Promoting Learner Agency Through Critical Pedagogy in the English Language Classroom

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the incredible support and understanding of my excellent advisors, Dr. Sarina Molina and Dr. Padmini Boruah. Without their constructive feedback, dedication, and patience, this project may have been a very different and less valuable experience. I am also grateful to Dr. James Fabionar for providing an informed, unbiased perspective on many occasions, through which I was able to see my project in a different way, allowing for deeper understanding and learning. And, of course, my cohort, who always uplift and motivate me.

I would also like to thank my practicum mentor and the primary instructor of the course in which this research took place, Mr. Craig Carroll. His endless encouragement, flexibility, and curiosity are what made this project possible. I hope someday to contribute to the learning and self-efficacy of future teachers as generously as he has. He is a true teacher.

This project is dedicated to the students whose desire to learn and be of service motivated them to attend voluntary online course meetings in the middle of a busy semester ... and a global pandemic. I hope that my learning through this project, and how it has shaped and will continue to shape my practice, will honor their contribution.

Abstract

In this self-study action research project, I explored how students exercised agency and how it may be affected by a critical pedagogy approach in a community college English as a Second Language (ESL) setting. The participants were adults enrolled in an advanced ESL course in a community college in the greater San Diego area. Students engaged in three dialogic circles as part of a needs assessment dialogue and two successive critical pedagogy dialogues. Data were collected using a classroom observation protocol (supported by audio recordings of the dialogues), student writings in response to journal prompts, and an analytic journal which I completed after each dialogue. The data suggest that my attempts to implement a critical pedagogy approach improved the quality of my facilitative questions and altered how students participated in the dialogues, evolving from primarily statements of opinion and personal narrative to an increased level of evidential, dissenting, and metacognitive statements, but did not dramatically alter how much I spoke relative to the students. While contextual factors, such as the effects of COVID-19, may have affected the validity of this study, the data suggest that implementing a critical pedagogy approach has the potential to increase learner agency in adult ESL students, and that the skills required for engaging in such dialogues may require significant scaffolding for both instructors and students.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, learner agency, adult education, English language learners, English as a Second Language, action research, self-study research

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in the English Language Classroom

Education in general, and second language education (SLE) in particular, has changed

drastically over the last 200 years (Bates, 2019; Brown, 2014; Freire, 2014; Rogers, 1969;

VanPatten, Smith, & Benati, 2019). Several major philosophical shifts have occurred in the

evolution of SLE theory and practice over the last two centuries. The most prominent and

beneficial of these shifts, from my perspective, are the movements from:

- concern for observable behaviors, based on Skinnerian behaviorism, to concern for

  unobservable processes, such as Chomskian "universal grammar" or the cognitive and

  social constructivist theories of learning posited by Vygostky, Dewey, Piaget, and others

  (Bates, 2019; Brown, 2014);

- deficit models, called a "banking model" of education by Freire (2014) to indicate the

  perspective that students come to education as empty vessels for instructors to fill with

  knowledge, to "funds of knowledge" (asset-based) models, as coined by Gonzalez, Moll,

  & Amanti (2015);

- authoritarian, form-focused instruction, which prioritize grammar and rote memorization

  for the sake of knowledge itself, to facilitative, fluency-focused instruction in which

  language learning is communicative, practical, and agentic (Rogers, 1969; VanPatten et

  al., 2019).

As an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher-in-training, my education has

included both the acquisition of theoretical and methodological knowledge as well as the critical

analysis of this knowledge and its integration into my own practice. As a result, my philosophies

and values have shifted along the same lines as the above, and I have searched for ways to enhance my learning and practice in ways that further promote these shifts.

Theoretical Foundations

Personal Perspective and Influences

I approach my life and my role as a teacher with a pragmatic worldview. Creswell (2009) described pragmatism as an approach that focuses on the research problem and uses all available methods to understand and solve it. This is a very useful perspective in a classroom, which is a complex and dynamic context with ever-changing variables and contingencies. The classroom environment requires teachers to be flexible.

My secondary worldview is social constructivism, based in work by Vygotsky, Piaget, Dewey, and others, which considers learning to be a complex and highly subjective process through which individuals develop meaning based on their experiences, many of which are social in nature (Brown, 2014; Creswell, 2009). Language, especially, is a socially-oriented subject and cannot be learned without feedback and input from others (Brown, 2014); in fact, without a social context, there is no need to learn a language at all. Language is cultural in nature, and its meaning is both derived from culture and directly informs culture (Kramsch, 2003). I have observed my own students learning with and from one another, building both meaning and culture as they engage with the language, and those who participated with their peers in this way learned more effectively than those who did not. I have also observed how the social aspects of the classroom can either promote or hinder language learning, and have learned that developing a supportive community of learners is essential to effective language teaching. Thus, I pay close attention to and attempt to address socio-emotional factors within my classroom.

I have also been greatly influenced by the work of many prominent educators over the last year and a half. The work of Carl Rogers (1961, 1969) on humanism, both as a psychologist and educator, has pushed me toward a greater recognition and understanding of human value and potential - both mine and my students' - and how these are reflected in my relationships with my students, administration, community, and the world. Zaretta Hammond (2015) expanded my understanding of culturally responsive teaching, which has been particularly useful to me as a future teacher of highly multilingual and multicultural classrooms, particularly her chapters on building learning partnerships and fostering an academic mindset that promotes student confidence. These concepts are less common in authoritarian educational systems, which are still prevalent in many parts of the world and which many foreign-born English learners are comfortable and familiar with (Brown, 2014; VanPatten, Smith, & Benati, 2019). Freire (2005, 2014) has helped me to see the inherently political nature of my role as an educator, as well as how educational institutions serve to propagate cultural hegemony and oppress cultural minorities. Finally, after reading Bourdieu (1991) on the nature of language as a form of social and political power, as well as Crookes (2013) on critical pedagogy implications and application in ESOL education, I was able to synthesize Freire (2005, 2014) more completely in the context of linguistic hegemony and began to consider more deeply the cultural, political, and moral implications of teaching English language both within and outside of English-speaking countries.

All of these authors have allowed me to reframe my approach to teaching the English language as a more student-centered, culturally responsive, politically aware educator. Consequently, my values include humanism, social justice and equity, and student-centered education. Through my continued work as an educator, however, I came to realize that I had not fully embraced practices that reflect my transforming values. After intense self-reflection and

intentional exploration of the literature, I recognized that the most glaring omission in my pedagogy was the promotion of learner agency.

Construct Development

Agency can be defined as a combination of skills competence, self-efficacy, and a critical approach to discrimination (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova, 2014). In other words, an individual must be capable of behaving effectively in a given situation, aware of their capability to do so, and able to identify the potential outcomes of available behaviors and use this information to guide (or inhibit) their actions. As Bandura (2001) states, "To make their way successfully through a complex world full of challenges and hazards, people have to make good judgments about their capabilities, anticipate probable effects of different events and courses of action, size up sociocultural opportunities and constraints, and regulate their behavior accordingly" (p. 3). While this somewhat individualistic and action-oriented definition is arguably "Western" in its approach, this intentional ability to successfully navigate complex situations is necessary in the use of language and can even be interpreted as one of the purposes of language (Deters et al., 2014; Duranti, 2006). Given this, in addition to the shifts in SLE described above, it is both reasonable and desirable to incorporate ample opportunities for students to exercise agency during the language learning process.

I also reflected on the commitment of myself, my program, and the department to "changemaker education," which, according to Ashoka (n.d.), ensures that young people master and apply the core changemaker competencies of empathy, collaboration, creative problem-solving, and systems thinking. After investigating potential methods of addressing my pedagogical need, as well as this core personal and institutional commitment to changemaking, I identified critical pedagogy as an ideal means for promoting both learner agency and

changemaking in my instructional practice. Critical pedagogy is a method of instruction that

regards education as a vehicle for oppressed populations to achieve social and political liberation

(Freire, 2014). As such, it is a model that promotes the agency of the learners as a means of not

only constructing knowledge, but also as a skill through which constructed knowledge can be

applied outside of the classroom to improve one's life circumstances and the status of one's

community (Freire, 2014). It is, therefore, an ideal method for promoting both learner agency

and changemaking within the context of English language education as it requires the application

of all aspects of changemaker education.

Context

This project was completed in a six-unit English as a Second Language (ESL) course at a

community college in San Diego County, California. The course title was ESL 105: Rhetoric for

Academic Success. This was a third (out of five) tier, advanced language course with integrated

reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar strands. The professor of this course shares an

interest in critical pedagogy and agreed to allow me to implement a series of lessons throughout

the semester. The class met on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:00 P.M. until 3:55 P.M. during

the first part of the Spring 2020 semester, which began on January 27. I attended all course

meetings during the semester and observed the professor's instruction when I was not leading

lessons. After the class meeting on March 13, the course was moved fully online due to the

COVID-19 outbreak. Classes were no longer held synchronously, but I hosted 60- to 90- minute

informal, optional Zoom meeting sessions for the students on a weekly basis.

There were 11 students enrolled in this course at the time of this study; of those, 10

provided demographic information using a Google Forms survey. Two students identified as

male and eight identified as female; no students declined to state or identified as intersex,

transgender, or "other." The students ranged in age from 18-38 years old. They identified as

coming from a variety of countries and speaking a variety of primary languages, as represented

in Figures 1 and 2.
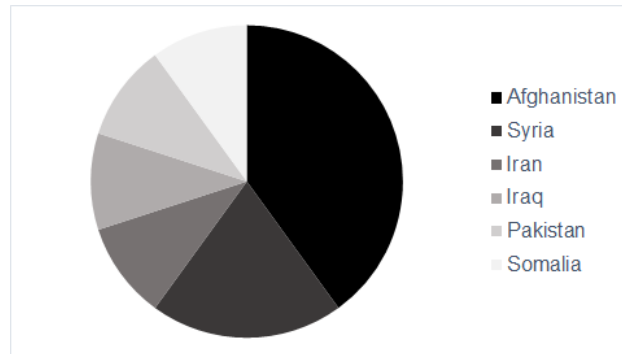
Figure 1. Students' Countries of Origin. This figure illustrates the students' self-identified

countries of origin.
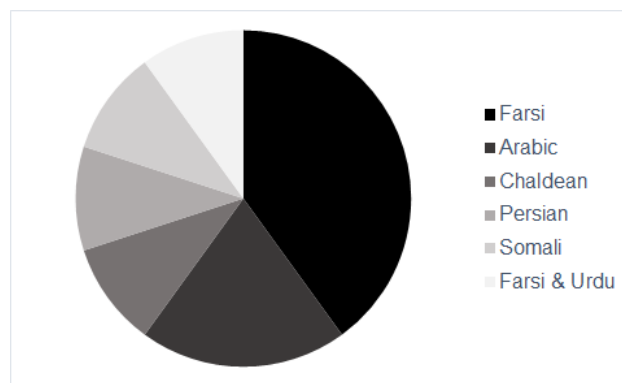
Figure 2. Students' Primary Languages. This figure illustrates the students' self-identified

primary languages.

The students had been living in the United States for 1 to 5 years and studying English for less

than 1 year to 5 years. Prior to arriving in the United States, the students had a wide range of

formal education experience, as shown in Figure 3.
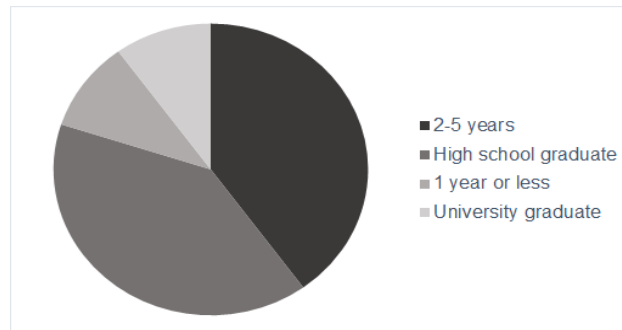
Figure 3. Students' Formal Education. This figure illustrates the students' self-identified level of formal education prior to entering the United States.

One male-identifying student voluntarily disclosed his student visa status, and that he was living in the United States temporarily to study English. This student expected to return to his country of origin after the semester ended but actually returned in mid-April due to the COVID-19 outbreak, although he remained in the course. No other student voluntarily disclosed their visa or residency status to me, but during class discussions several students spoke in a general way about the fact that much of the class had come to the United States under refugee or asylum-seeking status and that the majority intended to be long-term residents of the United States. Although the course is described by the department as being advanced, the instructor and I agreed that the students were intermediate users of English.

Needs Assessment

Project Inspiration

My initial needs assessment, which was the inspiration for this project, was based solely on unofficially documented student feedback that I received while teaching abroad during the summer of 2019, as well as my own self-reflection on that feedback. I taught a series of week-long conversational English courses at a summer camp for children and young adults in the Czech Republic, and each week I engaged my students in roleplay through the collaborative creation and performance of a short theatrical skit of their design, which was performed for the

other attendees and staff of the camp. I facilitated this design in a way that made sense to me: a) brainstorm ideas, b) take a class vote to choose an idea, c) flesh out the details of the chosen story, and d) write the dialogue. The final step was generally done as a class while seated in a circle, with students calling out ideas while one or more other students wrote them down. I took on a managerial role to ensure that the language used and props required for the roleplay were within reasonable limits, given administrative constraints, and also encouraged the students as they navigated this process.

While working with a particularly outgoing, emotionally mature, and thoughtful group of fluent young adults, the students and I were working through this process quite well, but when we reached the dialogue creation stage, one of the students raised her hand and asked if the class could discover the dialogue through exploratory roleplay. I consented and the students immediately became more engaged, more collaborative, more creative, and seemed to be having much more fun. As I watched, I realized that this change in engagement was, at least in part, the result of a change in the classroom power dynamic - they had become the leaders and decision-makers in their learning process, while I acted primarily as an observer. They had the necessary skills to accomplish the task, and they were aware of this. It wasn't until later, after much review of the literature, that I came to label their change in behavior "learner agency." It was humbling to realize that I had unknowingly stifled their creativity and ability to act, and that my intention to provide scaffolding and support had manifested as oppression.

Having experienced various forms of physical and psychological oppression myself, as both a child and an adult, this connection between my behavior in the classroom and oppression greatly disturbed me. I found that, by inhibiting student agency, I was violating not only the students' right to learn and their funds of knowledge, but also my own values as a changemaker.

