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Title: Encouraging Students to Develop Critical Analysis of ESL Reading Textbooks

Drawing on Habermas’s theory of communicative action and Carspecken’s critical methodology theory for its philosophical foundations, this critical qualitative research study aimed to explore the possibility of utilizing principles of critical literacy in the ESL classroom, specifically applying its practices to ESL reading texts. It also explored the possibility of raising my own critical awareness as both researcher and teacher by critically reflecting on my subjectivity, examining not just my thoughts and feelings but also my teaching practices. This study is of potential benefit to the field of language education in that it links critical literacy and the ESL context, an approach which has rarely been explored.

Five ESL participants recruited from the Intensive English Program (IEP) at a major US Midwestern university engaged in critical literacy practices, which consisted of eight group discussion sessions about the content and points of view of selected ESL texts. Audio and video recorded discussion data were analyzed through critical literacy frameworks including Luke and Freebody’s four resources model and Lewison et al.’s four dimensions model, and Carspecken’s critical qualitative research frameworks including coding procedures and reconstructive analysis for meaning reconstruction. In addition, philosophical concepts from Habermas and Carspecken were frequently employed for deeper analysis of the discussion data.

The analysis of the discussion data revealed that participants engaged in critical social practices by disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple viewpoints, and/or focusing on the sociopolitical in a variety of ways. Critical reflection on my subjectivity illuminated what I had not previously been aware of in terms of my beliefs and teaching practices. Based on the findings, this research study suggests a variety of effective strategies to promote ESL students’ critical engagement with their texts as implications for ESL educators.