciousness Raising as Critical Content Teaching

Morgan (1998) suggests developing critical pedagogy lessons for ESL/EFL learners that “are intended to help prepare students for a social world in which language practices can *deny* as well as provide opportunity. It is through such awareness that newcomers might better develop the language skills necessary to act in their best interests and contribute effectively in the development of a more equitable and tolerant society” (p. 6). Morgan (1998) documents how his class raised awareness by selecting for discussion content both socially and individually meaningful to students such as the Gulf War, immigrants, social justice, and environmental issues. He then encouraged students to reflect on their own life histories so that they find themselves in larger contexts through meaningful content. For example, reading, speaking, and writing activities enabled his ethnically Chinese students to see the way in which they have been positioned as immigrants and, for most of them, females.

In her in-service EAP courses, Benesch (2001) taught psychology, anthropology, and social science to undergraduate international students who took the same content courses offered at her academic institution. In her psychology class, she assigned anorexia as a content topic for students to discuss. Using engaged dialogues with students, she not only enabled her female students to discover their subjection in terms of body image, ranging from the extreme of eating disorders to more familiar self-surveillance, but she also allowed her male students to realize their positioning of body image and control (p. 76). Moreover, the content of “anorexia provided the opportunities to connect their private concerns and academic study in ways other topics had not” (p. 77).

Whether the content is academic or not, consciousness-raising through critical issues requires a deep level of engagement both from students and the teacher. It is crucial that the content be immediate and meaningful to students so that they become aware of both the reproductive nature and the possibility of resistance to problematic content. As Pennycook (1999) cautions, it also requires teachers' investment at the level of desire. Developing critical consciousness doesn't mean "a rational, intellectual explanation of what is wrong with racism and homophobia" (p. 340). Instead, it requires of a teacher a deeper level of engagement with beliefs, experiences, identities, and desires.¹ Another important point is that, in the process of discussing critical issues that are meaningful and engaging, students develop their writing, grammatical, and oral competence. Thus, the course serves the dual purposes of language development and consciousness-raising.

In sum, by gaining one's voice and resisting unjust reproduction in their own self-interest, students start to become active agents for social change. Yet there is not much empirical research that explicitly examines language learners' evolving perspectives during a critical content-based course. This paper documents evidence of consciousness-raising through critical ESL lessons. I define critical consciousness as the ability to realize and question the reproduction of socio-cultural and historical injustice, as well as power relationships in one's own culture, the target culture, and global cultures.

EXPLORING THE SOCIOPOLITICAL NATURE OF CULTURE: AN ESL COURSE OF STUDY

The study described here was conducted in the course *Cultural Issues* which is one of the elective academic preparation courses in the Intensive English Program (IEP) at a large public university in a mid-sized city on the Pacific Rim. The IEP is designed for speakers of English as a second language. The tuition is considered fairly high compared to other ESL schools in the city. While the majority of the students in the IEP are from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and are relatively stable or even privileged financially, some students come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and receive scholarships. All the

¹ The example of a teacher's engagement is described in the section below on *Problem-posing, Dialogues, and Critical Consciousness* with a reading text (Appendix A).

classes in the IEP are taught by graduates of or graduate students in the university's department of English as a second language.

The *Cultural Issues* course was the site of the participatory action research project I conducted in which I collected data in the process of teaching the course. Classes met for two hours, twice a week on Monday and Wednesday, for a 10-week term from July to September of 2004. The multiple purposes of the course are developing writing and oral language abilities, increasing academic group (whole-class, small group, and pair) discussion skills and cross-cultural communication skills, increasing critical awareness on cultural issues in both an academic and global society, and acquiring coping strategies for dealing with cultural and ethical dilemmas. At the beginning of the semester, activities focused on finding the sociopolitically relevant cultural themes in students' lives (cf. Auerbach, 1992). Together with ongoing email exchanges and conscious listening in class, the students determined themes to be discussed in future classes. The topics negotiated with students were culture shock, stereotypes, racism, religions, sexism, gender orientation, and sexual harassment. I used texts, handouts, a video, and invited guest speakers to conduct special sessions on these topics. The students read and wrote their responses to classes and topics in weekly journal entries. The first activity of each class was to share their response writing in a group of four or five students. While sharing, they were encouraged to write comments on papers they were reading and discuss issues that arose with the groups. I also read their response writing and provided comments. I strove to appreciate their experiences and wisdom while posing questions that would enable them to consider a range of perspectives. It was hoped that through this dialogic engagement and problem posing, shared goals of social and political justice might be furthered (Morgan, 1998). The final project was to conduct research on one of the topics discussed in class and make a class presentation based on this research. The research involved interviewing experts on the issue they were concerned about, and the student presentations included both the interview results and their own opinions.