Although there is an expression in America that, "It's the thought that counts," I do not agree that this applies in any way to education due to the significant long-term implications of the educational process and experience. In my opinion, educators have a professional and moral obligation to engage students in ways that promote student learning, creativity, critical thinking, and empathy, and to continuously improve their practice to this end. In considering ways that I might correct the self-identified flaw in my own practice, it quickly became clear that the link between critical pedagogy and learner empowerment made this educational approach an ideal solution. While my knowledge of critical pedagogy was limited, the context of a Capstone project seemed like the perfect opportunity to explore critical pedagogy both in theory and in action.

Formal Needs Analysis

After identifying this need for growth in my approach and designing a plan of action during the fall of 2019, I engaged in a much more rigorous, systematic needs analysis at the start of this study in the spring of 2020. The primary instructor, one embedded tutor, eight students and I participated in the needs analysis dialogue, the topic of which was life balance. The dialogue was embedded at the end of a lesson devoted to a provided text about life balance (see Appendix A) which focused on practicing the reading and analysis skills that were central to the course objectives, such as identifying the genre, audience, and purpose of a text. The duration of the dialogue was approximately 21 minutes; each participant was instructed to write a question based on the lesson text that they could direct to the group during the dialogue. I facilitated the dialogue in a way that is typical for my teaching style and did not attempt to alter my usual methods in any conscious way.

Three data collection tools - a classroom observation protocol, supplemented by an audio recording of the dialogue, student writings in response to journal prompts, and an analytic journal which I wrote after the dialogue - were created in order to assess the presentation of the primary constructs of the research question, which were critical pedagogy and learner agency. The goals of data collection were to determine the extent to which I implemented a critical pedagogy approach in my existing practice as well as how and to what extent students exercised learner agency.

Data collection tools.

Classroom observation protocol. I developed a protocol consisting of seven linguistic cues to understand how my student and I verbally and nonverbally contribute to the dialog. This included factors such as frequency, duration, and quality, including question versus response, agreement or disagreement, whom/what students looked at while listening, signals of attention/understanding, etc. The linguistic cues used in the protocol were:

- What percentage of the instructional time did the instructor spend speaking?
- How did the students participate in the discourse (verbally, electronically, nonverbally)?
- What questions did the students ask about the topic/issue?
- How did they share thoughts/feelings/experiences (example quotes)?
- What questions did the instructor ask, and how did she share her thoughts/feelings/experiences? Were these consistent with a critical pedagogy framework as defined in this study and, if so, to what extent?
- Did the students appear, as determined by their participation and body language, that they felt engaged and comfortable during the discourse?
- Did any of the students disagree with other speakers during the discourse?

Through these cues, I attempted to measure my adherence to critical pedagogy tenets as well as document how students exercised their agency as learners. The latter also allowed me to compare the frequency of agentic behaviors, as I identified them, across dialogic circles. My visual observations were supported by audio recordings of the dialogic circles, which were transcribed with timestamps.

I reasoned that the first step in determining the potential for promoting agency would be to determine how the students in this course exercised their agency and how much opportunity students had to do so, e.g. how much time I spent speaking - "teacher talk time," or TTT - versus the time provided to them for speaking. I had yet to learn how the individuals in this course commonly prefered to exercise their agency as learners, so I wanted to determine what students said and did during class and how their behavior might reflect learner agency. By cross-referencing this against their self-reported experiences, I believed that I might also be able to determine the extent to which they perceived themselves as agentic in the classroom. I also wanted to include my own self-reported experiences to examine my initial interpretations of learner agency, as I perceived it, and whether or not this was consistent with students' perceptions. Additionally, I wanted to calculate how much discussion time I spent engaged in TTT or with the class's attention focused on me. A focus on the instructor as the authority and holder of knowledge is directly contrary to Freire (2014), and engaging in such a role might reduce the potential variety of agentic behaviors that students could engage in simply by reducing their opportunity for active participation. During these times, they were, theoretically, limited to receptive behaviors, such as attentive listening.

Student journals. Student journals included approximately 15 minutes of writing using five prompts after each dialogic circle. I created these prompts in order to examine the students' subjective experiences during the dialogic circles. The prompts were:

- Did our class discussion about (topic/issue) relate to your life in America or your home country? If so, how?

- Were you able to participate as much as you wanted to during our class discussion? Why or why not? If not, what would you have liked to share? What do you think would help you to share more next time?

- Did you feel comfortable disagreeing with others during the conversation?

- What did you like/not like about our class discussion as a way of learning and practicing English? How could we have made it even better or more comfortable for you?

- Now that you've discussed (topic/issue) with our class, how would you feel about talking with someone about it outside of class?

Analytic journal. I wrote analytic notes after the dialogic session to document my subjective experiences. I included my general impressions, thoughts, and feelings, observations or events that were particularly salient to me, and a subjective analysis of events with my own interpretations and potential future actions.

Data analysis. All qualitative data were analyzed inductively using applied thematic analysis, which Guest, MacQueen, & Namey (2011) defined as "a type of inductive analysis of qualitative data that can involve multiple analytic techniques" (p. 4). This method combines a variety of frameworks, such as grounded theory, positivism, interpretivism, and phenomenology, into a single methodology, and assumes a high level of involvement and interpretation on the part of the researcher (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). I used a manual coding process,

which is to say that I coded by hand using printed copies of the data, as recommended by

Saldaña (2009) for new researchers or those performing small-scale studies.

I utilized multiple strategies to enhance the validity of my findings. I used member

checking by presenting my transcript and audio recording to the primary course instructor for

accuracy review. I engaged several colleagues in peer debriefing by providing samples of my

raw data along with a coding schema in a Google Form survey. My colleagues then categorized

the data according to the provided schema in order to confirm it through inter-coder agreement

(Creswell, 2009). Finally, I utilized data triangulation by collecting multiple types of data and

analyzing them independently before comparing my analyses for convergence and/or

discrepancies (Creswell, 2009).

Classroom observation protocol data. A quick comparison of student versus teacher

talking time, as measured by a stopwatch while reviewing the dialogue audio recording, revealed

that TTT comprised 45% of the total dialogue time. The embedded tutor spoke for about 5% of

the dialogue time, and there was silence for about 4% of the dialogue. Student body language -

primarily eye contact and body positioning - indicated that the primary instructor and I were the

primary targets of communication while students were speaking, as opposed to another student

or the group as a whole. One student did not appear to be actively engaged in the dialogue, as

evidenced by looking out the window and not making eye contact with speakers, although his

body posture did not indicate discomfort; this particular student was usually minimally engaged,

and so this was not unusual.

Students asked 21 questions during the dialogue, 6 (29%) of which were divergent - that

is, questions that encourage diverse responses and require higher-level thinking (Richards &

Lockhart, 1996). Examples included "How can you improve your life balance today?" and

"What is life balance?" Additionally, of the 67 unique questions that I asked during the dialogue, only 15, or 22%, were divergent. Examples included "What do you think?" and "What does that mean for you?"

There were several ways in which students contributed to the dialogue: a) asking questions, such as for clarification, information, confirmation, etc.; b) voicing opinions, c) relating personal narratives in the form of anecdotes or storytelling, d) statements reflecting metacognition, popularly defined by Livingston (2003) as "higher order thinking which involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning" (p. 2); and e) engaging in active listening, such as eye contact with and body faced toward the speaker, nodding and hand gestures, and non-lexical conversational sounds such as "uh huh." Although most students contributed to the conversation voluntarily, some students only contributed after being individually prompted.

Verbal contributions that were not questions varied in length from single word answers - for example, "Yeah," "No," "Family," "Me" - to multiple sentences, such as "For the schedule, like this one is mine. Practicing. [laughing] This one is mine. Because when I sleep at night I'm thinking about my family, what should I do. [inaudible]. Where should I go. [*sic*] [inaudible] About everything." The content of such contributions was primarily either to share opinions or personal narratives. There were three identified instances of metacognition from students in the form of identifying ways in which changing their thinking would affect their overall mood and life balance, e.g. "Thinking positive." and "We could be optimistic."

Student journals data. Student writings reflected student opinions and personal narratives almost exclusively, but this is to be expected given the nature of the prompts. All but one student confirmed that the dialogue topic was relevant to their lives, and the remaining

student specified that the dialogue itself, rather than the topic, was relevant within the context of the course but not to other courses at the college. Half of the students wrote that the topic did relate to their lives in the United States, but not in their countries of origin. For example, one student wrote, "In my country you do not need life balance or is [*sic*] not very [*sic*] important factor, because the life [*sic*] is so simple." All students confirmed that they were able to share as much as they wanted and that they felt comfortable disagreeing during the dialogue. For example, one student wrote, "I like it. communicate with us as friend [*sic*]." Another wrote, "I feel very good when I share my idea in a group discussion." They also all expressed approval of the dialogic method as a means of practicing English, e.g. "group discussion is good after our lesson because we can talk about we [*sic*] learn what was helpful that can be a main idea." Finally, all students expressed a high level of comfort discussing the topic with another person outside of the class.

     Analytic journal data. In my reflective writing, I indicated overall satisfaction with the dialogue, but with a few areas of potential improvement. I was aware of the disproportion in verbal contributions to the dialogue and student focus, as well as the way in which students appeared to be speaking only to me and their primary instructor. I wrote, "These students do not need me to lead a discussion in the way that I did, in my opinion, but it's the way I'm used to leading and, perhaps, the way that they're used to having discussions led." I also thought about the students' verbal contributions and concluded that they did not have sufficient skills and language scaffolding to engage in a critical dialogue without preparation and additional support, writing "This, then, becomes my task: a) to determine which skills are needed, b) to determine how best to teach them, c) to teach them, and d) to let students practice and then fully utilize them." However, accomplishing all of these was not feasible within the limitations of this study

and, in addition, I wrote that my goals "...may require more skill and experience than I currently possess." My ideas for scaffolding critical dialogue within the context of this study included promoting student leadership and critical analysis as well as providing language and social-emotional support for expressing contradicting opinions. These indicated to me that the students would require language, cognitive, and social scaffolding in order to be able to fully engage in critical dialogue.

        Interpretations and next steps. The students wrote that they felt comfortable disagreeing during the dialogue, but a review of the dialogue revealed no evidence of disagreement. Also, I had noted in my reflection that students might need support in order to engage in disagreement during the dialogue, but it's possible that the students did have the necessary skills and support but simply happened to agree on every aspect of the dialogue topic. This is somewhat likely as the topic itself - life balance - was not particularly controversial, unlike topics generally discussed in critical pedagogy. This required more investigation to determine the level of support needed, if any.

        The high TTT, listening body language directed at instructors, and overall positive feedback regarding the dialogue in student writings suggested to me that not only was I acting as the locus of control for the dialogue, but also that the students were comfortable with this power dynamic. However, the low instance of metacognition relative to opinion and personal narrative during the dialogue, as well as the low rate of divergent teacher questions, supported my conclusion in my reflective journal that the students had not been sufficiently challenged and that significant alterations to my methodology would be needed to scaffold and facilitate a critical dialogue.

I found it difficult to identify instances of learner agency because so many different behaviors can potentially be qualified as such, so I decided to focus on the "critical discrimination" aspect of my definition of learner agency. Within the context of the needs analysis, this emerged from the data as evidence of metacognition, either verbally or in writing, unprompted divergent questions related to the topic, and, potentially, disagreement with either a peer or instructor. Marchel (2007) suggested that asking the right kind of questions - divergent questions, especially those that require students to engage in metacognition - is essential for facilitating critical dialogue and, potentially, promoting each of these expressions of learner agency. Examples of such questions include, "Why did you ask that question?" and "Why do you think that?" (Marchel, 2007). The data revealed that both the students' and my questions emerged as an area of significant potential improvement regarding facilitating critical dialogue. Metacognitive engagement is a necessary component of critical dialogue, so increasing this type of verbal contribution during the dialogue through the use of the right kind of questions would promote critical thought and responding, which may also promote learner agency (Marchel, 2007). While I did not have sufficient time to scaffold this type of questioning for students, I hoped that, by scaffolding them for myself and increasing my own rate of "right" questions, I might provide a model for students to emulate.

Purpose of Action Research

The purpose of this study was to understand how critical pedagogy may be used, if at all, to promote or impact student agency in an adult ESL classroom setting.

Research Questions

Through this action research project, I hoped to answer the following questions:

How can I utilize critical pedagogy dialogue to promote learner agency in a community college

ESL context?

- How do adult ESL community college students exercise learner agency?

- How can I translate critical pedagogy theory into practice in a community college ESL

  context?

- If I am able to implement a critical pedagogy approach to dialogue, how will this affect

  learner agency?

Literature Review

In this section, I outline the literature as it pertains to learner agency and critical

pedagogy. In regards to agency, I describe the literature surrounding the concept as well as

factors that influence it, outline how it has been shown to apply to language and language

learning, discuss the challenges of promoting agency in language learners, and describe how

agency has been promoted in an English language learning context. I then describe the critical

pedagogy literature in more detail, explain its relevance for language learning and English

language learning in particular, discuss the potential benefits and drawbacks of utilizing a critical

pedagogy approach to education, and outline ways in which critical pedagogy has been applied

to English language education. Finally, I try to show how critical pedagogy intersects with

learner agency, and how the literature suggests that critical pedagogy can be used to enhance

learner agency in English language learning contexts.

Construct Frameworks

Agency. The concept of agency is rooted in social psychology, where it is described as an

individual's ability, at any given point in time, to act independently in order to change the

internal or external environment (Bandura, 2001; Campbell, 2009; Hitlin & Elder, 2007). In the

context of education, learner agency was defined by Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, and Friedlander

(2015), in their report for The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, as "the

capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative—the opposite of helplessness" (p. 1).

Additionally, van Lier (2008) proposed several popular and widely-cited criteria that are a

synthesis of several prominent authors on agency. In order for a student to be exercising learner

agency, a) the student must be acting on their own initiative, potentially as a form of self-

regulation; b) the act must occur within and be mediated by a sociocultural context, such as a

classroom, workplace, or community; and c) the student must be aware of their responsibility for

the act, such as its effect on others (van Lier, 2008). However, it's important to consider how

Sheldon (2017) reframed receptivity as agentic, which allows for the exercise of agency despite

the appearance of passivity. In his opinion, this provides a balance for the otherwise active

conceptualization of agency, which is a somewhat Western perspective (Deters, Gao, Miller, &

Vitanova, 2014; Sheldon, 2017).

