Chi-chuan Yang

Title: Critical Literacy: Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students' Identity Transformation

This dissertation employed a narrative-based multiple-case study approach to investigate how engaging Taiwanese EFL students in critical literacy affects their changing perceptions of themselves, as well as their changing perceptions of learning English as a foreign language. As critical literacy advocates argue, language learning is not socially, culturally, and politically neutral (Comber, 2001; Gee, 2000; Janks, 2010; Luke, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Rather, it plays a fundamental role in students’ identity construction. EFL students are learning different social, cultural, and political representations that may involve change in identity. Thus, the study attempts to provide valuable insights into identity issues in the EFL field since research in the EFL field has often considered language learning as the learning of neutral skills, and emphasized the outcome of teaching methods, measuring students’ competence and performance of language (Bax, 2003; Bell, 2003; Gu, 2003; Liao, 2004; Yu, 2001).

This research was conducted in an after-school English study group located in Taiwan. Six Taiwanese EFL students, ranging in age from 15 to 17, had volunteered to take part in this English study group. The group met weekly for three hours over 24 weeks period. During each meeting, participants were engaged in critical literacy, in which they took on critical stances to discuss the social, cultural, and political issues generated from the reading texts. The four cases were developed through transcripts of text discussions, autobiographies, formal and informal interviews, and students’ artifacts. The framework for analyzing participants’ changing identities was drawn from the theories of Bourdieu (1990, 1991), Fairclough (1982, 1992, 1995), and Gee (1996, 1999, 2008). This model demonstrates how identity, texts, and cultural models are interrelated, as well as where critical literacy will take place. Consequently, the objectives in applying this model were twofold. First, it intended to examine what cultural models the students recognized, possessed, and identified from texts that affect their identities. Second, it was expected to investigate how the power relations embroiled in the process of identity formation.