For the purpose of data collection, qualitative research methods were used. In addition to my teacher researcher activities in the *Cultural Issues* course, I conducted interviews with students in order to explore development of critical consciousness and their perspectives on what goes on in the class. Another important source of data was the

students' journals. After obtaining permission from students, I photocopied all of the journals as well as midterm and end-of-term class evaluations and self-evaluations. I also kept a journal to explore how my perceptions of teaching shifted through the experience of teaching this course. Data were triangulated from four sources: observations, interviews, journals, and materials brought into class by students and the teacher.

PROBLEM-POSING AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In order to address the ways and extent to which the experience of taking the course affected particular students' critical consciousness, I focused on four students who agreed to participate in a longitudinal case study. I conducted both semi-formal interviews and ongoing dialogue with Hanh from Vietnam and Yayoi, Mie, and Jack from Japan.² In the following description, I will first address how the problem-posing process of learning helped students maintain dialogue and raise critical consciousness. I then analyze how the participants manifested critical consciousness during and after taking the course.

Problem-posing, Dialogues, and Critical Consciousness

The first topic students read and discussed was culture shock. I used two texts, both of which introduce personal stories in which an international student studying in the U.S. has a hard time adjusting to academic culture in the U.S. In each case, there's an American (an ESL teacher or a roommate) with whom the international student interacted repeatedly and, through these interactions, suffered huge misunderstandings and culture shock. For both readings, students wrote in their journals about personal experiences studying in the U.S. and read and commented on each other's writing. I also introduced my own personal written anecdote (see Appendix A) about my experience studying in England and being the object of symbolic and physical violence. This is not only to show that international students can be symbolically marginalized and go through extremely depressing and difficult times, but also to present, in the struggle, hope that becomes an ontological need to improve the world (Freire, 1994). Moreover, it was a chance for me to show my nonnative speaker and foreigner identity and open up to the class my rationale behind offering the course. This exercise strengthened our dialogues, not so

²The names of participants have been changed to protect their identities.

much as between students and a teacher, but as among a minority group of learners in an English speaking community. Here, I do not wish to exclude Americans or native speakers of English, as I believe anyone can be a minority person in terms of their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Nevertheless, it is of importance to show that I am in the same boat with my students in the early stages of the course, and so collectively, we can co-construct our own realities. Moreover, as Pennycook (1999) argues, critical teachers need to engage with students at the level of investment in beliefs, desire, and identity.

Although many of the students were surprised to read about my experiences with racism, they showed appreciation for my sharing a possibly embarrassing experience, and they became more open to sharing their own experiences, such as being a nonnative speaker of English, a nonnative speaker of a local language in Indonesia, and a minority in the U.S., France, or Vietnam. Others shared how discriminatory people in their own countries, namely Japan and Korea, are towards foreigners. The depth and length of their written journals showed how, through my sharing of experiences, students became more engaged in classroom dialogue as shown in the following examples:

Taka's story remind me about my childhood time when I used to face some kind of prejudice. I was born in Ho Chi Minh City... Things happened when my family moved to Binh Thuan province... Whenever I said something in class, all of my classmates laughed at me and stared me into silence. They did not let me join any of their games during the break time... I always came home from school with tears.

[Hanh journal, July 2004]

I had kind of same experience in U.S.A. I went to there when I was high school student. Before I go to there, I had good image like freedom country and friendly... When I was waiting school bus with my host student. Around fifteen years old boys came over to me and they surround me with staring. It was strange... They did the same doing to me almost one week... I think still now he didn't know about my country but he was just curious.

[Mie journal, July 2004]

In addition to reflecting on their own experiences with discrimination, students were also provided with the opportunity to reflect on their own values and beliefs. For the topic on stereotypes and racism, students were presented a picture of an African-American man and another picture of a Caucasian woman (Okazaki, 2004). They were then asked to

predict their occupation, hobbies, educational background, family, personality, and so fourth. The guesses³ students made about the African-American man were:

- He didn't finish his high school.
- He is poor.
- He is scary. I don't wanna be a friend of him.
- He is a painter, painting walls.
- He has no plan about future.
- He is single but has a daughter.
- He is a basketball player because most of the basketball players are black.