In both psychology and education, the key components of agency are the freedom,

ability, and desire to take action and the potential to effect change. This is quite similar to the

definition proposed by Ashoka regarding a changemaker, which is "someone who is taking

creative action to solve a social problem" ("Changemaker Skills," n.d., par. 1). In fact, the only

difference between the two is the focus of Ashoka on social change.

Critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is an approach to education, especially literacy

education, that values freedom, equity, and choice, and it does so by assisting members of

oppressed groups in changing the structure of thought that leads them to participate in their own

oppression (Freire, 2014). This is accomplished, in part, by rejecting the banking model of

education, which envisions students as depositories and teachers as depositors of knowledge, in

favor of a dialogue-based, problem-posing method, which promotes critical thinking and

metacognition and allows students to generate meaning for themselves (Freire, 2005). In this

way, critical pedagogy is similar in some ways to the humanistic approach to education proposed

by Carl Rogers (1969), which prioritizes student freedom and human relationship in the learning

context. Both critical pedagogy and humanistic education place high value on the student's need

- and fundamental right - to learn in an environment which values and respects their ability to

construct meaning for themself with the facilitation of an expert who cares deeply and

authentically about their well-being.

Learner Agency

      Factors affecting agency in language learners. While external inputs, such as course

materials and the course instructor, have an effect on learner agency in language learners, a much

stronger influence comes from the student's "activity and initiative" (van Lier, 2008, p. 163).

Benson (1997) claimed that one aspect of learner initiative and autonomy is political in nature in

that it is created through empowering the learner to take control over their own learning content

and process. One way of doing this is by decentralizing teacher control, which decreases

helplessness and provides a greater opportunity for learner agency (Mercer, 2011, 2012).

      Lin (2013) noted, however, that while the teacher may influence student agency less than

the student's internal factors, this does not mean that the teacher does not represent a powerful

force for promoting and enhancing learner agency. He recommended using methods and

strategies that may be novel for students and even, possibly, within the TESOL field to change

the student's context in favor of agency (Lin, 2013). Yet, even then, the decision to exercise

agency is ultimately the student's. A teacher may utilize a novel lesson design in order to enable

agency, but the student must still utilize initiative to take advantage of the opportunity (Seppälä,

2018). It is also important to remember that each student is unique in both their choice to, as well as their choice of, agency, and teachers cannot expect that students will necessarily utilize all available opportunities (Mercer, 2012).

Agency and language learning. The production of language is a form of agency because, as Duranti (2006) noted, "words always do things" (p. 457). Speaking and writing have the potential to change our reality through their effects on the listener/reader, who may adjust their behavior as a result of our words (Duranti, 2006). Language is, therefore, inherently agentic, and is both interpersonal, in the form of communication, and intrapersonal, in the form of thoughts. Agency is likewise both inter- and intrapersonal in nature, both affecting and being affected by social and internal contexts (Lin, 2013; Mercer, 2012; van Lier, 2008; Xu, 2012). Agency consists of two essential components: a) the internal sense of agency, and b) the externally observable acts of agency (Mercer, 2011, 2012; van Lier, 2008). One's sense of agency is formed, in part, by using one's observation and experience of others as a frame of reference (Mercer, 2012). While this ties agency strongly to the theory of Vygostky about the social nature of learning, it also implies that agency is a complex and dynamic construct (Brown, 2014; Mercer, 2011; van Lier, 2008).

While agency is a multifaceted concept, it could be said, in simple terms, that agency arises from the combination of resources and contexts, an individual's perceptions of these, and the individual's capacity to utilize them (Mercer, 2012). These internal processes also make agency behaviors extremely difficult to quantify because an observer - and, potentially, the actor - is likely to be unaware of the full range of resource and contextual factors that influence the act (Mercer, 2012). It is important, therefore, not to confuse agency with neoliberal compliance, in

which the student may appear to be autonomous and self-regulatory but is, in fact, completely

dependent on the direction of the instructor (Charteris & Thomas, 2017).

Agency is temporally situated; it develops over time and fluctuates depending on a

variety of contributing factors, including one's past experiences (Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Mercer,

2012). Agency can be said to have two dynamic components: a) a highly contextually sensitive

level, which changes quickly and frequently; and b) a more stable level that is formed gradually

over time (Mercer, 2012). How and when these levels manifest is dependent on many factors but

seem to be strongly tied to the student's goals (Xu, 2012). In terms of language learning, there is

some evidence that agency may also cross linguistic lines; that is, one's agency in one language

can affect one's agency in another (Mercer, 2012).

Challenges of promoting learner agency in language contexts. The necessity of

student initiative in exercising learner agency can potentially be hindered by a drawback which is

common to all student-centered learning approaches: student resistance (Coffman, 2003; Felder

& Brent, 2010; Hoskinson, Barger, & Martin, 2014). Many students are unused to taking an

active role in their learning, and even those who are interested in taking on the challenge require

time to adjust and learn the necessary skills (Felder & Brent, 2010; Hoskinson et al., 2014). The

change in learning style, as well as the increase in student responsibility and effort that are

required, may cause students - even those who are compliant - to experience some or all of the

psychological stages of grief or trauma (Felder & Brent, 2010). Students may exhibit strong

emotional responses, become noncompliant, or even become actively defiant when student-

centered learning is introduced (Felder & Brent, 2010). However, this usually only happens with

a small minority of students, and, if the teaching methods are employed effectively and with

attention to student affect, students in student-centered classrooms generally experience

increased motivation, information retention, depth of knowledge, and subject appreciation

(Felder & Brent, 2010). In an organizational setting, Cammann (1988) found that by allowing

resistant individuals time to observe organizational changes in action without pressure to

conform, they were able to watch their peers engage with the changes and benefit from them,

which was usually enough to motivate resistors to also accept and engage.

Potential methods of increasing agency in language learners. There are many

suggestions for ways in which teachers can promote agency among language learners. Xu (2012)

recommended recognizing and utilizing student capital, attending closely to affective factors, and

trying to understand students' shared responsibilities. Mercer (2012) suggested focusing on

changing students' beliefs about both themselves and the context. Seppälä (2018) warned that

limiting assumptions may be unconsciously embedded into the language that instructors use, and

so steps should be taken to ensure that teachers use language that assumes student initiative and

positions students as agentive rather than passive. Additionally, the collaborative creation of

course organization, content, and tasks is a time-consuming but very effective way to increase

learner agency throughout a course (Lin, 2013; Seppälä, 2018).

The common thread amongst all of these suggestions is the focus of the teacher on the

students' existing ability to take positive action toward accomplishing their goals, as well as the

teacher's willingness to surrender power and control within the classroom. This perspective

positions teachers and learners as equals working toward a common goal for the benefit of all

and requires teachers to act as facilitators rather than directors. As this is a philosophy inherent to

critical pedagogy, it was natural to look to this approach for insight into how best to support

agency in English language learners (Freire, 2005).

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy has most notably been popularized by Freire (2005, 2014), but the basic tenets have also been promoted by other educational theory giants such as Dewey and Horton and expanded most notably in the United States by Ira Shor (Crookes, 2010; Degener, 2001). Auerbach and Giroux wrote extensively about the role of ideology and power dynamics in education, and these ideas were further expanded by Macedo, McLaren, Norton, Pennycook (Bartlett, 2005; Crookes, 2010; Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005; Pennycook, 1990; Riasati & Mollaei, 2012). In the field of English language acquisition (ELA), Crookes is considered the primary authority, and he has contributed not only to the understanding of critical pedagogy in the ELA context but also to the development of critical pedagogy practices in educators (Crookes, 2010; Crookes, 2013).

The critical approach to education is similar to and sometimes confused with active learning and student-centered learning (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012), but the primary difference lies in critical pedagogy's goal of promoting social equity (Bartlett, 2005; Freire, 2005; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014; Riasati & Mollaei, 2012; Sheldon, 2017; Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015). The vehicle for this social change is literacy, which is defined in critical pedagogy as the ability to read and write as well as to use these skills to examine one's own social status (Degener, 2001). By improving literacy, students are able to increase their social power and improve their lives (Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005). Curricula and lessons are designed using students' language and reality as a foundation (Bartlett, 2005; Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005), which also promotes an asset-based perspective on the part of both teachers and students (Degener, 2001).

Knowledge is inherently political (Bartlett, 2005), as are educational systems (Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005). The prevailing industrial approach to education has created classrooms that contribute to the hegemony of the dominant culture and language (Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas,

2012). From the perspective of critical pedagogy, agents of these systems who are complacent or compliant within them are complicit in their effects (Degener, 2001). Teachers, as an integral part of these systems, are thus forced into a political role - whether they welcome it or not - and are challenged to utilize their political status consciously and with intentionality (Degener, 2001). Language itself is a form of power that students are unable to access until they become socially proficient in the dominant language (Bourdieu, 1991), which creates further power distance between English-speaking teachers and English learners. Furthermore, the ideological nature of language and its capacity to establish and promote norms makes it a powerful force for political and, thus, educational change (Bourdieu, 1991; Degener, 2001). The "culture of silence" so prevalent in authoritarian systems of education is, from this viewpoint, a form of active oppression of students (Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015, p. 207).

        The role of critical analysis in critical consciousness. Freire (2014) referred to the use of critical pedagogy as a means for students to develop critical consciousness, which can be defined as the awareness and analysis of, as well as intervention in, social inequity. According to Freire (2014), the banking model of education prevents critical consciousness by positioning students as passive and, in essence, biological data storage units. The nature of oppression, Freire (2014) argued, causes an alteration of mind such that "The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped" (p. 46). This means that, even when the oppressed are aware of their situation, they may only be able to conceive of power within an oppressor-oppressed framework, which limits both their ability to overcome oppression and their contribution to equitable solutions (Freire, 2014). As a result, the revolution of today becomes the oppression of tomorrow (Freire, 2014).

Underlying the concept of critical consciousness is critical analysis: In order to develop critical consciousness, critical analysis of personal and social biases must not only be recognized, but also examined (Freire, 2014). While critical analysis itself does not necessarily lead to critical consciousness, it is a necessary component, so promoting learners' ability to engage in critical analysis, particularly regarding forms of social oppression, is the first step toward helping them to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 2014). According to Marchel (2007), the critical analytical skills required to engage in critical dialogue, which is the basis of critical pedagogy, require significant scaffolding and practice, and may not have significant effects on critical thinking in the short-term. However, students can and do learn the skills required to engage in critical dialogue (Marchel, 2007). Students then have the potential to apply these skills to issues of personal bias and social oppression in order to develop their critical consciousness.

Relevance for language learning. Shokohui and Pashaie (2015) noted that many prominent authors in the English language teaching (ELT) field consider critical pedagogy to be crucial to ELA. There are several reasons for this. Degener (2001) claimed that while learning English may not seem like a life and death issue for immigrants in the United States, this is not necessarily the case. Access to food, housing, education, and services such as healthcare are often dependent on a working knowledge of English, and individuals may not be able to receive the basic necessities of life if they are unable to utilize the language (Degener, 2001). This is a clear example of how language can cause or contribute to inequity, inequality, and discrimination in the lives of individuals who are not literate in English. Critical pedagogues claim that literacy alone does not decrease inequality - a critical component is necessary to help students take action (Bartlett, 2005; Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005).

English language learners in the United States are, primarily, members of racial or ethnic minorities (Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas, 2012). Unfortunately, most modern educational systems require these students to devalue and, in some ways, reject their own culture in favor of the dominant and academic cultures (Degener, 2001). Unintegrated attempts to promote aspects of minority cultures, such as cultural festivals and Black History Month, are insufficient for supporting the achievement of minorities (Degener, 2001). The result is that, in most academic models, students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge with nothing of value to contribute - a "banking concept of education" (Freire, 2005, p. 72). Such students are seen as having little power or agency in the classroom (Degener, 2001). Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas (2012) advocated for utilizing critical pedagogy to help students understand how language contributes to inequality, which allows them insight into how language acts to affect their personal life situations and how it can be used to empower themselves (Degener, 2001). This is the process of developing critical consciousness (Freire, 2005).

Benefits of critical pedagogy in language contexts. English language students benefit significantly from a critical pedagogy approach. When a critical pedagogy lens is applied to instruction, students exhibit greater persistence in their education, even if they were not properly prepared for higher education (Barbatis, 2010), as well as increased class participation (Richard-Amato, 2002) and an increased sense of agency as they begin to understand that society is changeable and they can change it (Degener, 2001). These lead to increased action as students begin to exercise this agency (Degener, 2001). Additionally, students usually enjoy the increased relevance and meaningfulness provided by critical pedagogy, as long as they are allowed time to adjust to such a radically different and, initially, uncomfortable approach (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013). Although the benefits of critical pedagogy for instructors are less obvious, it is important

to note that a critical approach can help to manage the complex social system that is a class of students and critical methods make it very easy to determine student's individual interests and needs (Riasati & Mollaei, 2012).

Drawbacks of utilizing a critical pedagogy approach to language learning. Although the benefits are numerous, there are drawbacks to the critical pedagogy approach. The primary criticism of critical pedagogy is that it is heavy on theory with significantly less guidance on how to turn theory into practice (Bartlett, 2005; Riasati & Mollaei, 2012). While this is true, the beauty of critical pedagogy lies in its empowerment not only of students but also of teachers. By applying a critical perspective to their current practices and engaging in critical, honest reflection, teachers are able to construct their own methodology from critical principles (Degener, 2001).

Critical pedagogues often perceive education and power from an extremely dichotomous, judgmental perspective and utilize radical language that may reflect unrealistic ideals, which can be divisive and counter-productive (Degener, 2001; Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015). The solution is to view power from a Foucauldian perspective, in which power is seen as ubiquitous and productive rather than local or limited and oppressive (Bartlett, 2005; Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas, 2012). Additionally, Sheldon (2017) addressed the unspoken, underlying assumption inherent in critical pedagogy that teachers are the primary agents - it is only through the teacher's agency that the students are able to utilize their own agency. This can be overcome by embracing a perspective of critical learning rather than critical teaching, in which the students hold the principle agentic role, as well as by recognizing both active and receptive forms of student behavior as agentic (Sheldon, 2017).

