

Examining Critical Pedagogy with Drama in an IEP Context

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Abstract—The practical implications of critical pedagogy (CP) have not been well reported despite its educational potentials in English language teaching contexts. Moreover, although CP practitioners have been emphasizing the importance of improving the social equality and justice for those who are oppressed, how social action could be facilitated in second language (L2) classrooms have not been well explored yet. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the implementation of CP with a drama approach in an Intensive English Program (IEP). Ample incidences of critical dialogue and English learning opportunities were found. In addition, students responded positively to the use of drama in terms of learning critical perspectives and English. In the end, this teacher research showed that CP with drama could have a place in an IEP context.

Index Terms—critical pedagogy, theatre of the oppressed, language learning through drama, second language classroom, intensive English program, teacher research

I. INTRODUCTION

In this report, I respond to the suggestions and advice of Akbari (2008) concerning the need for critical pedagogy (CP) to be investigated in English language teaching contexts and the recommendations of Fairclough (1995) that language education should contain a component for developing critical language awareness. Taking a teacher research approach (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) and following the fundamental educational goal from critical multicultural education (i.e., promoting social justice and equity through critical examinations of power, e.g., Freire, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987), I designed and implemented a CP course at a university-based Intensive English Programs (IEP) in the United States.

According to Canagarajah (2005), CP is not a theory but a way of doing learning and teaching. It is a pedagogy that takes steps towards social change to include and represent those who are oppressed (Akbari, 2008). Therefore, CP incorporates discourses of liberation and hope as it questions the socially accepted power relations and provides potentials for marginalized groups to explore ways of changing the status quo. Crookes (2013, p. 1) further defines CP as a form of education with

a perspective on teaching, learning, and curriculum that doesn't take for granted the status quo, but subjects it to critique, creates alternative forms of practice, and does so on the basis of radical theories of language, the individual, and society that take seriously our hopes for improvement in the direction of goals such as liberty, equality, and justice for all.

CP aims to lead students to become critical agents “who will be prepared to seek out solutions to the problems they define and encounter, and take action accordingly” (Crookes, 2013, p.77). Although the implementation of CP and critical multicultural education is not a new idea and have been extensively discussed and applied to English language teaching (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Lin, 1999; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2001), in the project to be reported here, drama was combined with CP in line with the early integration of drama with critical pedagogy devised by Boal (1985). My goal was to create an environment where students could identify social issues that were relevant to themselves, reflect on these issues among themselves through the process of critical dialogue, and deliver their critical messages to as well as brainstorm possible solutions with their audiences through the forms of drama. The purpose of this study was to examine the IEP context as a potential site for practicing critical pedagogy that recognizes the need for critical awareness and realizes this need through a performance process.

II. INTRODUCING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY WITH DRAMA INTO AN IEP CONTEXT

A. Theoretical Background for the Course

Grounded on the notion of *praxis* (i.e., learning through critical reflection and action; Freire, 2000) and Boal's (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, I developed a course entitled ‘English through drama,’ which manipulated “theatre forms to provide opportunities for participants [students] to act, reflect on their actions, and transform the status quo” (Goldstein, 2004, p. 323). According to Burgoyne et al. (2005, p. 2), participants in Theatre of the Oppressed “recognize, analyze, and overcome social oppression” by exploring and acting out solutions to social problems that are relevant to themselves and their communities. This line of curriculum theory expects teachers to engage in *critical dialogue* with the students so they can “identify issues they themselves see as problematic ... and reflect back these problems (problem-posing) as the driving force for a process of collaboratively constructed knowledge. ... [This way,] students

can gain control over their learning and a critical view of their learning and the society” (Shin & Crookes, 2005, p. 114). Consistent with these ideas, the course, ‘English through drama,’ was learner-centered and focused on dialogue instead of on a one-way transmission of knowledge. Moreover, it aimed to empower individuals as agents for social change.