[Students, guest speaker session, August 2004]

The guesses students made about the Caucasian American woman were:

- She is a graduate student
- She is from a rich family.
- She likes shopping.
- She is friendly and independent.
- She is a Christian.

[Students, guest speaker session, August 2004]

Clearly, while the guesses students made are both stereotypical, the ones about the African-American man were far more negative than the ones about the Caucasian woman. After sharing their guesses, I surprised my students by having the two actual people in the pictures show up in class.⁴ Students as a group asked questions to these two people in order to try to find out if their former guesses were right. The most shocking part of this question-answer session seemed to be when students found out that these two people are married to each other. After questions, the two guest speakers talked about their experiences of being stereotyped and discriminated against. Since students realized they had just engaged in stereotyping themselves, the experiences that the couple, especially the African American man, went through became highly relevant to them. In their journal reflections they wrote the following:

³ Students were paired and wrote their guesses on the piece of paper. Teachers collected and read them anonymously.

⁴ They were the first guest speakers in class. Although students knew I would invite guest speakers, they didn't know that this particular session would involve guest speakers.

- I learned how serious discrimination or racism is.
- I learned that effects from TV and movies are very strong.
- Before presentation, I didn't like black people. I was stupid. I got angry with myself.
- I learned color, race doesn't matter. The most important thing is to respect each other.
- To avoid having prejudice, we need to know current real race problems through education.
- At HELP, there are many students from different cultural backgrounds. I'll communicate my classmates without typical images from now on.
- I realized that I should tell my father to reconsider his prejudice against foreigners.

[Students, guest speaker session, August 2004]

As shown by this activity, students found the issue of stereotypes problematic and immediately relevant to their lives, and thus, they began doubting what is taken for granted in their own lives. Some became critical and reflective about themselves and others became critical about the society surrounding them.

In sum, the class engaged in discussing issues that were derived from their living experiences, instead of practicing decontextualized exercises to acquire the skills of solving well-formulated problems from a textbook. Freire called this situatedness, which means grounding class activities in students' "thematic universe" (Freire, 1970, p. 77). Their questions about life in and out of classroom were treated as the main source of class dialogue. It is this contextually situatedness that made discussions meaningful to their lives and thus would carry on after classes. In addition to students' extensive dialogues, the teacher's role is crucial in problem posing.

According to Freire, with problem posing education, "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught (Freire, 1970, p. 67). He also emphasized that the students already have wisdom and invaluable experiences, which might not be articulated or shared in the classroom. As a result, the teacher's crucial roles are to learn from the students, welcome and appreciate their perspectives, and engage in the dialogical process. The following excerpt from Hanh is in response to the question "what did you like about the class the most":

The way you get all the students involved. Because you make all the students not afraid of you as a teacher but consider you as a friend. So we feel very comfortable, very easy to talk, very easy to share the opinions without afraid...if I said something wrong...

[Hanh, interview, November 2004]

Other students commented in the end-of-term evaluations that the “teacher is very helpful”; “(he is) willing to help students”; “we all feel comfortable in his class”; “(the) teacher always care about students”; and “he always encourage us to participate in each class session.” Yet, the process of problem-posing involves not only appreciating students’ thoughts and opinions, but also questioning and sometimes disagreeing with students in order to develop critical consciousness. This question-posing involves challenging students’ taken-for-granted commonsense knowledge. In Morgan’s words, “Problem-posing involves circulating probing questions and ideas in a thought-provoking manner that engages rather than threatens people and opens up possibilities for critical reflection” (1998, p. 16). He goes on to say that he believes “teachers, through problem-posing, can help students see issues in critical ways that promote their participation” (1998, p. 16). In class, problems that question commonsense knowledge were posed throughout class activities, and more personal problem-posing questions were given as feedback in the students’ journals to encourage them to consider alternative possibilities. The following is an example of my attempts to respect students’ perspectives but, at the same time, pose questions that might help promote critical reflection:

This is very thoughtful writing. I agree that we should keep in mind “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” However, I also believe people in multicultural setting should have sensitivity to different cultures... Is it only a non-native speaker’s responsibility to learn how the Romans speak? Is it only a foreigner’s responsibility to try to communicate? Do you think all the English speakers do as the Romans do when they travel? ... Do you think Koreans and Filipinos in Japan, Indians in UK and Muslims in the US are not trying hard enough?