It's important to note that critical pedagogy can be quite difficult for teachers to implement. It requires willingness on the teacher's part to acknowledge and address personal biases that may lead them to unconsciously devalue students' language, culture, or capital (Degener, 2001). Teachers are inherently part of the dominant educational culture, and so they must be careful not to fall prey to the savior complex or try to indoctrinate students into their own perspectives (Bartlett, 2005; Degener, 2001; Riasati & Mollaei, 2012). Applying critical methods requires commitment, a willingness to take risks, radical honesty, and self-awareness (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014; Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015). It also involves a surrender of power that makes many educators uncomfortable (Richard-Amato, 2002).

Aside from the personal challenges that critical pedagogy presents to educators, teachers may also lack the knowledge and expertise that is required. Crookes (2010) noted that beginning teachers may find critical pedagogy principles impossible to implement. Also, many teachers mistake the equitable dialogue of critical pedagogy for friendly, egalitarian dialogue (Bartlett, 2005). However, critical pedagogy does not suggest that the teacher should relinquish the role of authority in the classroom, only that they should use their role to promote a respectful, democratic environment in which the teacher is also a student and the students are also teachers (Bartlett, 2005; Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005). Unfortunately, caring about students is not enough; a teacher must be a leader more than a friend (Bartlett, 2005). These skills take time, experience, and practice for educators to master.

Application to English language education. In the critical pedagogy classroom, dialogue is paramount (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013; Bartlett, 2005; Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005; Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014; Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas, 2012; Riasati & Mollaei, 2012; Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015). Freire (2005) promoted a "problem-posing" (p. 79) method in which the

teacher plays the role of the questioner, asking questions that promote critical thinking and with

most of the speaking being done by the students. The keys to critical dialogue are that it must be

equitable and the teacher must truly listen to and make use of what the students say (Degener,

2001; Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas, 2012). Teachers can encourage student voice in the classroom

by extending their response wait time, delaying error correction, reducing the amount that they

echo student responses, using referential questions, welcoming student initiation, and utilizing

students' primary languages in discussion (Khatib & Miri, 2016). This last strategy is especially

important because allowing space for and valuing the contribution of students' primary

languages not only enhances meaning-making, but also enhances students' perceptions of the

value that their own languages and cultures contribute (Degener, 2001).

The teacher and the classroom are not neutral, and so teachers should not attempt to hold

back or hide their perspectives and opinions, although they should be careful not to overshadow

students or prioritize their own opinions over those of students (Jeyaraj & Harland, 2014). It is

crucial that educators allow students to voice their perspectives and value these as equal to their

own, but these should not be accepted blindly or universally (Bartlett, 2005). When needed,

instructors must guide students, using problem-posing, to critically analyze their personal views

to avoid the propagation of harmful, discriminatory, or verifiably incorrect opinions (Bartlett,

2005).

The topics of study should be discovered jointly through teacher-student dialogue.

Themes that emerge from these discussions are cocreations that must reflect student needs and

interests, and teachers can utilize these for dialogue as well as explicit or embedded language

instruction (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013; Bartlett, 2005; Degener, 2001; Freire, 2005; Pessoa & de

Urzeda Freitas, 2012; Shokouhi & Pashaie, 2015). It is important that teachers engage with a

theme for a sufficient duration so that students are able to learn vocabulary and other language

elements as well as form their own ideas about the content (Pessoa & de Urzeda Freitas, 2012).

Once themes of interest to the students have been identified, the teacher can guide

students into a critical analysis in several ways. Teachers can assist students in identifying the

linguistic violence and power reflected within a reading or topic (Bartlett, 2005). An example

might be to utilize this perspective when reading a course textbook, which is likely to reflect the

dominant culture (Degener, 2001). The teacher could also draw attention to the historical and

institutional contributors to inequality so that students develop an awareness of the factors that

influence and promote it (Degener, 2001). Regardless of the theme or the critical approach used,

the teacher should always frame literacy and language as tools that can be utilized to understand

and influence issues that affect their lives (Degener, 2001). Teachers would also be wise to

directly address the power inequities in the classroom and how they relate or contribute to the

themes being discussed (Bartlett, 2005). Once students understand how to engage in critical

analysis, the teacher should encourage them to engage in problem-posing with one another,

either in groups or as a class, in order to further develop this skill (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013).

When students are proficient at critical analysis, the instructor can encourage critical analysis of

teacher comments and feedback, engaging students in one-on-one dialogue regarding their own

work (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013).

The Intersection of Critical Pedagogy and Learner Agency

Both learner agency and critical pedagogy are concepts that promote student

responsibility and respect the student's right and potential to take action for change. The nature

of critical pedagogy encourages students to focus on social issues and how their behavior affects

them, and this social awareness is a key component of learner agency. A dialogic, problem-

posing method assumes learner agency in that the students become the primary participants in the learning process. It is therefore reasonable to expect that, by utilizing methods consistent with critical pedagogy, learner agency and students' awareness of this agency can be enhanced. Although critical pedagogy is primarily theoretical and requires personal interpretation and professional expertise to implement, which makes it difficult for new teachers to utilize, the potential benefits to both students and teachers are more than worthwhile, especially when the goal is enhanced learner agency.

Using critical pedagogy to enhance learner agency in language contexts. As a final note, it is important that practitioners utilize their own agency and apply a critical lens not only to their course content and methods, but also to the concepts of learner agency and critical pedagogy themselves. For example, the overarching theme consistent in both agency and critical pedagogy theory and literature is that of action. Critical pedagogy positions students as moving from information receptacles to information engineers, while learner agency generally associates passivity with a lack of agency. However, utilizing critical pedagogy and appreciating learner agency in ways that are both realistic and equitable requires a reframing of both concepts. Sheldon (2017) pointed out, and rightly so, that this obsession with action not only overlooks the value and agency of receptivity but it also denigrates the value of those who occupy receptive roles. This may include women, the disabled, adherents of certain religions or philosophical viewpoints, individuals not proficient in the dominant language, and others (Sheldon, 2017). Additionally, the acquisition of language requires large amounts of input and repetition, in addition to production, in order to occur, and this receptivity to input is no less agentic than is language production itself (Brown, 2014). Therefore, documenting the effects of critical pedagogy on learner agency requires the teacher to adopt a critical lens toward both constructs.

Conclusion

The literature suggests that learner agency is a critical component of successful learning, especially in the field of language instruction. As a student-centered approach that promotes meaning-making, critical pedagogy has excellent potential for promoting learner agency. This is especially true for English language learners in English-speaking countries, where minority status across multiple dimensions exposes students to a variety of social and cultural inequities. However, it is important to acknowledge and respect the way in which students choose to exercise their agency as learners, especially given the temporal and contextual nature of agency. Additionally, the application of critical pedagogy will require practice as well as heightened cultural sensitivity and an asset-based perspective in order for me to promote critical analysis of biases and social inequities and avoid forcing my personal beliefs and opinions onto my students, who bring their own beliefs, opinions, and experiences to the classroom. This action research project will allow me to explore the use of critical pedagogy in an adult ESL context while also learning about how students exercise agency. I hope to understand how I can learn to implement critical pedagogy and how it can be used, if at all, to promote learner agency in language learners.

Phase 1

Action Plan

This action research project was designed to answer the following question: How can I utilize critical pedagogy dialogue to promote learner agency in a community college ESL context? This study utilized a qualitative self-study action research design. Creswell (2009) described qualitative research as a form of inquiry that is primarily concerned with exploring how participants understand and experience a particular issue. Research procedures are

emerging, data are collected in the participants' setting, and data are analyzed inductively (Creswell, 2009). According to Phillips and Carr (2010), "The process of learning and doing action research enables preservice teachers to grow a strong and trustworthy professional voice to engage students, parents and colleagues in critical conversation for change" (p. 2). Action research allowed me to improve both my praxis as well as learner achievement (Phillips & Carr, 2010). Self-study research consists of five primary factors: a) personal situated inquiry, b) critical collaborative inquiry, c) improved learning, d) a transparent and systematic research process, and e) knowledge generation and presentation (Samaras, 2011). Self-study research is a way for practitioners to identify and rectify, through collaboration with students and peers, contradictions between belief and practice (Samaras, 2011). As my impetus for investigating the potential intersection between learner agency and critical pedagogy was based on my identification of a contradiction between my values and practice, and a desire to correct this contradiction, self-study was an ideal approach. Thus, I chose a self- and action-oriented method of research that would allow me to learn more about my practice and how it affects my students, which I deemed the most effective way to support my development as an educator.

Qualitative design was appropriate because: a) learner agency is a multifaceted concept and is composed of a complex set of observable and unobservable behaviors that occur within the context of the complex social system and are difficult to accurately quantify (Bandura, 2001), b) action research is often categorized as qualitative, even when quantitative data are incorporated (Phillips & Carr, 2010); and c) participants' perspectives are paramount and the complexity of social issues is acknowledged (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, as critical pedagogy requires time and experience for teachers to become competent in its implementation, I felt that it was best to begin this learning process as early in my career as possible (Crookes, 2013).

Data Collection

Data collection tools were created in order to assess the three primary constructs of the research question: a) critical pedagogy, b) learner agency, and c) promotion of learner agency. The goals of data collection were to determine the extent to which I implemented a critical pedagogy approach, how students exercised learner agency, and if students exercised more learner agency during a critical dialogic circle than during the needs analysis dialogic circle. The same data collection tools were utilized, which consisted of a classroom observation protocol with audio recording, student writings to journal prompts, and an analytic journal that I wrote after completing the dialogue. All qualitative data were analyzed inductively using applied thematic analysis and I used a manual coding process.

I utilized the same strategies to enhance validity as those applied to the needs analysis dialogue. These were: a) member checking by presenting my transcript and audio recording to a Phase I observer and requesting feedback regarding accuracy, b) peer debriefing by providing samples of my raw data along with a coding schema in a Google Form to several colleagues, and c) data triangulation by collecting multiple types of data and analyzing them independently before comparing them (Creswell, 2009).

Implementation and Findings

Due to the COVID-19 school closures, the Phase I implementation was performed using the online meeting platform "Zoom." There were no official synchronous course meetings after the transition to online learning, and so the lesson within which these data were collected was offered to participants on a voluntary basis. Seven students attended the lesson, but three left prior to the dialogue portion of the lesson, leaving only four students in attendance for the implementation. One student responded once during the first ten minutes of the dialogue but was

later unresponsive, including when he was addressed by name. This student was difficult to

engage in class prior to the COVID-19 school closures, and it was my sense that, at some point,

he physically or mentally left the dialogue. Of the three remaining students, all participated

verbally but not visually. I chose not to measure active listening as I felt that, in the absence of

students' video feed and with occasionally unreliable or muted audio input, my measurement

would not accurately reflect students' active listening. I recorded the meeting using the Zoom

software recording feature and transcribed the dialogue based on that recording.

The lesson topic, xenophobia related to the COVID-19 outbreak, was chosen with the

intent of being both relevant and related to social justice. The lesson was based on a portion of a

news article describing xenophobic violence motivated by fear of Chinese individuals due to the

COVID-19 outbreak having been identified as originating in China; see Appendix B for the full

lesson text. My idea was to focus on xenophobic violence as an extreme form of bias and

discrimination, and I hoped that students would come to see the connection between the topic of

this article and their own knowledge of - and, potentially, personal experiences with - racial fear

and/or discrimination in the United States. The students first practiced reading and analysis skills

that were central to the course objectives, such as identifying the genre, audience, and purpose of

a text, and then discussed their understanding of the content. Finally, we created a collaborative

vocabulary document using Google Docs before engaging in the critical dialogic circle.

Several patterns emerged from the observational data: a) teacher talking time, b) teacher

questions, c) student non-metacognitive expression, and d) evidence of metacognition.

Teacher talking time. As was the case during the needs analysis, analysis of the audio

recording of the dialogue revealed that TTT was high. I spent approximately 54% of the dialogue

time speaking or using non-lexical conversational sounds. About 5% of the dialogue time was

silence, and the remaining 43% was student talking time. The observational data confirmed my

analytic journal reflection that I had spent the majority of the dialogue speaking, but the student

writings also supported my impression that students felt comfortable contributing to the

dialogue. I theorized that part of the high TTT may have been due to the fact that only one of the

students in attendance was generally talkative and outgoing during dialogues, both before and

after the COVID-19 school closure. The other two students were usually quiet during group

discussions and only responded when the primary instructor or I called on them by name.

Unfortunately, only two of the three participatory students provided written journal prompt

responses, one of which was the typically outgoing student, but both respondents indicated that

they felt comfortable disagreeing during the dialogue and were able to contribute as much as

they desired.

Teacher questions. My reflective writing indicated that my initial impression, before

analyzing the observational data and audio recording, was that my rate of divergent questioning

had increased. I wrote:

> It seemed as though my questioning had improved. Although I did ask convergent
>
> questions, I was consciously aware of my questioning most of the time, and I was able to
>
> use more divergent questions and identify more opportunities for critical questions and
>
> analysis. We will see if the data support this impression.

However, the observational data did not support this.

I asked 74 unique questions during the dialogue, including 11 procedural questions,

which related directly to facilitation rather than content, 48 convergent questions, which do not

require higher-order thinking (Richards & Lockhart, 1996), and 15 divergent questions, which

represented about 20% of my questions. These values were similar to the needs analysis despite

my intention to increase the ratio of divergent questions, as well as the fact that the intervention

dialogue was twice the duration. I asked 12 of the divergent questions within the first 10 minutes

of the dialogue, but my subjective interpretation of students' answers was that they lacked the

understanding and/or ability to answer, so I began utilizing more convergent questions. At first I

attempted to use convergent questions to scaffold divergent questions, such as:

1. So when you read this, did you think that the author wanted there to be more violence or

   less violence?

2. So you think the author wants less violence?

3. Why do you think so? Why do you think the author wants that?

In this example, the first two questions were convergent and the last is convergent. This seemed

effective and students were able to answer the divergent question after answering the preceding

convergent questions. However, as the dialogue progressed, I moved away from a questioning

model and into a statement-based model. Whereas I asked 20 unique questions within the first

five minutes of the dialogue, I asked only one unique question in the final 5 minutes.