This course also aimed to facilitate students’ oral communication skills by encouraging them to cooperatively develop script-writing and acting skills (cf. Miccoli, 2003). According to Even (2008), there are a lot of opportunities for second language (L2) learners to use and practice English when negotiating to fulfill the task during the collaborative process of making a play. From a sociocultural perspective (see Leont’ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981), it is in this participation in social interaction of the learners that fosters language development with or without the guidance of more competent member. In addition, this course focused on “social, emotional, and kinesthetic learning that is traditionally neglected in instructional settings” (Even, 2008, p. 161) through the process of play making and performing. With this ‘critical drama approach’, my aim as a teacher was to lead the students to be able to engage with critical dialogue and prepare for social action through the forms of drama while improving their English skills.

B. *The Institution*

The institution where I implemented this CP with drama approach is an IEP, part of a US university with substantial populations of Asian students. The IEP generally uses “skill-based” language teaching methods. Classes are divided into four levels (100 to 400, 400 being the most advanced) with skill areas of English reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar as well as some other elective courses (e.g., TOEFL preparation and story reading). The institution aims to prepare ESL students for academic work at university level in the United States. Typically, terms are scheduled for six (summer) or eight (spring and fall) weeks and most of the students are from East Asia (Japan, Korea, and China). This course, like all the others in the summer term, was a six-week course. Classes met four times a week (Monday to Thursday), 65 minutes a class, and the ages of students were early 20s to 30s.

The class was comprised of eight students (three males and five females; four Japanese, one Chinese, one Thai, one Chilean, and one Iraqi) at the 300-level (intermediate-advanced). ‘English through drama’ was offered as one out of four of their mandatory courses. The students had not experienced a course focused on critical perspectives or drama and they had never participated any kinds of social actions or social movements before (e.g., boycott, demonstration, and campaign) except one (Jennifer¹). She had taken a class on social issues once in Thailand.

C. *The Course*

CP does not have a fixed model of teaching and lesson planning. In this exploration, I drew on Wallerstein’s (1983) four steps: (a) listening to the learners and identifying their problems; (b) providing codes (i.e., concrete physical expressions that represent the aspects of a theme surrounding a problem on social issues that are relevant to the students); (c) engaging students in understanding, generalizing, and suggesting alternative forms of problems; and (d) aiding the learners to take action for change.

Moreover, as the course aimed to develop critical perspectives the goals for the course were that students would

- pose problems and engage in critical dialogue
- develop critical perspectives on social issues
- produce reflections on social issues that would lead to action
- engage in decision-making processes in class
- learn and practice English

I facilitated critical discussions with a skit on racism that I wrote myself for the first three weeks. This was followed by student-made group plays on their own topics. One group (three students) ended up doing a play on ‘lookism²’ and the other (five) on ‘gender inequality’ for the remaining three weeks. The topics, ‘racism’ and ‘discrimination,’ were chosen based on the students’ responses to a pre-course questionnaire. I used the topic for the first two weeks to model how to come up with codes, critical discussion questions (e.g., how to make questions that problematize the status quo), write a critical skit (a skit that has a critical message), practice acting, and lead critical discussions. After that, in the third week, students were required to lead a critical discussion on a topic that they wanted to engage with. They ended up choosing ‘income inequality,’ ‘lookism,’ and ‘Big Brother’ (government surveillance) issues. Then for the remaining weeks, groups of students cooperated to write a critical play and to stage the play-script.

In implementing a course and an approach that was unfamiliar to the students and unusual at this institution, I naturally wanted to look for evidence of success or even failure. Could I tell other teachers that this course was successful at a basic level? That is, did I have evidence of L2 learning opportunity? Was this approach acceptable, even if unfamiliar to the students? At a more serious level, in respect to CP itself, was this really CP? Was this good drama-based CP? As mentioned earlier, critical dialogue is central to CP and the Theatre of the Oppressed. In this respect, did the course lead the students to produce enough critical dialogue? To answer these questions, I decided to focus on the following three main areas:

1. Evidence of language learning opportunities
2. Students’ attitudes towards the course

¹ All the names of the participants are pseudonyms

² Discrimination based on physical appearance

3. Evidence of critical dialogue

III. DATA AND ANALYSIS

Following IRB approval, I audio-recorded the classroom interaction throughout the six-week term. All the recorded data (24 hours) was transcribed. A basic qualitative content (thematic) analysis (see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002) was used to extract the systematic phenomena appearing in the transcripts. By following the qualitative content analysis approach, my aim for this paper was not only to identify important themes and categories in the body of content, but also to illustrate and understand a rich description of the themes and categories in a subjective but scientific manner. The transcripts were reviewed in light of a priori concern with manifestations of critical dialogue and language learning opportunity moments through the procedure of constant comparison.