[The teacher’s comment in a student’s journal, July 2004]

Through this process of problem posing in dialogical journals, students as well as the teacher become aware of attitudes and beliefs we take for granted and how we reproduce

these values in our day-to-day interaction. In the following example, Hanh shows realization that the values and beliefs that she grew up with were taken for granted:

Sometimes we just think that something in our mind is right and we don't want to change the idea in our mind. We keep the belief and we grow up with the belief. ... From your class, I think we have to put ourselves in other people's position so that we understand better. [Hanh, interview, November 2004]

Once students come to see what they tend to take for granted, they come to question their beliefs and start to consider alternative possibilities. When asked what she thought about my problem-posing comments in her journal, Mie stated, "It was good comments for me, and it made my thought changeable."

While some students (Hanh and Mie) agreed that all the topics were familiar and relevant, others (Yayoi and Jack) thought some topics were 'far' from their lives. However, through response sharing among students and problem-posing by students and me, all students, including Yayoi and Jack, engaged in dialogues about topics not only in the classroom, but also outside our bi-weekly meetings. For example, Mie said that she was particularly interested in talking with other classmates about racism, sexism, and religion. She also observed other students asking each other questions about a range of course topics outside of class. Yayoi often asked other students, including Jack and Mie, if they were familiar with these issues and, thus, engaged us in further discussion. Even after the course was over, Mie and Yayoi discussed the more controversial issues brought up in class with an Indonesian student who had also taken the course.

The following case studies of Jack and Yayoi illustrate the growing critical consciousness among students in the course.

JACK: CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS QUESTIONING AND GAINING ONE'S VOICE

Jack was born in Japan in 1985. He is 18 years old and came to Hawaii in April 2004 right after graduating from high school. He wanted to go to a university in the U.S. to "get skills for business to work in international trading companies in Tokyo." His father

is Caucasian American and his mother is Japanese. Although he grew up in Japan, Jack visited his grandparents every summer in Chicago where all the other relatives got together. He “didn’t like English at all” as he had to pretend that he understood what the relatives were saying at his grandparents’ house. However, he “started to like English songs and movies” when he was a high school student.

The critical conception of “gaining one’s voice” is helpful in illustrating the way Jack over time developed critical consciousness. For the first weeks of the term, he thought it was natural for him to accept the discrimination that he experienced over the years for being part Japanese and part Caucasian. In fact, in the second week when we invited guest speakers to discuss racism, I asked Jack about his experiences with racism, and he completely denied being discriminated against by saying “No. Never.” Also in his journal (July, 28 2004) he wrote about his experience of looking Caucasian while being culturally and linguistically Japanese:

In my case, before I came here, I lived in Japan. When Japanese people looked at me or meet someone we don’t know, they always showed me same attitude. But it became used to me now. Fortunately I’ve never been discriminated.

[Jack, journal, July 2004]

His strong denial about his discrimination experience did not last very long as the class dialogues and problem posing continued. In the interview on November 13, 2004, he admitted that he talked with Yayoi about the racism issue for a long time outside of class. My questioning also continued and in the midterm conference on August 16, 2004, he shared that being an Amerasian is “very hard.” For example, he said that “a million times” Japanese people asked him “can you speak English?” or “how do you say this in English?” In the U.S., he was also expected to be an American. He admitted that “a million times” American people treated him as an American. Consider the following extract from the interview on November 13, 2004,

(T refers to Taka and J refers to Jack.)

J: When my dad was here, we went to eat dinner with his friends. They were talking with a waiter. He was kind of not good.

T: who? The waiter?

J: yeah.

T: What kind of restaurant?

J: Italian. I mean he just tried to make fun. And so I was just laughing when they were talking. So he thought strange, why I didn't speak anything. So he said to me, "Hey, Mr. Silence" he said, "why you don't speak at all?" I was just laughing because they were talking. It's kind of ashamed of speaking English for me in front of them. So I was just be silent.

T: Was the waiter Italian or American?

J: He's American. He's from mainland. And he sometimes teased me. "What do you wanna eat Mr. Silence?"