   Student non-metacognitive expression. The primary form of student contribution, both

verbally and in writing, were non-metacognitive. I identified several primary content categories

of student utterances: a) asking content questions, b) voicing opinions, c) relating personal

narratives in the form of anecdotes or storytelling, and d) content agreement/disagreement. These

categories were similar to the needs analysis, with the exception of the removal of the active

listening metric and the addition of content disagreement, which was not present in the needs

analysis dialogue. In my analytic journal, I noted that non-metacognitive expression was, by far,

the most common form of contribution during the dialogue, and analysis of the observational

data and student writings supported this.

Asking questions. There was only one instance of questioning about the topic from the students during the course of the dialogue, which was much fewer than the needs assessment dialogue. We were discussing the topic of meritocracy as it related to racial discrimination in educational opportunity, and I expressed my opinion that it was easier for white individuals to achieve a high quality education. One student expressed disagreement by asking me, "In which university or in which school the black, Asian, this and that [*sic*] not welcome? Is anywhere [*sic*] in the country?" Interestingly, this question also reflected disagreement, as the student had previously expressed his opinion that meritocracy accurately captures the current distribution of wealth and opportunity in the United States.

A lower rate of questioning did not alarm me, and in my analytic journal I contributed it to the fact that asking questions had not been integrated into the discussion as it had been during the needs analysis. As a result, I had expected a lower rate of student questions and was not surprised. However, I had hoped that the critical nature of the topic and my own modeling of questions might promote more spontaneous questioning than was observed.

Voicing opinions. Students expressed personal opinions about the topic frequently, unsupported by external evidence. For example, "I really don't know 'cause I think it's all fake news" or "It can be. I'm not sure. I don't know." Their writings also reflected some of their personal opinions, unsupported by evidence, such as "It was great" and "... discussion with everyone it's [*sic*] the better way…" Students provided personal opinions even when asked divergent questions, e.g. "Because they don't like them" in response to a question about why people, in general, may blame a certain group for an unpleasant or undesirable event or situation.

Relating personal narratives. Students often provided personal narratives as evidence for their opinions. For example, when refuting the idea that whites have more wealth and

opportunity than other racial groups in the United States, one student stated, "I mean, I see white people that they lives [*sic*] on the street." Another student shared several examples of xenophobia from her own life, which occurred after arriving in the United States. Students had not been provided with information about logical fallacies and had only just begun to be introduced to the concept of citing evidence for claims and opinions, so this form of "evidence" was not surprising in their conversation. Also, one student wrote in her reflection that the topic was relevant because "... sometimes when I interact with customer service and there is a language barrier I feel like there is a sense of prejudice because they assume that I am not knowledgable [*sic*]."

Utilizing uncited evidence. There were a few instances of students presenting external evidence from uncited sources, but this was rare. One such instance was when a student agreed with a statement that xenophobia is common to humanity in general rather than being the domain of a specific group or groups of people: "If you go, like, other country [*sic*], and there is a lot of people came [*sic*] from the Arab countries. They don't wanna they [*sic*] lose their power. And they don't wanna mix the other people, they wanna keep their country, their power, their color, their culture." Another example was when a student referred to former President Barack Obama as evidence for his opinion that black Americans have equal opportunities and access to education. There was no external evidence, cited or uncited, utilized within student writings.

Content agreement/disagreement. All students expressed agreement and disagreement with the opinions of others throughout the dialogue, both in the form of simple, one-word answers such as "Yeah," "Mmm, no," as well as using more complex language forms, such as "No, it can be both" and "Oh yeah, they like to accuse people for something." Both I and the students engaged in mild disagreement during the dialogue, although we were largely in

agreement in our opinions about the text and the topic. There were three exceptions to this, however. The first was when one student said, in response to discussion about white culture and people as having the most power and opportunity in America, "If you have knowledge, you can get everything." This student engaged in conversation about meritocracy for several minutes, claiming that, in America, opportunity is a direct reflection of education and hard work. The second was during a discussion about racial disparities in access to quality education, when another student stated:

> Maybe they immigrated for the other countries, they don't have that chance and they don't have to say, "We ... we have to be same." And still feel like I am thankful for the ... for the, like, government and the people live in America because they still ... they give opportunity for the other people who don't have, like, money to offer, like, education or to go school. Still we have, like, opportunity, we have free schooling, we have free medical. Sometimes we get, like, free houses or we somehow [inaudible]. Housing for low countries. Like, low income. But is ... this is great because there are some country you can't get that. Even if you, like in my country, like some people had, like, can go to school or not and there's nobody helping them. [*sic*]

Later in the conversation, this same student expressed that, while she agreed that there was racial disparity in educational opportunity in the United States, she disagreed that this was a problem or required correction. She stated that her status as an immigrant made her less worthy of equity and that she would feel ungrateful if she were to expect equitable opportunities, both for herself and her as yet unborn children.

The final instance of verbal disagreement was the instance of student questioning previously mentioned, which was posed by the same student who discussed his belief in meritocracy. There was no evidence of content disagreement in student writings.

Evidence of metacognition. There was no apparent evidence of student metacognition during the critical dialogue. However, regarding the final journal prompt, asking about the students' comfort level discussing the topic with someone outside of class, one student responded negatively. The negative response was not due to a lack of self-efficacy, but rather discomfort with the topic: "I don't feel comfortable because people may feel I am racist." I interpreted this as reflecting more critical analysis than a simple "yes or no" response because the student had thought not only about her own experience but had also predicted the effect of such a discussion on others, and the potential results of that effect. Given my definition of learner agency for the purposes of this study, this response was highly agentic. However, the remaining student responses did not reflect either strong evidence of metacognition or critical analysis. They were straightforward answers to the prompts, such as, "Yes I was able to participate as much as I wanted. It was great."

Data connections and reflections

Regarding student participation, which the observational data and student writings indicated were high, I wrote, "They did, however, contribute in a way that felt different from the first dialogue… The topic, it seemed, was well-chosen, at least regarding these students." This is noteworthy in that immediately after the lesson, I was inclined to attribute the high level of student engagement to the topic rather than to my methodology - an idea which I later found the observational and student writings data to support. I also noted only one of the three instances of disagreement as significant to the conversation in my analytic journal, failing to consider the first

and last instance as important. This may have been because I found the nature of the student's

disagreement interesting on a personal level because it violated my own personal values, whereas

I do not wholly disagree with the student who argued in favor of meritocracy. My own education

in this regard is ongoing.

       All data collected confirmed that students felt comfortable participating and were highly

engaged and agentic, despite the high ratio of teacher talking time. However, the lack of

metacognition and critical analysis in most of the student writings combined with the

observational data indicating a lack of critical pedagogy methodology contradict my self-

reflective writing. In reflecting on the Freireian (2005; 2014) model of problem-posing and the

model of scaffolding critical dialogue suggested by Marchel (2007), the data suggest that my

facilitation of the dialogue did not reflect critical pedagogy principles. Thus, any change in

learner agency is unlikely to be due to the implementation of an effective critical pedagogy

model. While I had noted some indication of critical analysis in the students' responses, it was

my impression that the students did not appear to have been given the proper scaffolding to

engage in a critical dialogue. What I realized as a result of this implementation was that this was

also true for myself, as the observational data reveal. All data sets indicated a significant need for

scaffolding of critical analysis and critical dialogue skills, both for myself and the students.

       Strengths and areas of improvement. The online platform utilized for this lesson had

some benefits, such as providing a very clear recording for dialogue transcription, but the lack of

visual feedback made it very difficult to utilize informal assessment based on non-verbal signals.

Agency became harder to identify in the absence of visual data because I was unable to use non-

verbal signals to interpret students' internal states. However, this may have been useful as it

prevented me from applying personal interpretations without direct evidence.

Additionally, because this lesson was taught online and was optional, I had low student attendance, and one participatory student did not submit journal writing. This, combined with the unique contexts of each session, made it very difficult to compare student participation and responses between the needs analysis and Phase I intervention dialogues. And, while one student showed slightly more agency in writing across sessions, the other student showed less. This supports the theory of Hitlin & Elder (2007) that agency is temporally situated, being both dependent on experience and affected by the immediate context in any given moment. Although the students seemed very comfortable and were able to use the technology effectively, I did find it difficult to avoid interrupting or speaking over students, especially in the absence of the students' visual cues that might have indicated that they were preparing to speak.

Regarding my methodology, I realize, in retrospect, that I did not provide myself with enough scaffolding to effectively bridge the gap between my current skills and those needed to engage in critical pedagogy. My intention to ask more "questions of the right kind" (Marchel, 2007, p. 7) was actionable but vague, lacking a specific structure. While Marchel (2007) was immensely helpful in identifying the steps necessary to scaffold critical dialogue for students, I lacked any such guide for myself. It would have been useful to create a dialogue protocol for myself as the instructor so that I could have begun to build my own skills as a facilitator while simultaneously introducing the concept of critical dialogue to students. In the absence of this, my implementation fell short of my target methodology. This is consistent with Crookes (2010), who wrote that critical pedagogy is an extremely difficult methodology for new teachers to employ, and also supports Marchel (2007), who wrote, "... the critical dialogue process is difficult for students, and changes to critical thinking come slowly" (p. 8). In fact, Marchel (2007) discovered that her students showed no significant changes on the California Critical Thinking Disposition

Inventory after her semester-long implementation and their scores were similar to undergraduate students. As these data were collected on pre-service teachers, such as myself, it would seem overly optimistic to expect my own abilities to significantly improve over the span of a few weeks.

Additionally, the constructs of critical pedagogy and learner agency, as well as their application, are abstract and subject to individual interpretation. As such, the theoretical foundations for both constructs are not easily translated into observable phenomena and must be measured indirectly using related constructs such as "metacognition," "participation," and "self-efficacy." This is an unavoidable drawback due to the abstract nature of this study's primary constructs.

Finally, the change in context between the needs assessment and the Phase I implementation represented a significant alteration. Aside from the number of students who participated, the way in which students participated and how we interacted were very different in the classroom than they were online. While this change may have benefited my Phase I implementation in some ways, it does call into questions any comparisons between needs analysis and implementation data. My own experience as a student and instructor moving from in-person to online meetings has had an impact not only on my sense of community but also on my learning and understanding of the concepts and framework through which this study was performed. While I am technologically savvy and a successful independent learner, I strongly prefer face-to-face interaction as both a student and educator, and this bias may have affected my online implementation of this research as well as my teaching methods and practice.

However, the most obvious area of improvement was my implementation of critical pedagogy and promotion of critical analysis/metacognition. While I had expected this approach

to be challenging, I had not anticipated that I would require so much scaffolding in order to apply a critical pedagogy framework during the dialogue. As a result, this became my focus for my Phase II implementation.

Next Steps

Despite my intentions to ask more divergent questions and reduce my talking time, I was unable to do so. However, this simply meant that I required more learning and practice in order to apply a critical pedagogy framework, and this drove the evolution of my research question for my Phase II implementation: How can I begin to scaffold my current skills in order to support the development of critical pedagogy in my practice? While scaffolding critical analysis and dialogue skills for students is necessary in order to engage in critical pedagogy dialogues, I first needed to learn these skills so that I can teach and model them. As Malcolm X once said, "You can't teach what you don't know and you can't lead where you won't go" (Howard, 2016, p. 9).

Specifically, I wanted to find techniques that I could apply that would increase my rate of divergent questioning and reduce my talking time. Regarding the latter, I had the idea that using a stopwatch to track my speaking during the dialogue would make this extremely salient and might decrease my talking time, but after conferencing with a mentor within my department, I realized that this would be very cognitively challenging and might impair my ability to facilitate the dialogue. I then searched for additional resources in the literature to assist me in developing a scaffolding framework for myself. After reviewing Wallerstein & Auerbach (2004), who wrote about introducing a Freireian problem-posing method in educational contexts, and Crookes (2013), who wrote about utilizing critical pedagogy in ESOL, I decided on several potential foci for my next implementation: a) crafting guiding questions, to be presented visually, that would promote critical analysis and provide a framework for student dialogue without my verbal

prompting; b) promoting my listening, as opposed to speaking, by taking notes during the dialogue to identify themes and vocabulary for use in designing future lessons; and c) creating a printed bank of divergent, metacognitive questions for myself to refer to and utilize during the dialogue to allow me to ask divergent questions without adding much to my cognitive load.

My focus thus far had been very active - my own actions and the actions of my students - and this may have contributed to my high rate of talking time and sharing opinions rather than facilitation through questioning. Wallerstein & Auerbach (2004) suggested embracing receptive listening as the first stage in applying problem-posing in order to determine "people's view of their role in the world, a powerful generative theme" (p. 17). They also recommended that educators listen for " generative words, words that would generate critical dialogue" (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004, p. 17) as a starting place for language and literacy development as well as critical dialogue. The "hidden voices" (p. 17) that these themes and words reflect can block learning, but can also be a doorway through which educators can promote learning by assisting students in removing the emotional, structural, or socioeconomic blocks that they represent. My focus, therefore, shifted from how I contributed to the dialogue to how I could more effectively receive and process student input.

Crookes (2013) stressed a number of preliminary concerns which must be established prior to implementing critical pedagogy. Of those, the primary concern, given my Phase I experience, was that of "critical (or oppositional) stance by the teacher" (p. 52). He noted that "a teacher who is starting to explore the possibilities provided by critical language pedagogy may equally well be exploring what his or her values are" (p. 52), and I can confirm that this applies to me. This may, in fact, be one reason that I preferred to voice my opinions during the Phase I dialogue rather than focus on problem-posing: I commonly achieve understanding and a deeper

level of insight into my own ideas and values by exploring them through verbal conversation.

Crookes (2013) recommends that, prior to engaging in critical pedagogy, teachers formally

create a philosophy of teaching that outlines "key values and beliefs as well as their implications

for one's practice" (p. 53). By doing this, teachers can further develop their critical perspective

and may feel less inclined to use critical dialogue with students as an outlet for doing so.

Coincidentally, a formal paper explaining my philosophy of teaching happened to be a required

assignment for another course that I was concurrently enrolled in, and I was able to complete this

prior to the Phase II implementation. As Crookes (2013) claimed that a formal philosophy of

teaching is of significant importance to implementing critical pedagogy, I have included it here;

please see Appendix C.

In addition, as teacher talking time remained high during my Phase I dialogue, I hoped to

decrease my own speaking time in order to increase student talking time and, potentially, the

opportunity for students to exercise their agency.