A pre-post questionnaire was also used to examine students' perspectives and attitudes about the course. The questionnaire focused on the following two areas: a) the students' attitudes towards the course, given its IEP academic English setting; and b) their attitudes towards the use of drama for the purpose of English learning and social actions. Six items on a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), addressed the students' attitudes towards the course (the use of drama in learning English and critical aspects), acting (and script-writing), and critical engagements (and social movements). To supplement the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews (based on the questions from the post-questionnaire; e.g., 'tell me one thing you liked and one thing you disliked about this course'), self-reflection papers (reflecting the course; collected on the fifth week), and student diaries (their own perceptions towards the each lesson throughout the term) were analyzed.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Language Learning Opportunities

First, I wanted to investigate whether, regardless of the critical elements or perspective of the course, it was at least as potentially productive a course as others in my IEP. One would not wish to implement a CP approach if it offered inadequate opportunities for students to learn the L2. In analyzing the audio-recorded data, I identified many English learning opportunities throughout the six weeks. During the *pre* script-writing period (weeks 1–3), students encountered many new words and expressions while reading newspaper articles and watching YouTube videos. Students asked questions and answered each other's questions to figure out the meanings. I also implemented explicit instruction on the new expressions by asking questions to the students (e.g., "Let's look at some of the vocabulary here...what's 'jeopardize'?" and "In the sentence here where Tom says 'I'd be where he is gone,' what could be the underlying meaning here?") and by responding to student-initiated questions (e.g., "What is the difference between 'everyone' and 'everybody'?"). In addition, some of the readings led the class to discuss metacognitive reading strategies such as the use of context in guessing the meaning of unknown words and topic sentences to understand the gist of the readings.

During the script-writing period (weeks 4–6), various forms of written feedback (both explicit and implicit) were provided to the students. In fact, students had to write not only their scripts, but also student diaries and self-reflection papers about the course. I gave them individual feedback on their writings. I also explicitly elaborated on the script feedback in the class by going over their mistakes and providing other alternative forms. Students also created learnable moments over the course of the classes. An example of how students create a learnable moment in a small group script-writing session is provided below.

(During one of the small group script-writing sessions)

- Matthew:** What about 'hang out' the phone. Is it all right?
Teacher: Hang out hang out means you are going out with somebody
Matthew: ...Yeah I know
Teacher: Yeah?
Teacher: Hang up hang up is
Amelia: Up?
Teacher: Hang up
Amelia: Oh...
Teacher: Hang up is the...the thing...an action you actually
Matthew: Up?
Teacher: Yeah hang out is like you are going out with somebody. "Let's hang out!" means like "[let's go out together]",
Matthew: [let's go to...
Teacher: and up
Amelia: up
Teacher: hang hang up the phone.

This feedback excerpt shows how a student in a small group creates a learning opportunity during a script-writing session. It starts by Matthew explicitly seeking a confirmation of the use of 'hang out' to mean ending a telephone conversation. In response, I corrected it by first providing the meaning of 'hang out', and then by introducing the

correct phrasal verb ‘hang up’. Instead of just providing the correct form, I also explain what ‘hang out’ means, thereby orienting to Matthew’s L2 competence. Amelia also orients to this correction by seeking another confirmation. She repeats the partial correction ‘up?’ I then confirm by saying the whole phrase once again (‘hang up’). Amelia treats my language support as new information with the change of state token ‘oh’ (Heritage, 1984). When I try to elaborate the meaning of ‘hang up’ in the next turn, Matthew also displays his lack of knowledge by seeking a confirmation. I confirm once again and provide examples of how ‘hang out’ and ‘hang up’ can be used in a conversation. Although the data above show no evidence of learning *in situ* being accomplished (see Markee, 2000), they do show the students creating a learning opportunity by doing self-initiation of repair during the script-writing sessions. Such evidence of students creating learning opportunity was prevalent throughout the six-week CP course.