T: So he repeated Mr. Silence?

J: Uh-hum. So the waiter said "Why you didn't speak?" And my dad's friend said he can speak English very well. But it's strange, right? She just try to make me comfort.

T: Oh, she tried to make you feel comfortable

J: Yeah and the waiter said "OK, try it. Try speak it!" But of course I couldn't! How come I should speak?

T: Oh, OK.

J: And there was a fork. He said, "Go ahead. Repeat after me, fork"

T: Oh, that's horrible.

J: So I didn't enjoy! [Jack, interview, November 2004]

Jack reveals that the waiter in this incident was "kind of not good." Because Jack looked Caucasian, his silence was interpreted as voluntary non-participation. Yet when it was revealed that he was not fluent in English, the waiter urged him to speak in English by saying, "Try speak it!" and "Repeat after me, fork." However, Jack resisted the imposed identities as both American and a non-native speaker by observing during our interview "How come I should speak?" Similarly, the following interview excerpt, from November 13, 2004, shows Jack's voice in resisting the dominant discourse instead of accepting it as natural:

I thought it was natural to have reactions like that. But through the class, I realized people including me have to consider each other. Not look at people as an outsider,

but to consider the other side, the other perspective. Don't think it's natural. It's negative things. [Jack, interview, November 2004]

As Jack continued to develop what I call critical consciousness, he developed the awareness to resist and act in his own interests. He became aware that if people treated him with disrespect, it was not his problem but their problem. Jack also resisted the dominant discourse by cautioning us “don't think it's natural.” It is precisely this critical awareness that helps those discriminated against to take actions in their own interests.

YAYOI:

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS REALIZATION AND RESISTANCE

Yayoi was born in Japan in 1981. She came to Hawaii in April 2004 right after graduating from a university, which included an attached elementary school and middle school. Through 12 years of education at this institution, she “learned to appreciate tradition and history of Japan.” Studying in Hawaii was encouraged by her professors and financially supported by the university under the promise of her returning to the university to contribute to the future of the school. She plans to study for a Master's degree in Japanese teaching in Hawai'i, which she also majored in her during her undergraduate program.

Yayoi's initial reaction to the Culture Issues course was not positive. She thought, “the level of class is too high and the topics are too heavy in the first few weeks.” Many of the comments in her midterm conference on August 17, 2004 included how she felt frustrated by the need to interact with other students in class. She said, “Among Japanese, I don't share my opinions. So why would I share with foreigners?” In reference to the Culture Issues Course she said, “We can't say our opinions. If we say our opinions many students say something back. One Korean student asked, ‘What happens if Korean wants to work in Japan?’ So I couldn't answer. I was at a loss.”

Categorizing herself with two other young students, Yayoi suggested that discussion is more difficult for students like her who have never worked and generally have less life experience than others. However, over time, the experience of having continuous dialogues with other students helped her to begin reflecting on her knowledge and views.

In a midterm conference, she revealed, “By taking Cultural Issues class, I’m ashamed about myself. I studied history but I don’t know anything about politics in Japan now.” Yayoi also mentioned that when she was in Japan, she studied those issues we were discussing in class and saw scenes on TVs and movies about discrimination, but these issues “seemed not to be real. I couldn’t think it’s real, really happening. I think it’s very good to know it’s real.” She went on to say, “if we discuss these issues in Japan, they can’t think it’s real.” Although she does not consider herself as having direct experiences of discrimination or oppression, through dialogues with other students and guest speakers who shared authentic discriminatory experiences, she started to be more aware of the issues and take a more active role in discussions. At the end of the term, Yayoi observed “At the first three weeks, I couldn’t talk much in discussion, so I tried to say my opinions from the middle of the course.” In terms of what she had learned from the course, Yayoi stated:

To be honest I don’t know my country’s social issues well, so I regret my life in Japan so far. However, I could realize the discrimination is more real by the lecture or discussion. As I can’t understand all their feelings, I can care about that. I also try to contact with other people without stereotypes. And then, I hope the peaceful world without discrimination. Add to this, I’m going to study minimum knowledge about my country. There are many what I should study from now.