Phase II

I intended to utilize the same measurement tools used throughout this study while

implementing the novel interventions listed below. These data collection tools included an

observational protocol, supported by an audio recording of the dialogue, student writings in

response to journal prompts, and my own analytic journal. My goal was to begin answering my

evolving research question: How can I better promote the development of critical pedagogy in

my practice, and does this affect learner agency? I believed, based on my further exploration of

the literature - Wallerstein & Auerbach (2004) and Crookes (2013) in particular - that the steps

outlined below would promote my ability to deeply listen and engage in divergent problem-

posing as well as reduce my talking time, resulting in a dialogue that more accurately reflected a critical pedagogy approach:

- Provide students with a series of guiding questions about the lesson content that promote critical analysis. This was useful in guiding the dialogue during Phase I, and Traver (1998) claims that good guiding questions promote critical thinking and higher achievement. I attempted to craft a small number of high quality guiding questions, listed below, as a starting point for the dialogue which, according to Traver (1998), must be open-ended yet focus student inquiry, be non-judgmental, have "emotive force and intellectual bite" (p. 71), and be succinct.

- Take notes during the dialogue regarding potential generative themes and words (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004).

- Create a printed list of questions based on the recommendations of Marchel (2007) to keep close at hand in order to assist me in focusing on utilizing these questions when facilitating student dialogue. These included questions such as "Why do you think that?" and "What do the rest of you think?"

The Phase II implementation was also held online, using Zoom video conferencing software, and attendance was voluntary. Four students attended, one with video input, and the lesson was recorded in its entirety. As a basis for the dialogue, the students were guided through a lesson about graphic novels. This text medium was chosen based on feedback posted on the course blog (see Figure 4), through which I asked what text genre the students would enjoy using; only one student responded, so I based my choice on her feedback. I also requested feedback regarding the lesson topic but did not receive any, so I chose feminism/misogyny based on the availability of materials of appropriate length and language complexity.

April 24, 2020 at 2:55 PM
Hi Susan
All those topics are interesting but I prefer
Graphic novels
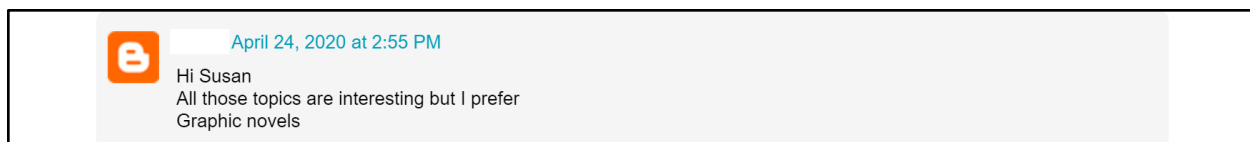
Figure 4. Student Text Feedback. This figure illustrates the feedback received by a student regarding my blog post requesting suggestions for lesson text type and topic.

First, the students watched a short video about the mechanics of how to read graphic novels, then we discussed the guidelines presented in the video (see Appendix D). This was followed by two examples of increasing complexity for practice, and then the students were shown a 4-page story entitled "Nzinga: Queen of Ndongo and Matamba" from the graphic novel "Brazen: Rebel Ladies Who Rocked the World" (Bagieu, 2018).

Following the reading and a brief discussion of the story, students were presented with dialogue guiding questions, which were:

1. Why did Nzinga's brother become king even though she was smarter and more experienced in war?

2. Why did Nzinga "declare herself a man" and never marry? How did that help her, and was it necessary?

3. How are gender roles in your country, culture, or society different for men and women? Why? How does this compare to America?

4. English uses gendered pronouns. Is it the same or different in your primary language? How do you think this affects the way that people view gender? Why?

5. The alternative gender movement promotes the use of gender-neutral pronouns. Why do you think women didn't ask for this?

Implementation and Findings

I was able to utilize the guiding questions that I designed during the dialogue, although in the interest of time, we did not discuss question three ("How are gender roles in your country, culture, or society different for men and women? Why? How does this compare to America?"). Also, the discussion regarding question five ("The alternative gender movement promotes the use of gender-neutral pronouns. Why do you think women didn't ask for this?") was minimal, with only one student responding very briefly. The majority of the dialogue was dedicated to question four: "English uses gendered pronouns. Is it the same or different in your primary language? How do you think this affects the way that people view gender? Why?" I also used the list of questions inspired by Marchel (2007) that I had printed, referring to it several times during the course of the dialogue. However, I found that taking notes while facilitating the dialogue was extremely difficult and chose not to do this in order to be more fully attentive and provide more effective facilitation.

I attempted to utilize the same strategies to enhance validity as those applied to the needs analysis dialogue. These were: a) member checking by presenting my transcript and audio recording to a Phase I observer and asking for feedback regarding accuracy, b) peer debriefing by providing samples of my raw data along with a coding schema in a Google Form to several colleagues, and c) data triangulation. Unfortunately, I was unable to triangulate the data because none of the students provided their writings, despite multiple promptings.

Several patterns emerged from the data that was collected, all of which were similar to data from the earlier dialogues, but many were of different quality. These were: a) teacher talking time, b) teacher questions, c) student non-metacognitive expression, d) evidence of metacognition, and e) agreement/disagreement.

Teacher talking time. My analytic journal reflected an impression that my talking time had been greatly reduced, but this was not supported by the observational data. My talking time was approximately 43% of the dialogue duration, which, while less than the Phase I dialogue, was only slightly less than the needs analysis. However, silence accounted for 6% of the dialogue time, which was a slight increase, and students seemed comfortable during the dialogue, sharing freely and often interrupting one another or me in order to speak. There were several instances in which I prevented a student from speaking in order to facilitate another student or lead the dialogue in a new direction, which may have impaired some students' contributions. But, in one instance, a student was able to redirect the conversation back to the previous topic so that she could fully express herself.

Teacher questions. My questioning was much different than the previous two dialogues, as I subjectively noted in my analytic journal and was pleased to see confirmed by the observational data. I asked a total of 84 unique questions, 40, or 48%, of which were divergent. While I did not perform a statistical analysis on the differences in questioning and cannot confirm significance, this is a promising trend compared to previous dialogues, in which divergent questions represented less than 30% of my questions.

Student non-metacognitive expression. Student expression was once again high in both opinion and personal narrative. An example of a student's expressed opinion was, "I think, yeah, I think based on their culture, maybe," and an example of a students expression of personal narrative was, "And, like, for example, I had a professor for online [*sic*] class and didn't know if he [*sic*] or she." However, one student did ask several content questions during this dialogue:

- But they not [*sic*] forced by … they can still be in military [*sic*], right?
- [Student name], really?

- Like what?)

- What language, [student name]?

- Or maybe not?

No other students asked content-related questions, but the student who asked the questions above had not asked content questions during the Phase I intervention dialogue, so this represents a noticeable change, which I noted in my analytic journal prior to analyzing the observational data.

The use of uncited evidence was also more abundant throughout this dialogue, such as citing laws, cultural standards, religious doctrine, and historical precedents:

- "Like, even in the U.S., like when there's talks [*sic*] with anyone or somewhere they're … they don't let the woman [*sic*] to [*sic*] be in [*sic*] the front line."

- "It's not okay in my country…"

- "It's hard 'cause, you know, from the first day when the world create [*sic*] … from the first day when God create [*sic*] the human, He created, for some reason, man and woman."

- "Yes. And have [*sic*] a … she had a husband."

Regarding the use of uncited evidence, I wrote in my analytic journal that, "This was the first time that I remember students using so many outside sources of information to support their ideas, in addition to opinion and narrative, and they did this spontaneously without prompting or pre-dialogue instruction."

The final pattern that emerged was agreement versus disagreement. During the Phase I dialogue there were only a few instances of disagreement, which were directed toward me. However, during this dialogue, students disagreed with one another's opinions and requested evidence for their claims multiple times. For example:

- "[Student name], really?"

- "I think it's the same," which contradicted another student's statement.

- "But I think, Susan … I don't think it's based on religion."

- "Oh my God. Every woman including us," in response to a male student making a sweeping generalization about "all women."

These statements were so salient that I mentioned them in my analytic journal before analyzing the observational data: "The students seemed engaged and interested, and there was even a bit of disagreement between two students. It was friendly and respectful, but there was definitely a difference of opinion along gender lines."

Evidence of metacognition. Statements evidencing metacognition were also more salient and prevalent during this dialogue. Some examples of these statements were:

- "It's something we get used to," in response to my question regarding why not knowing another person's gender is confusing, which was the student's previous statement.

- "Some cultures are better than other cultures," in response to my question about how one could know which culture is correct or "right."

- "It's not based on my culture, but my religion," in response to my questions about what influences one's opinion about gay marriage.

- "When I think on [*sic*] equal rights stuff. If, 'cause, what is on my mind is only one man, man and woman. But not … not gender things."

In my analytic journal, I noted that "...they did more metacognition." However, I did not provide examples or evidence as specific occurrences of metacognition were difficult to define - it was only my subjective impression. I was pleased that analysis of the observational data, as well as peer debriefing, confirmed my interpretations of metacognition in the dialogue.

Data connections and reflections. In retrospect, the impression that I had spoken less was likely due to the fact that I occasionally engaged in longer wait times for student responses than in previous dialogues. Although it wasn't common, I found this to be very uncomfortable, so it was particularly salient and may have influenced my impression regarding my talking time. Upon reviewing the observational data, I noticed several instances in which, rather than asking students to explain their thinking, I provided a personal narrative or uncited evidence as a means of explanation or support. This added significantly to my TTT.

Regarding the increase in uncited evidence, I noted in my analytic journal: "This may be due to previous course content, which emphasized citing evidence, but students have little experience with this so I think it's unlikely that it had a significant impact, especially since no additional instruction was received in the time between the Phase I and Phase II lessons." It seems possible that good guiding questions and divergent facilitation alone may contribute to a greater tendency toward providing outside evidence as opposed to opinion or personal narrative.

If learner agency is exercised through metacognition, as I have suggested previously, then the metacognitive statements are evidence of learner agency during this dialogue. In my post-dialogue journal, I wrote: "In my opinion, the students exercised more agency than in the previous dialogue. They also spoke more to one another than in the previous dialogue. I asked more questions, and they did more metacognition." However, I experienced difficulty in identifying specific instances of metacognition as the dialogue was occuring. It is possible that additional practice and experience may assist in "in the moment" noticing of student metacognition.

Strengths and areas of improvement. One strength of this intervention was that the context remained largely consistent compared to the Phase I intervention. The meeting context

and students in attendance were the same, allowing for a more valid comparison between the two. Also, the confirmation of validity from both member checking and peer debriefing for all dialogues suggest that my interpretations of student dialogue is reasonably accurate, making the differences seen in this intervention potentially useful in determining future directions for both my research and praxis. However, the lack of student writings prevented data triangulation, which makes any conclusions drawn from the collected data less scientifically valid.

Discussion

The data collected throughout this study were, overall, consistent with the literature, which suggested that:

- Learner agency is a complex and multifaceted construct that is difficult to quantify and requires individual interpretation to identify and categorize (Bandura, 2001; Benight & Bandura, 2004; Brown, 2014; Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova, 2014; Duranti, 2006; Mercer, 2011; Sheldon, 2017; van Lier, 2008).

- Critical pedagogy is difficult for new teachers to implement effectively without scaffolding and/or support (Crookes, 2010).

- Synthesizing the literature in regards to both constructs, critical pedagogy has the potential to promote learner agency in a language acquisition context by promoting critical analysis and creating a call to action.

I initially found it difficult to identify instances of student agency, especially in the absence of non-verbal communication. My worries about the effects of my own biases on my interpretation of learner agency resulted in a not insignificant level of anxiety about erroneously overlooking the students' exercise of agency. I was initially hopeful that I would be able to identify what Sheldon (2017) called "receptive agency," but this seemed more difficult than I

had anticipated. It was not until after I had analyzed all of the data and begun to notice patterns

that I realized two things:

- According to my definition of learner agency, learning itself is agentic if it is intentional,

   purposeful, and is accomplished through critical thought because it causes a change to

   one's internal world (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova, 2014).

   However, learning is an internal process and cannot be observed directly but must be

   assessed using a variety of indirect means. Thus, agentic learning itself is an example of

   receptive learner agency.

- Metacognition is a form of learning that satisfies all criteria of learner agency. Thus,

   metacognition is also an example of receptive learner agency and must be indirectly

   assessed.

If these conclusions are accurate, then effective assessment of agentic learning and

metacognition is a crucial part of identifying and measuring learner agency.

I was not surprised that I found a critical pedagogy approach difficult to implement,

although I had hoped that I would be able to apply it more effectively more quickly. Despite

Crookes' (2010) warning, I was initially confident that my intervention required a simple

adjustment in behavior, but this was not the case. My experience was more consistent with

Marchel (2007): The critical dialogue process is difficult for students - which is what I am within

the context of this research - and changes come slowly. Scaffolding from several sources was

required to implement the small changes to my behavior that I made in this study.

 I was quite disappointed to realize that my impression regarding my questioning

behavior during the Phase I intervention was completely inaccurate, as was my sense that I had

spent less of the dialogue speaking during the Phase II intervention. However, these quickly

became a point of interest. These discrepancies in the data indicated to me that my subjective

impressions are not a sufficient basis for praxis development. As I move forward in my practice,

further development of my skills as an educator will necessitate both objective data, such as by

video or audio recording, and student feedback to ensure that my impressions are both accurate

and consistent with student experiences. Additionally, peer feedback is necessary to confirm my

interpretations and avoid assumptions. Self-study action research will continue to be a useful

vehicle for implementing interventions and analyzing their effects.

The online and voluntary nature of the Phase I and Phase II dialogues did impair my

study somewhat, especially as they represented a very different context from the needs analysis

dialogue, but this impairment was not irredeemable. Also, there was no way for me to accurately

define or interpret how the COVID-19 situation may have affected me, my students, our lessons

together, or our dialogues. As there is no literature to draw from regarding the unique situation

that COVID-19 has caused, it is not possible to predict how these data may have been affected,

what data might have emerged in a pre-COVID-19 context, or how my students and I will

respond to future interventions in a post-COVID-19 context. The novel nature of the situation,

the potential social-emotional effects, and the change in context may have altered how I and my

students engaged in the dialogues, which may influence the validity of applying my conclusions

to an in-person context, with or without the influence of COVID-19. However, my hope is that

applying my learning from this study to an in-person context will enhance rather than inhibit my

implementation of critical pedagogy and my students' agency.