When students were developing their scripts and the plays, they had to use English to negotiate among themselves to accomplish the given tasks. The following excerpts illustrate some of the student-to-student negotiations that took place while they were developing their plays.

[*Developing a line for a character*]

Stella: “She has a wonderful husband and children, and she feels very happy with her family” (reading out the line she made). What do you think about this?

Tim: ...If you say that, the character might be...more confusing. If you write that just for her, you are saying that the other female are not feeling happy about their families.

[*Developing the title for the play*]

Amelia: How about gender inequality?

Tim: Umm...that’s too broad? Let’s make it...more creative?

Amelia: What should we do?

Tim: Let’s brainstorm ideas first. Say anything now that comes your mind.

[*Acting practice*]

(Monica practices her lines and Matthew watches her)

Matthew: When saying your lines, try to think about the others, audiences. Help them understand the situation, what’s going on.

...(Monica tries again)

Matthew: When saying your lines, you should be more caring, maybe you might want to hug her. You are worried about your daughter...

Here we see how, instead of relying on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge, the students turn to each other as they are developing the lines, content, and acting strategies they need for the plays; they recognize and orient to each other as sources of knowledge. Such recurrent practices of negotiating and engaging with the tasks could have developed their communication skills and institution-specific interactional practices over time. As Richard and Rodgers (2001) noted, the process of negotiation of meaning in doing a task is at the heart of L2 learning.

In the 1,430 minutes of the course, the students were actively engaged in using English most of the class time. They produced and revised a skit and a group play, wrote student diaries and a self-reflection, modified a teacher-produced skit, led critical discussions, and performed two skits and a play in the end. The implementation of the drama-based activity was able to provide learning opportunities for oral communicative skills (Miccoli, 2003); furthermore, the process of developing the scripts and plays provided a natural context for the integration of the four skills, as students had to write the plays themselves and negotiate about their writing with their group members through reading, listening, and speaking (Elgar, 2002). From a sociocultural point of view (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978, 1981), all these encounters and experiences are environments for understanding and learning. These opportunities do not mean that the students were able to learn and acquire everything that they encountered in the classroom, but they at least show that there were plentiful learnable moments in the CP with drama course.

B. Student Attitudes towards the Course

1. Things students liked and disliked about the course

In general, the self-reflection and open-ended questionnaire data showed that the students liked discussions (eight students), acting practices (six), acting performances (four), the classroom atmosphere (eight), the use of YouTube videos (three), and the use of forum theatre (four; i.e., a form of theatre involving audience members, who suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage in an attempt to brainstorm possible solutions to the problems that the drama presents).³ More than 85% of their individual reflections⁴ regarding CP leaned towards the positive side more than the negative. However, it is possible that they expressed positive views out of courtesy or kindness towards the teacher. Although they were assured that their reactions would not affect their grades or personal relations with the teacher, a wish to affiliate with the course and/or teacher might still have affected their behavior.

³ The numbers represent the numbers of students who mentioned the activity, but do not indicate that the others did not like the activity; the other students did not mention the activity.

⁴ This percentage was calculated by coding and counting students’ semantic choices for expressing attitudes towards the CP course and/or CP-oriented classroom activities.

Students also expressed some negative opinions towards the CP course: things they disliked or things they wanted to improve about the course. Three mentioned that they disliked the topics that were difficult or not relevant to them. For instance, though Monica liked all the other topics, she said she did not see ‘Big Brother’ as a problematic issue and that it was not relevant to her. In addition, Melisa said she did not feel comfortable expressing ‘sad feelings’ when acting in a critical play on racism. Although she saw the value of focusing on social problems, Melisa suggested including other topics (e.g., culture and society) for the sake of variety to discuss in the class. Furthermore, both Jennifer and Melisa stated that six weeks was not enough time to learn deeply about the social issues and to learn how to act at the same time, particularly when the students did not have much free time after class. In short, the topic selection and time were the issues that were raised by the students.