[Yayoi, end-of-term reflection, October 2004]

Yayoi’s critical consciousness was raised both by her reflection that she does not know about sociopolitical issues in Japan and by her realization that socio-historical injustice is real. She also became more aware of her own socioeconomic situation:

I realized I’m so lucky person, because I’ve lived my life without these issues so far. Especially Taka’s presentation made me notice about that... I hadn’t realized my environment is very good until watching his presentation. I can’t understand how life is wealthy. To be born in Japanese and to be born as a child of my parents already made me luckier than others.

[Yayoi, end-of-term reflection, October 2004]

This reflection suggests that Yayoi realized her privilege and empathized with oppressed groups. In fact, when she came back to school the next term, she suggested that

I borrow the book she had recently bought *If the world were a village of 1,000 people*. In the book, language, population, ages, religions, literacy, money, and other global issues of six billion people are reduced to a more manageable conceptualization of the world situation through illustrating socioeconomic and other issues in a community of 1000 people. Her raised critical consciousness prompted her to independently purchase the book to become more informed about the social inequity of the world and take an active role in creating a dialogue with me by showing her willingness to share the information in the book. In addition, Yayoi began to reveal changes in attitudes and views in conversations with friends:

One of my friends told me recent information in Japanese world of entertainment last week. She told me one actor who is popular in Japan is gay with strange face. If I heard that 3 weeks ago, I might be disgusting, but I already knew 10% people are homosexual people. So I answered, “Did he come out? It had to be hard. But other homosexual people also had to be encouraged by him,” Then she didn’t reply.

[Yayoi, end-of-term reflection, October 2004]

Yayoi’s empathizing with homosexual people (“It had to be hard. But other homosexual people had to be encouraged by him”) rather than agreeing with a friend’s homophobia revealed increased critical consciousness. Instead of reproducing the dominant discourse, she challenged the unequal predominant ideology with the counter-knowledge that 10% of people are homosexual. Although she was not the one who experienced the marginalization, her raised awareness allowed her to challenge the dominant discourse in a way that encouraged a friend to reconsider what she took for granted. It is this resistance that influences other people’s thoughts and transforms the social practice of marginalization.

CONCLUSIONS:

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING FOR BOTH THE OPPRESSED AND THE NON-OPPRESSED

The elective Cultural Issues course is an example of how critical content ESL courses can stimulate engaging dialogue and writing, which further results in increased language

and literacy proficiency. In addition, the elective Cultural Issues course described here was not a shallow celebration of festivals and food as is often the case in language study; rather, students engaged in examining social issues that crossed cultural boundaries. Thus, while many educators (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Robinson, 1988; Seelye, 1997) claim that the study of language and culture can promote international understanding and cultural tolerance, a Cultural Issues course that focuses on critical consciousness raising can actually achieve these goals.

More specifically, in the study described here, it was observed that the problem-posing process served to maintain dialogues and raise students' critical consciousness in the language-teaching classroom. It is noteworthy that while Jack realized that he had gone through the symbolic violence of discrimination, Yayoi understood that she had been privileged. Given the fact that Critical pedagogy was formally shaped by Freire (1970) who worked with the "oppressed" peasants and slum-dwellers, Luke (2004) suggests, we "should ask how and whether it is possible to teach the critical to those who have not had the experience of being Othered" (p. 27). As Yayoi's case suggests, I would argue that it is possible.

Freire (1994) emphasizes that critical action is not only being aware of the reproducing process of the status quo, but also taking action to develop a more equitable society. One might argue that critical consciousness does not necessarily lead to critical action. However, in both Jack and Yayoi's cases, critical consciousness allowed the students to resist the dominant discourses in ways that Luke (2004) defines as "to call up for scrutiny, whether through embodied action or discourse practice, the rules of exchange within a social field" (p. 26). Nevertheless, it is important for critical educators to seek possibilities for both teachers and students to take action which effectively contributes to the development of a more equal and tolerant society.

This report has shown how I utilized a content-based critical pedagogy approach. Considering that critical pedagogies regard learning as locally situated, personal, socio-historical, and political, each classroom would look universally different and, thus, there should be different approaches that attend to the need for equity and social justice in multiple ways. Although there are some commonalities in critical pedagogies, in my study, I have reviewed three different approaches. One approach is to take locally-

situatedness seriously and negotiate with students the teaching methods suitable to a particular class. Another approach is to focus on the educational process and address the issues of power, discourse, and knowledge. The last approach is to connect the content, students' lives, and the larger context where students find themselves through engaged dialogues. With the complex nature of classroom, including student backgrounds, I argue that teachers consider all three areas of critical pedagogy approaches when developing curriculum that informs those who experience privilege and/or disadvantage.