Conclusion

The evolving purpose of this self-study action research project was to enhance not only

my ability to engage in critical pedagogy in a community college ESL context, but also to

understand how my students exercised their agency as learners and how a critical pedagogy approach might affect this. The literature suggested to me that not only is learner agency a fundamental aspect of language acquisition and critical pedagogy an effective student-centered instructional approach, but also that the use of critical pedagogy may directly enhance learner agency, especially in a language learning context. I was motivated to engage in both self-study research and action research in order to promote an alignment of my values with my practice as well as to improve my effectiveness as an educator. While I was initially inspired to engage in this study by my own subjective experiences in the classroom, this took a more formal, documented form as I began engaging in this study and reviewed the data that I collected.

The needs assessment showed a clear need for change regarding the amount and nature of my dialogic contributions, as well as providing a framework for understanding my students' agency in the classroom. As a result of this, I resolved to reduce my talking time and ask more divergent questions and examine how this might affect learner agency. However, upon reviewing the data collected during the Phase I implementation, I realized that the decision to adjust my behavior had not translated into a significant change - not only had I spoken more, I had also asked fewer questions. It did not surprise me, then, that the students had expressed less agency, as defined for the purpose of this study, by relying more on opinion and personal narrative than evidence or engaging in questioning, disagreement, or metacognition. A more thorough and rigorous approach to my own learning was needed.

With the help of Wallerstein & Auerbach (2004) and Crookes (2013), I devised a more concrete plan of action to help reduce my talking time and increase my rate of divergent questioning. While I was unable to take notes during the dialogue due to the strain on my attention, I was successfully able to provide good guiding questions (Traver, 1998) and use a list

of divergent questions suggested by Marchel (2007) to facilitate the dialogue. This resulted in an increase in divergent questioning, which may have been an influencing factor in the students' increase in content questions, use of uncited evidence, evidence of metacognition, and peer disagreement. However, the lack of triangulation makes this conclusion tenuous at best.

The online nature of the meetings had some benefits, such as ease of recording and high sound quality for transcription, as well as allowing students to participate from the comfort of their homes, which may have contributed to their feelings of comfort during the dialogue. However, low student attendance and lack of visual feedback were significant challenges as they limited the variety of data and removed non-verbal communication as a potential data source. The effects of COVID-19, which necessitated the online platform, are also unknown and may or may not impact the validity of my findings or their applicability to in-person contexts. Despite this, and the lack of data triangulation during Phase II, I was heartened by the consistency reflected through member checking and inter-coder agreement. Although further research is needed, it seems possible that my findings are both valid and useful and will be applicable in my practice. Additionally, while my Phase I attempt to implement a critical pedagogy approach was largely unsuccessful, the evidence of improvement shown during my Phase II intervention leads me to believe that not only am I capable of implementing such a framework, but that there is an effective means of scaffolding the necessary skills for myself.

In my practice, this study has been largely encouraging in that it has, at least in part, addressed my research questions in a favorable way: Students exercise learner agency both actively and receptively, I can implement critical pedagogy, and it has the potential to increase learner agency. However, I require additional study and practice to utilize critical pedagogy effectively, as well as to scaffold critical dialogue for my students. Despite this, it appears that

students are capable of significant learner agency, especially in the forms of metacognition and dissenting opinion, although it appears that they require explicit instruction in the use of evidence versus personal narrative to support their opinions. From a research perspective, I have come to understand the value of objective data, especially in the form of audio or video recording, to supplement my subjective interpretations, as well as the vital role of student and peer feedback regarding my understanding and interpretation of my own and students' behavior.

Future directions for this study include establishing a method of scaffolding my own critical dialogue facilitation skills as well as creating a framework for scaffolding critical discourse skills for my students. This will require additional reading and practice, but initial sources, such as Wallerstein & Auerbach (2004), Traver (1998), Marchel (2007), and Crookes (2013), indicate that reducing my talking time by listening for identifying generative themes and words, providing good guiding questions as a basis for dialogue, using divergent questions that promote critical analysis to facilitate dialogue, soliciting student feedback regarding topics and materials, and keeping in mind my values and teaching philosophy will be useful in further promoting my ability to engage students in critical pedagogy dialogue. Further scaffolds will depend largely on the effects of implementing these strategies.

Reflection

As I have explored the literature, as well as in conversation with my own professors, peers, and mentors, it has become apparent that critical pedagogy is a severely underutilized teaching approach. While I understand the difficulty of teaching and implementing a pedagogy that has no specific methodology, it is my opinion that the political nature of education necessitates that both teachers and teacher-educators recognize and address their roles in this paradigm. The gap in the literature surrounding how to apply critical pedagogy, as well as the

relative lack of connection between a critical approach and learner agency in English language contexts, represents an incredible philosophical and pragmatic need in the field of education, particularly teacher education. Marchel (2007) wrote of the difficulty in assisting pre-service teachers in developing critical dialogue skills, and the relative ineffectiveness of her efforts to significantly alter students' over ability to engage in critical thinking. This is just one indication that pre-service teachers require more scaffolding and support for critical analysis than they currently receive. If one must first learn in order to teach and one's goal is education for equity, social justice, and democratic participation, then it would seem that the development of critical dialogue skills is a vital part of teacher education (Freire, 2014; Howard, 2016).

The way in which such development is to be accomplished is an area of potential growth within the literature, especially within the realm of English language education. This is an especially important field for the implementation of equitable, socially just, emancipatory practice as English represents a language hegemony on a global scale - it is not only students in English-speaking countries who suffer from the bias and oppression inherent in English language instruction and the prevailing institutional norms. By developing an effective and actionable method of scaffolding skills supporting critical analysis, self-reflection, and critical pedagogy in teachers-in-training, the field of English language education could become a leader in global equity.

Inherent in this idea is that the goal of English language education is to support the development of agentic users of English who are capable of utilizing the language to improve their own lives as well as the social standing of communities. The relative unpopularity and, in some cases, the active rejection of critical pedagogy in the field would seem to reflect that promoting equity in social and cultural power is not, in fact, the intended purpose of educational

institutions. This reality requires both English language teachers and teacher-educators to closely examine their assumptions, biases, and expectations regarding student learning outcomes. To what extent are educators focused purely on language-acquisition as opposed to the meaningful and purposeful use of language as a means of achieving goals and contributing to the community, both locally and globally? To what extent do our good intentions result in oppressive practices? And to what extent do we perceive the empowerment of our students as a threat to our own power in the classroom … and, possibly, outside of it? While this may seem like a somewhat harsh interpretation of the current educational paradigm and the teachers who contribute to it, I agree with Degener (2001) that, especially in an English-speaking country, the acquisition of English is not simply a matter of convenience - it may be, quite literally, a matter of life and death. Educators who do not seriously consider and address the ramifications of their own political role in English language education are not adequately serving the population which they have dedicated their professional lives to.

In my own practice, this study has shown me some of how I, myself, contribute to this cycle of oppression, but it has also revealed ways in which I can extract myself from this paradigm. Through the continued use of self-study action research, I can further analyze and reflect on my practice, identifying areas of potential improvement and implementing interventions in a way that leads to valid, useful data and conclusions. I have also realized that my previous ideas regarding student-centered instruction and student funds of knowledge were heavily influenced by my own culture and did not fully honor and appreciate student resources, abilities, and contributions. One of the ways that this manifested was in the way that I came to value student feedback. Not only did the lack of student writing prevent triangulation of my Phase II data, but I also experienced a subjective sense of lack - I wanted to know what my

students thought of our dialogue and how I could work to improve their experience. I also felt an

enormous sense of curiosity and excitement in eliciting student feedback regarding our lesson

text and topic. Through this study, I came to recognize new ways in which my students were

expressing their ability to take ownership of and direct their own learning. I look forward to

having more of my assumptions and biases upended by my students as I engage in the research

process in my own teaching practice.

I also found, through listening to the audio recordings of the dialogues, several areas of

potential improvement of my practice that were unrelated to this project but of personal interest

to me, such as increasing response wait time and reducing how frequently I repeat students after

they speak. Reviewing audio and video recording of lessons and activities will be a very useful

tool going forward, whether it occurs within the context of research or not.

The benefits of engaging with my professors, peers, and mentors throughout the research

process cannot be understated. Aside from simply confirming my understanding and

interpretations of the data, my professional learning community (PLC) also provided guidance

regarding possible alternative perspectives, promoted deeper levels of insight regarding the data

and the research project as a whole, suggested potential improvements and implementations, and

gave a significant amount of professional and emotional support. Without this support system,

this project would not have been possible, or perhaps it would have simply been much poorer in

its execution and personal impact. A PLC is especially important when conducting self-study

research, according to Samaras (2011), because an ongoing dialogue with peers allows the

researcher to achieve a deeper level of understanding regarding their research and practice.

While the execution of self-study research is private and personal, it is also public and

interpersonal, and one's peers act as both sounding boards and a "validation team" (Samaras, 2011, p. 14).

Finally, of significant importance throughout the process of this research project has been the development of my own growth mindset. I am, in general, an accomplished student, and I find learning to be enjoyable. This is, perhaps, part of the reason that I enjoy being a teacher - the classroom is usually my "safe space." However, the downside to this is that I have had less opportunity to build frustration tolerance in an educational context, and when I find certain aspects of my learning difficult, I sometimes feel like I have failed in some way. While I have been actively working toward changing this perspective for some time, and have made considerable progress, I was nonetheless very disappointed by my inability to drastically alter my behavior during my Phase I intervention, despite the lack of scaffolding and support that I provided for myself. What this project helped me to acquire was a deeper level of self-compassion and an awareness that my own learning is the same as everyone else's - it takes time and effective support. I feel confident that, overall, my future attempts to improve my practice - which will, inevitably, involve some level of challenge or "failure" - will now be met with empathy, understanding, and a desire to identify and provide the necessary support. I hope now to be able to approach my own and my students' learning in the same way: with high expectations and rigor, but also compassion, empathy, and a willingness to reevaluate my own assumptions about what will best serve the learner as well as my methods of helping them to achieve what they are capable of.

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Appendix A

Needs Assessment Lesson Text

Work-life balance secrets from the happiest countries in the world
Published Thu, Jan 9 202012:01 PM EST
By Cory Stieg
Edited by Susan Zyphur for ESL 105
https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/09/are-danish-people-really-happy-nordic-work-life-balance-secrets.html

Each year, a group of happiness experts from around the globe rank 156 countries based on how "happy" citizens are, and they publish their findings in the World Happiness Report.

When researchers talk about "happiness," they're referring to "satisfaction with the way one's life is going," Jeff Sachs, co-creator of the World Happiness Report and a professor at Columbia University, tells CNBC.

"It's not primarily a measure of whether one laughed or smiled yesterday, but how one feels about the course of one's life," he says.

Since the report began in 2012, Nordic countries — which include Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, plus the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Aland — consistently turn up at the top of the list. (The United States, on the other hand, typically lands somewhere around 18th or 19th place.)

This is no coincidence. Nordic countries rank so high on the happiness report because they have things like free education and healthcare, low crime rates, cushy social security nets, a relatively homogeneous population and they're fairly prosperous.

Perhaps most importantly, these countries prioritize balance, which is the "formula for happiness," Sachs says. "They're not societies that are aiming for all of the effort and time to becoming gazillionaires, they're looking for a good balance of life and the results are extremely positive," he says.

"We find happiness in our own pursuits," like our professional work and passions, he adds. "And by living in societies that are more balanced."

They don't work long hours
"What the science shows is that the one thing that will make us happy is having a little bit more time," Laurie Santos, a professor of psychology at Yale who teaches The Science of Well-Being, tells CNBC.

A "full-time" workweek in Denmark is typically 37 hours spread over the course of five days. On the other hand, the average American works 44 hours per week, or 8.8 hours per day, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But what's even more striking is the Danes' attitude toward working long hours. While many Americans see working late as badge of honor and a way to get ahead, in Denmark it's seen as a weakness — it shows you can't get things done in the allotted work time, Kay Xander Mellish, a Danish business consultant and author of "How to Work In Denmark," tells CNBC. Most employees leave work around 4 p.m., according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

"There is a sense that, yes, work's important and you need to get your work done to a high quality, but you also need to make sure it's balanced appropriately," Alex Calvert, an expat who has lived in Copenhagen for seven years with his wife and two kids, tells CNBC.

To be as efficient as possible, Danes don't really socialize at work, or take breaks to run errands, Mellish says. "You might be there only 7.5 hours but you're working that whole time," she says. Free time is "the most important thing they have," so it's rare that people would hang out with coworkers after working hours, she adds.

Flexible work arrangements are also common. For example, Saara Alhopuro, who works as a diplomat in Helsinki, Finland, tells CNBC that she only goes into a physical office three times a week. She's allowed to work remotely one day a week, and then spends the rest of her free time working on her hobby: photographing mushrooms.

In fact, in Finland, employees have the right to shift their work day three hours earlier or later than their employers' typical requirements.

Five weeks paid vacation is a guarantee
In Denmark, full-time employees are guaranteed five weeks of vacation time, regardless of their position or field of work.

To put that in perspective, the average American worker with five years of experience is given 15 days of paid vacation, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. However the United States doesn't provide a federal paid vacation policy. According to a 2019 study, 23% of Americans don't receive paid vacation and 22% don't get paid holidays. On top of that, only 41% of U.S. workers feel like the organization they work for encourages employees to take time off, according to the American Psychological Association. Surveys have shown that more than 55% of Americans aren't using all their paid time off.

That's not the case in Denmark, according to Mellish. "People take every single hour of their time off," she says. If you try to contact someone in Denmark and Sweden in late July or August, they'll very likely be away "enjoying their vacation time," Sachs says.

Contrary to popular belief, "giving ourselves some free time can improve our productivity rather than decrease it," Santos says.

But happiness is just one piece of the puzzle
"We pay for this every single day, and we do it in more than one way," Mellich says. Nordic countries pay some of the highest taxes in the world. In Denmark, for example, there's a 25% sales tax, and a 150% tax on cars.

People in Nordic countries are happy to pay those taxes because they get great universal social services in return, Anu Partanen, author of "The Nordic Theory of Everything," tells CNBC. For example, daycare, public education including college and healthcare. "All of those are included in your taxes," she says.