The following examples from the student diaries also illustrate their different attitudes towards the course:

Stella (2nd week): Today we played several acting games [acting practice]. They were really fun. The activities not only helped us to practice English, but also helped us to relieve stress.

Melisa (3rd week): I think racism is a good topic to deal with because it is real. However, I don’t want to act this script on racism. I feel so sad. I want to learn about other topics like cultural differences between America and other countries.

The diverse stances taken by these students regarding how the course was implemented suggest the importance of CP teachers being aware that it may not be possible to satisfy all the students with the chosen topics. I thought about dividing the class into groups with different topics, but I realized it would just create more work for the students when they were already putting so much effort into this course. Future studies should investigate this issue—the choice of topics—so we can further understand what would be the best for the students.

2. Students’ attitude changes throughout the term

The pre-post questionnaire was implemented at the beginning and the end of the term. In general, the Likert-scale data showed that students’ attitudes improved in respect to the following three categories: the course itself, acting, and the course’s critical aspects (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
STUDENTS’ ATTITUDE CHANGE TOWARDS THE COURSE, ACTING, AND CRITICAL ASPECTS

Pre/Post	Course	Acting	Critical aspects
Pre	4	3.2	2.8
Post	4.5	4.1	3.7

Note. Two items for each category; the scores are averaged by number of items and students.

In fact, one student, who indicated that she strongly disliked acting (scoring this as 1 out of 5), writing a script (1), and being involved in critical actions (1) at the beginning of the term stated that she strongly liked acting (5) and writing the script (5), and was neutral on being involved in critical actions (3)—at the end of the term. Specifically, in the post-course open-ended section, the student wrote, “I liked developing plays and performing with my classmates.” The six-week CP with drama course was able to change the student’s attitude about the course.

Furthermore, students expressed positive attitudes towards learning and being deeply engaged with social issues. In the interview, for example, Stella mentioned that the course was able to help her to deeply think about social issues:

Teacher: What did you think about the course? Particularly in regards to critical discussions we had?

Stella: Umm...I think this class helped me to critical thinking about the social issues. And uh help me thinking deeply for this for these issues. I know the issues. But never know if I might meet these issues, what should I do. This class helps me...to thinking about if I might meet this issues, what should I do...what will I do. The course helped me positively.

Stella talked about the usefulness of the course and how the course helped her to deeply think about social issues and to think about what she would do if she became involved in a situation like one of the hypothetical situations we discussed in class. As this example suggests, the students started to consider human rights when discussing various social problems. However, when the discussions got deeper, many still prioritized other values (e.g., materialistic values) over justice to those who are oppressed. A six-week course might not have been enough to bring students to truly question socially constructed power relations and the status quo (as is also implied by the comments of Jennifer and Melisa, mentioned above). Moreover, Melisa, in the interview, added that she had a difficult time expressing her ideas and feelings because of her limited English proficiency. This raises the perennial question of whether a CP approach is feasible with low proficiency English users.

The six weeks was, however, able to at least aid the students to “think about the social issues” (Monica), “think deeper about the issues” (Melisa), and have “a priceless experience” (Jennifer, in the student self-reflection):

Monica: This class gave us a chance to show the audiences how we think about the social issues. Without this course, I wouldn’t have thought about the issues on inequality and human rights.

Melisa: Though I already knew about most of the topics that we focused in our class, the course made me to think deeper about the issues, which was very helpful to me.

Jennifer: This class really gave me a priceless experience. I developed my English skills and social knowledge, which will be definitely useful in the future.

Though there were some areas that needed to be improved to fit with the students' needs and wants, the analysis above shows that in general, students positively perceived the CP-approach drama course in an IEP context.