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APPENDIX A:***A Sensitive Minority***

Taka Okazaki

“Almost always the creative, dedicated minority has made the world better.” This is what Martin Luther King said and I can’t agree with this more. But I would like to add one more characteristic and modify his words. I would say, “Almost always the creative, dedicated and sensitive minority has made and will make the world better.”

I was born and grew up in Japan. When I was twenty years old, as I was interested in studying abroad, I decided to take a year off from my university in Japan and went to England to study in a university. My reaction when I got to the dormitory of the university was one of culture shock. The majority, ninety nine percent, of students, teachers, and staff were white British. I had never been such a minority where I was the only East Asian. Up to then I had been in a completely Japanese society, except for the time I went to Seattle to study in ESL classes for a month. When I got to the dormitory, the first thing that ran through my head was, “What am I doing? Where in the world did I come from?”

I felt as if I was in another world of people who looked different, acted differently, spoke a different language and dressed differently. I knew my English was really poor but not only that, I didn’t know how to behave, how to use my hands to make any gestures or what to say. They spoke so fast that I could not understand what they are saying at all. They wore what I considered unfashionable clothes. They also seemed not to be interested in any foreign culture or Asian culture.

I didn’t have any friends at first. I didn’t know any of the students who ate meals with me in the cafeteria (they called it “refectory” in British English, by the way). I hated to eat in the cafeteria as it became so obvious that I didn’t have friends. In most of my classes, I was the only Asian. I was shy and embarrassed. I felt very intimidated by all these very verbal and confident individuals. I also felt vibrations of hate and resentment from these people, although I wasn’t sure why. Although I made a few Japanese friends with whom I was able to meet and share the same feeling occasionally, I didn’t feel I was accepted by the society.

During the first month of the school, there was an incident. As I was walking back to the dormitory, a bunch of British kids began shooting at me with their water guns, laughing and screaming something. I had no idea why they would be so cruel. Another incident is that when I was on a bus with my friend, this drunk white guy came into the bus and came straight to me and hit me with his rolled newspaper and mumbled something I couldn't understand. There were dozens of other people in the bus. Why did he choose me to hit? Was it because I was the only one who looked different? These incidents stayed with me.

I don't think people are bad. But sometimes they seem not to want to talk to me. I always think about this matter. It makes me so sad AND no answer. At last I think that I don't wanna be down anymore. ...If I happened to meet these kinds of people, I would think that they have never undergone what I am going through every day. This is the difference. They can never understand what it is. That's fine. I'm happy cause I can tell what I'm experiencing.

This is what I wrote in my journal when I was so depressed. I wrote two whole pages about how I felt and what I should do to change the situation. I felt hurt, mad and confused. Deep inside I felt that many of the British people did not want any Asians in their dormitory or the university. Later on, I got to know that the dormitory takes only one Japanese and no other East Asian out of six hundred residents although many East Asians apply. I wondered why. I think that since they did not really know many East Asians, they probably had hundreds of stereotypes about us.

However, as time went on, I was able to make many friends who were very kind, helpful and sensitive to foreign cultures. They often asked me questions like, "What about Japan?" "What do you think of people in England?" "How's everything going with you?" They were generous enough to listen to my slow broken English. We often went to see movies, drink in pubs and dance in clubs. They saved me from being an alien. They let me remember the joy of communication and life. The interesting thing that I later came to learn is that most of my friends had been a minority in a foreign country. They were English who lived in the US, Japan, Uganda, China and some other countries. They were Americans or Italians in my dorm. They are the ones who had the generosity and

sensitivity to understand and empathize how I felt as a minority person. This experience made me believe that it is this sensitivity that makes the world better.

At the end of my study abroad, I felt that my experience had been very meaningful and educational. Before this experience I had never felt discrimination or alienation. I was amazed by how much I had learned about another part of the world. I became much more open-minded towards anything. However, what I learn the most is this sensitivity that let me understand how people, especially the minority people, really feel. That's why I decided to be sensitive and helpful to minority people in Japan as well as everywhere I go in my future, as I believe "Almost always the creative, dedicated and *sensitive* minority has made and will make the world better."