Living in the happiest country in the world also puts pressure on people to be happy, Konig Koehrsen says. "It might be that expectation to have a work-life balance here that stresses people out, that you both have to work, but you also have to take care of your family," she says.

A note from your teachers:

Would you like help supporting your or your family's mental health? Would you like to speak with someone who's trained to help you with stress and life balance?

Call Grossmont College Student Health Services at 1-619-644-7192

About Grossmont College Mental Health Services

College can be stressful! Our goal is to support your personal, emotional, and social wellness so that you can achieve your academic goals. Many students find the counseling process to be helpful when struggling with any of the following:

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- Anxiety, worry, panic attacks
- Grief or loss
- Relationship issues, difficult breakups, divorce
- Difficulty coping with stress or trauma
- Dating or relationship violence, sexual assault, or rape

Making an Appointment

You may walk in to Student Health Services (Building 60-130) or call (619) 644-7192 to request an appointment. Most students are provided an appointment within 1-2 weeks or sooner if the case of a crisis or emergency.

Or call toll-free, 24 hours a day:

San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

County of San Diego Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health website:

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/bhs_services.html

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Appendix B

Phase I Lesson Text

The outbreak, and responses to it, have fueled racist incidents.

Adapted from "Uncertainty and Fear: A Week of Coronavirus News"
By Michael Schulson
Published 03.06.2020
https://undark.org/2020/03/06/abstracts-coronavirus-tesla-marsquakes-2/

People of East Asian descent faced physical attacks, online harassment, and discriminatory
treatment in several countries this week as SARS-CoV-2's identification in Wuhan, China
continued to prompt racists and xenophobes to act on their beliefs. On Monday, a 29-year-old
interpreter living in The Hague, Netherlands, said two men yelled "Chinese" and tried to punch
her off of her bicycle. The same day, a 23-year-old student in London posted on Facebook that
he had been assaulted by a group of people, one of whom, he said, yelled: "I don't want your
coronavirus in my country." London police subsequently released photos of four men they're
looking for in connection with the attack. In Italy, the U.K., and the U.S., people reported racist
comments at work, school, on public transportation, at the police station, and, of course, on
social media. News outlets received criticism for running inaccurate photos of Asian people and
neighborhoods alongside stories about new COVID-19 cases. While this troubling trend comes
as little surprise to disease historians and public health experts, it puts millions of citizens in
danger — physically, mentally, and emotionally — and robs them of their basic rights. Further,
stereotypes about who is likely to carry or transmit the virus often run contrary to the science,
and experts say this may ultimately make it harder to contain the outbreaks.

Reference links:
https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/meghara/coronavirus-racism-europe-covid-19
https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/03/uk/coronavirus-assault-student-london-scli-intl-gbr/index.html
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Appendix C

Formal Philosophy of Teaching

I have changed tremendously as an educator since entering the M.Ed. in TESOL, Literacy, & Culture program at the University of San Diego. When I arrived at my first class meeting, I thought that I had no culture, that social inequity was none of my business (because I did not contribute to it), and that being a good teacher largely meant learning how to "teach good." Since that time, I have come to be able to describe my own culture in detail, as well as how it fits into the wide culture of my community, nation, and the world, I have become passionate about equity in education and within my own practice, and I have discovered that being a better teacher requires me to become a better human being. I have, of course, also learned how to "teach good," and, I hope, in more ways than one.

My omoi (Inoue, 2012, p. 20), or the passion of my being, is growth, both for myself and others. Learning is my primary value in life, and my belief in the instructive value of both in-class and real-world events helps me to approach both joyful and challenging situations with some degree of patience and appreciation. As an individual whose world view and cultural influences are based on the English language and so-called "Western" philosophy, I tend to view myself and my students from a monomythic perspective in which we are the heroes of our own life journeys (Campbell, 2008). Given my passion and my viewpoint, it is not surprising that I approach teaching as a method through which my students and I can be more successful in life by acquiring both knowledge and wisdom. However, I understand that my definition of "success" may differ from my student. My goal remains to support them in their goals even as I pursue my own life goal, which is to become an increasingly more mature and loving version of myself who is better able to serve my students, my community, and the world.

Future Teaching Contexts

I have taught children and adults in multiple countries, including the U.S. While I would like to continue teaching abroad, I do not currently have an immediate location goal. English is learned in a variety of contexts worldwide, including post-colonial countries and cultures in which "native-like accent" is still highly prized, so I think that it would be both valuable and instructive for me to teach in a variety of locales in order to further broaden my perspective, understanding, and praxis. However, my long-term goal is to live and teach in Scotland. To my surprise, when I visited Scotland over the summer, it immediately felt like "home." While this is a subjective experience based on a very short period of exposure, the experience was quite powerful. During my time there, my impression of the populace was that they are inclined toward critical thought, discrimination of mind, and discussion, particularly as it related to local history and current political events. This is also reflected in higher education through literature around critical pedagogy from such researcher-practitioners as Navan Govender at the The University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, and Amadu Khan at the University of Edinburgh (Govender, 2011, 2019; Khan, 2018). There are a significant number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Scotland, and the country holds a more inclusive and supportive view about immigrants than does the UK in general (Khan, 2018). As critical education and social justice are personal and professional interests of mine, this makes Scotland an ideal locale for me.

I would enjoy contributing to and expanding critical English language teaching (ELT), especially among adult immigrants who would like to better understand their host country's culture and government and, potentially, become active participants and influencers within those systems. I am open to achieving this goal in a variety of contexts, such as in a university setting, at community colleges or community partner-sponsored language courses, and through

government-sponsored language programs. That being said, I would not be opposed to teaching children of any age. I truly enjoyed my time teaching children prior to attending the University of San Diego, and it would provide an interesting change of pace from adult learning. Although this may take the form of volunteer or community-based work, I hope to work with children in some capacity on an ongoing basis.

I have taught ELLs at all levels of proficiency, from emerging/novice to advanced, and enjoy them all for different reasons. However, my interest in critical pedagogy inclines me toward students with intermediate to advanced proficiency simply because more advanced language skills are required to engage in effective critical dialogue. Also, I enjoy teaching integrated skills, in which reading, writing, listening, and speaking are combined and grammar and vocabulary are embedded within the content. Integrated, embedded skills courses more accurately reflect real-life language use than do segregated skills courses, so it reflects a more relevant approach to language learning (Oxford, 2001).

Linguistic Considerations

My approach to linguistic factors has changed significantly over the last few months due to my exposure to the work of Dr. Bill VanPatten, as well as other research related to his work. After meeting him at a faculty meeting at Grossmont College in January - thanks to the efforts of my mentor teacher, Craig Carroll - I was given several revelations that were completely new to me, such as that the concept of fossilization is not supported in the literature, especially from the perspective of English as an international or global language (B. VanPatten, personal communication, January 24, 2020). Also, research in language acquisition indicates that, because acquisition occurs in an ordered way according to a predictable pattern and regardless of the learner's primary language, error correction that does not support the current stage of acquisition

is ineffective and may even inhibit learning of the current linguistic stage (VanPatten, Smith, &

Benati, 2020; B. VanPatten, personal communication, January 24, 2020). For me, this means that

equity in English language education requires me to avoid promoting the dominant language

hegemony in terms of accentedness and grammatical "perfection." These vary too widely to be

promoted with consistency, and as the purpose of language is communication, my opinion is that

only language forms that impair understanding benefit from corrective feedback, and only if the

correction is developmentally appropriate. Unfortunately, I am not currently sufficiently

knowledgeable about the ordered stages of language acquisition to be competent in delivering

effective error correction, so this will be an area of further study for me.

Cognitive Considerations

My interest in social justice and critical pedagogy lead me to focus heavily on metacognition,

critical analysis, and critical dialogue within my teaching. Metacognition is commonly defined as

"thinking about thinking" (McGuire, 2015, p. 5), but could more thoroughly be defined as higher

order thinking that oversees cognitive processes in order to accomplish complex, dynamic tasks

(Inoue, 2012). This could be a way to describe language acquisition and communication: a

spectacularly complex, dynamic task which requires a variety of cognitive processes and often

involves metacognition, such as when one is "searching for the right words" to simultaneously

satisfy the linguistic, socio-emotional, and cultural requirements of a given communicative

interaction. Likewise, critical analysis, when applied reflectively, can be used as a form of

metacognition that allows one to examine the constructs that underlie beliefs, opinions, thoughts,

and the behaviors that they motivate (Marchel, 2007). When applied to issues of discrimination,

oppression, and hegemony, this becomes an incredibly valuable tool for deconstructing one's

beliefs surrounding these issues as well as their foundations within society (Wallerstein &

Auerbach, 2004). Critical analysis is also the foundation of critical dialogue, which may, when implemented effectively, promote the development of critical consciousness while also supporting literacy in some students and, one hopes, educators as well (Freire, 2014). In a recent lesson, I facilitated a dialogue with students around the topic of feminism in culture and language after we analyzed a short graphic novel story about a historical female figure. The use of unbiased, divergent questions was extremely effective in eliciting both student opinions and - more importantly - discussion about the bases for their opinions and how both culture and language contribute to opinions in general. These contributions were completely student-led, which was an extremely powerful experience for me, as an educator.

On a more practical level, my preference, based on language acquisition research, favors project- and task-based learning within a thematic curriculum, also called content-based learning (Brinton, 2003; Oxford, 2001). Thematic units allow for the activation of existing student schemas as well as the development of new schemas, repetition of new vocabulary and language forms, and provides authentic language context (Shin, 2007). My guess, which requires further study, is that these benefits are further promoted by effectively bridging content across all levels - activities, lessons, units, and courses - to create both micro- and macro-content-based learning contexts, which would maintain existing schemas while building new schemas, continuously recycle language, and promote authenticity of language use. Critical pedagogy can be applied by choosing themes based on students' lives and the generative themes and words that they use throughout the semester (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004). From this perspective, effective, relevant bridging within and across content-based learning could be thought of as one way to promote and utilize student funds of knowledge.

Emotional and Socio-Cultural Considerations

Student affect is of significant concern to me. I know from personal experience that trauma impairs learning, and I think that all of us can attest to the fact that our emotional states affect how receptive we are to engaging in the behaviors normally associated with learning, such as attending classes and studying, especially over the last few weeks. My peers and I have experienced how impactful it is to have kind and caring instructors who attend to student affect as we have navigated our way through a post-COVID world. Also, language is a social construct and occurs within the context of relationships between individuals and, on a larger scale, societies and cultures. The purposes of communication are many, but, as someone who has been communicating for many decades, my experience is that it is common for communication to include - or be solely focused on - affective states. For this reason, affective, social, and cultural contexts cannot be easily separated, and so it is only reasonable that language students' affective, social, cultural contexts should be considered and integrated into their learning. Frey, Fisher, and Smith claim that "all learning is social and emotional" (p. 17), and I believe that this is especially true of language learning. This is why, in my classroom, I will give significant time and attention to establishing classroom community through "icebreakers" and collaborative activities throughout the semester, but especially during the first two weeks. I will also scaffold vulnerability, both through modeling and activities that promote empathy and connection, such as writing assignments that are completed anonymously or turned in for completion credit (without direct instructor assessment). I also enjoy engaging in dialogue with students about critical social topics in which they can express their opinions while also analyzing the cultural and linguistic foundations for their opinions.

My special area of interest regarding affective and social factors is student agency, which is a combination of skills competence, self-efficacy, and a critical approach to discrimination

(Bandura, 2001; Deters, Gao, Miller, & Vitanova, 2014). Learner agency is also often referred to as voice and choice amongst practitioners, but this is a very simplistic and deficit-based perspective, in my opinion. Students require and deserve more than simply to have their instructors listen to their interests and hobbies or to be offered two or more pre-designed options from which to choose, even when those options are based on their interests. Promoting learner agency requires educators to incorporate student culture and funds of knowledge as well as a willingness to release some of their power and control to students, thereby changing the social dynamic within the classroom, and educators must provide students with the opportunity to take responsibility for and direct their own learning, if they so desire (Crookes, 2013; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.; Seppälä, 2018). I have has success in implementing this by soliciting student feedback on an ongoing basis about as many aspects of the course as possible, such as unit topics, material genres, and personal learning goals, and then implementing these in the course. This can also be accomplished by listening closely to student discussion contributions and analyzing student writings for generative themes and vocabulary on which to base themes, activities, and assignments (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004).

Promoting learner agency requires a careful balance as students may come from cultures or educational backgrounds that emphasize power distance between educators and students. This is why building classroom community and student relationships has become a critical part of my classroom - I have observed and personally experienced the effect that social-emotional factors have on students' affective filters and willingness to engage in more egalitarian-style dialogue in classroom settings. In order to promote beneficial relationships with and between students, I follow the guidelines of Carl Rogers (2004):

- Strive for "genuineness and transparency" (p. 37), in which my true thoughts and emotions are expressed;

- Cultivate warmth toward and value of each student as individuals;

- Attempt, to the extent that I am able, to see the world from students' perspectives.

These three guidelines help me to value not only my students' funds of knowledge, but also to consider their affective, social, and cultural perspectives and how these impact their learning (and, thus, my teaching). My goal is to provide opportunities for learning and growth beyond course content without requiring students to take advantage of these opportunities. Other factors such as emotional development, life circumstances, interval and/or external motivations, educational goals, etc. affect what students want and need from their teachers and their courses. My hope is to create a learning environment that is conducive to the breadth of learning that students wish to engage in.

Conclusion

In some sense, my goal today remains the same as my goal in September of 2018: To learn, grow, and improve as an educator and a human being. I doubt that goal will change much as I move into further study and practice, although the lessons that I learn will undoubtedly vary quite widely. I hope to continue my work around critical pedagogy and social justice, using action research to expand my knowledge base, skill set, and ability to serve my students and community. I have been blessed to work with an incredible teacher and equally incredible students at my practicum site this semester, who have taught me tremendous lessons about life and teaching, especially how to improve my listening skills. While my education is ongoing and I do not expect it to ever end, I am immeasurably grateful for the immense learning that I have experienced through this program and how it has prepared me not only to be a better educator,

but also for the fact that I now know how to identify what still remains to be learned as well as

how to go about learning it.

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Appendix D

Guidelines for Reading Graphic Novels

- Each panel (box) is a section in the story

- Read left to right

- Read top to bottom

- Text in round "bubbles" is dialogue

- Text in squares (or not enclosed) is narration

- Text in puffy "clouds" shows what a character is thinking