C. Critical Dialogue

As mentioned earlier, critical dialogue is a collaborative act in which students talk together, with help from the teacher, to reflect on and perhaps reach mutual understanding on social problems. This is important because it could facilitate students to become 'critical agents' who might challenge the status quo and seek to transform social inequalities. The audio-recorded data showed many instances where students engaged in sophisticated critical dialogue on social issues. The following data extract is an example of a student-to-student critical dialogue that was typical of what often occurred during class discussions.

- Jennifer:** I think equality is...how can I say...it's only idea. What is the ideal? Ideal terminology?
Teacher: ...Ideal terminology?
Jennifer: Um...Utopia?
Teacher: Oh, utopia?
Jennifer: Only utopia has that quality.
Tim: Oh okay. so...equality is...utopia for you?
Jennifer: Yeah, it's not real. You can't. ...We can't have our equality of opportunity unless that government help this...
 (a few lines omitted)
 We can't have everyone in the equal in the physical or something because we are born in the different way but we can have our equality in opportunity that government have to provide for that populations. For example, in Finland, they have uh...very...uh...tax rate...very high...but welfare is very good. ...The government give the money to the every student... (Continues to talk)

As shown here, the students articulated their own critical views when they discussed social topics. In the excerpt above, Jennifer critically problematizes the prevalent income inequalities in our societies, and even offers a possible solution to the problem. For reasons of space I have not shown how the discussion developed into everyone sharing their own ideas for solving income inequalities. Some students further elaborated Jennifer's idea of involving government, and talked about how governments should increase taxes for those who make more money. There were some disagreements regarding this idea, too. Tim, for example, said that if governments took more money from those who made more money, people might not be motivated to work harder. He argued that education is a better and safer solution to make positive changes. As in the discussion above, the students had various viewpoints and they freely shared their ideas. Usually, they used specific details (e.g., 'welfare system in Finland' above) or even personal examples such as things that they had experienced in the past to support their arguments or stances. Although it did not happen in every discussion, the students often ended up reaching a consensus. In that case, they were able to come up with more concrete alternatives to the problems. For example, when they talked about issues of racism in high school, they all agreed that racism is a serious social problem. They ended up brainstorming various ideas for actions towards positive change by schools (e.g., international festivals where people share and learn about other cultures), parents (overnight invitations: inviting international students or being invited to stay overnight at each other's places), and students (e.g., making a critical play on racism).

One particular activity that inspired the entire group of students to engage in critical dialogue was the forum theatre that was implemented in the fourth week. I adapted Boal's (2002, pp. 17–21) forum theatre activity with the belief that it would "facilitate the generation of serious and fruitful discussion" (p. 18) and create an environment in which the students could try out new solutions to solve the obstacles that they created in their play plots. I implemented the forum theatre activity by first introducing and discussing two related YouTube videos: "Using theatre for social change" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbYx01re-ec>) and "Theatre of the Oppressed NYC" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi1HfSiMxCU>). After a discussion of what the forum theatre is, what it does, and how to do it, I modeled the activity with a racism skit I created. I played the protagonist and had other students be the bullies. After doing one scene of the skit, I had volunteers (George, Tim, and Amelia) play the protagonist while trying out their own strategies to overcome the locally constructed oppression. Afterwards, we not only critically discussed the emerged strategies as a class, but also shared our feelings about the oppression that was represented in the skit.

In addition, once the students became familiar with the activity, I had them choose their favorite scenes from their own plays and lead the class in a forum theatre activity. To illustrate, Tim's group led their forum theatre on racism. The scene was about a Chinese customer (Monica) getting discriminated against by an English bartender (Tim). Unlike the other students' forum theatres where students waited for the group to finish the scene so that they could try out new solutions, Matthew stopped the play and started to complain to Tim that it is wrong to discriminate against people because of race. Soon after, George jumped in to support Matthew and to protect Monica from the discriminators (Tim and Stella, who played a customer who also discriminated against Monica). Amelia also joined the scene and calmed everyone down by alerting them that there were other people in the bar who were trying to have quality time with their

families. Then, the scene naturally ended. It was the students who voluntarily participated in the scene to help the oppressed character and to take social action.

