Beliefs and emotions in the L2 classroom: Confronting the past, questioning the present, and imagining the future

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Critical Language Teaching (CLT), based on Critical Pedagogy, sees teaching as a cultural, moral, social and political practice. Its goal is to engage students in questioning taken-for-granted world-views, becoming aware of their role in society, and of their potential as agents of change. CLT aims at teaching languages through questioning dominant ideologies, reflecting on these questions and on individual’s roles in society and potential action (Chun, 2016).

However, the nexus between critical pedagogical theories and L2 classroom practices is underresearched (Crookes, 2013). Thus, this presentation hopes to be a space where critically oriented researchers and practitioners can dialogue and bridge theories and actual approaches.

I share my experience teaching English to Japanese students in Hawai’i within a critically oriented curriculum, which included potentially controversial topics (i.e., the attack on Pearl Harbor). Tasks were designed to prepare students to engage in and develop linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. Students were asked to take pictures during a fieldtrip to USS Arizona Memorial (aka Pearl Harbor); these student-generated pictures were used as springboard to explore students’ knowledge, beliefs, and emotions related to this event. Classroom audio recordings and students’ journals indicated feelings of guilt for home country’s past actions, questioning of country’s current stance, and desire to never forget.

Implications include using student-generated pictures to engage students in critical thinking, and to facilitate meaningful, authentic discussions. In addition, student-generated pictures can ” help create dialogic spaces for students to explore and create newer ways to make meanings, enabling their agentive roles as knowledge producers in their own right.” (Chun, 2016, p. 3)


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