Everyone shared their own feelings and opinions as an actor and an observer when the scene ended. In brief, Matthew emphasized that people need to be aware that all humans are equal. George mentioned that he felt sorry for Monica's character and argued that there should be no discrimination. Amelia said that although she also felt sorry for the character, she thought it was morally wrong to fight in public spaces. She said if she were in that situation (i.e., experiencing discrimination at a business), she would just have left the place. As the oppressee, Monica said she felt great that people helped her, and she would do the same for people being discriminated against in the future. As the oppressor, Tim shared that he could not act as mean as he had planned to because he felt powerless when Matthew and George intervened to help Monica. Stella was supposed to help Tim oppress Monica's character, but she decided not to become further involved when others stood up for her. Melisa said it was good that it worked out well for Monica's character, but she questioned whether there would be people like Matthew or George in real life situations. Finally, Jennifer said that she felt uncomfortable as a customer in the bar and did not want to be involved. In the end, the students were able to co-construct the forum theatre and, through it, create a space where they were able to not only critically talk about racism issues, but also reflect on their own engagement in diverse ways, thus naturally creating an environment for critical dialogue.

Overall, the course seems both to have created an environment where students freely discussed critical aspects of social issues, sharing their thoughts and views, and also to have aided them to think about and even take part in representing those who are oppressed. Some of the students further shared their thoughts and interests in regard to critical issues in their student diaries as well:

Jennifer (3rd week): In my opinion, 'Equality' is impossible thing to achieve in our real world; it's an ideal concept.

Melisa (3rd week): I knew about the issues on 'racism,' but didn't know about 'lookism'. So this topic was very interesting to me. In Japan, we have many lookism problems as well.

Moreover, students further revealed how much they were engaged with the social topics throughout the course:

Matthew (3rd week): My group presented and led the discussion on lookism today. I think the resources we used were very relevant to all of us, and the class got very engaged about the topic.

Monica (6th week): I really felt sense of accomplishment through developing and performing the play. Though I have to say good-bye to everyone after the end of the term, this experience will stay as a great memory.

Analysis of the student diaries again confirmed that the course was able to stimulate deep discussions on social issues. If nothing else, these reflections and dialogue showed that the students actively participated in class and were engaged with the classroom activities on social issues.

V. CONCLUSION

This CP-approach course provided many opportunities for the students to negotiate and interact during the collaborative process of making the plays, as well as to be critically engaged in the discussion of social issues. In fact, as the teacher, I found that the students seemed very engaged with the course. One of my colleagues confirmed this perception; he taught the same students right after me, and one day he came to me and asked what I was doing with them. He said the students were so involved in talking about my class that they lost track of time and did not realize when the next class had begun.

Although six weeks may not have been enough time to lead the students to become 'critical agents' who can represent those who are oppressed in their own lives, it was enough to have them start thinking about oppression and justice. Before I end, I want to encourage further research to take on the effects of teacher intervention in critical dialogue, particularly considering the degree to which teachers should intervene and direct students' critical dialogue. On one hand, as CP pedagogues who know about the existence of inherent power asymmetries in classroom settings, we do not want to 'force' our beliefs and values on the students. On the other hand, some students in certain contexts might benefit from direction and strong encouragement. The degree to which such teachers' engagement might be useful needs further investigation.

All in all, this teacher research showed that a six-week critical drama approach course in an IEP context was generally positively perceived by the IEP students, and demonstrated the potential to increase the students' critical perspectives and language learning. As a final note, I hope that in providing evidence of students' positive perspective on the CP-approach course and their educational development, this study can encourage more teachers to design and offer various kinds of CP-approach classes for their own students' educational development. Moreover, I hope that this study inspires teachers to adapt drama-based activities to use in CP-oriented language learning contexts, specifically because drama provides learners the experience of what it would be like to be oppressed, and thus perhaps increases their critical awareness. In addition, it creates an environment for students to not only freely discuss possible alternatives to problems, but also take part in the social action of spreading critical messages to others through the form of drama, thereby being 'critical agents' in their target language.

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