

## Exploring Critical Literacy Practices in Teaching Reading among Grade 10 ESL Filipino Teachers

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### Abstract

This study investigated: (1) the critical literacy practices prevalently used by the Grade 10 ESL teachers; (2) their beliefs about reading instruction, the learners, and critical literacy; and (3) the extent of use of critical literacy in their lesson plan. To gain better understanding of the problem, a descriptive method under the mixed-method approach was applied. Specifically, an explanatory-sequential method was utilized wherein the first phase of data gathering procedure was quantitative followed by the qualitative data collection. In this vein, data triangulation was performed as well to achieve reliability and validity of the results. Hence, aside from the survey and interview questionnaires as research instruments, lesson plan content analysis was also used to solidify the results of the study. The findings of the study disclosed that critical literacy practices like problem-posing, promoting social justice, and counter-text production were prevalently used. However, due to low-level language proficiency among students, lack of resources, and discreet-point system of testing, they tended to de-emphasize critical literacy in their reading classroom. In fact, the results of the lesson plan content analysis evidenced that they applied critical literacy like promoting social justice however, they confirmed that sometimes critical literacy was not carried out due to the factors stated above. Through this, the results in the first two phases of the study were triangulated.

**Keywords:** Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Critical Literacy, Critical Literacy Practices, Teaching Beliefs, Data Triangulation

### Introduction

The Philippines has implemented the K to 12 curriculum from school year 2012-2013 (DepEd, 2013). It focuses on the acquisition of 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and risk tasking, and cultural sensitivity alongside with other skills to produce holistically-developed graduates (SEAMEO, 2012). As a result, the language teaching in the Philippines included critical literacy (CL) as one of its guiding principles in designing the English curriculum framework.

Critical literacy makes a great impact in today's age because it develops criticality among readers who do not only read the word but also the culture or the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Critical literacy assumes that all texts are not neutral, for they surface partiality or the favoring of a certain people while marginalizing others. Hence, it is very important that schools develop critical literacy in order for the students to understand, criticize, evaluate, and challenge the text. With that, the implication of critical literacy is that schools can produce critically literate individuals.

There are many definitions of CL in many different ways by numerous literacy educators, theorists, and linguists (Luke, 2004).

For McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004), CL talks about issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action. Its focal point lies on problematizing a socio-cultural issue and its

complexity. Finally, it disrupts the common understanding of an issue by examining it from multiple perspectives.

For Lewison et al. (2002), aside from disrupting a common situation or understanding about an issue, CL is about interrogating multiple viewpoints. Likewise, it centers on reflecting sociopolitical issues. Finally, the most important feature above all is the promotion of social justice and social action.

For Luke and Freebody (1999), CL is viewed not only about reading critically a text or being a ‘text critic’, but in harnessing CL, one must understand and take position as a code breaker, meaning maker, and text user. These roles provide a holistic view about reading from the surface understanding of text up to the development of higher order thinking skills.

Molden (2007) goes to say that critical literacy is synonymous to “analyzing text”. Thus, as a critical literate or critical reader, one is not a passive consumer of ideas or ideology impressed by the author in a text but rather has the capability to criticize or challenge the text actively; thus, one becomes an active reader based on his understanding of the world or culture. This notion about reading proposes that a reader should not limit himself on comprehending what is written in the selection he/she reads, but rather one must have a critical edge as David Pearson (2001, as cited in McLaughlin, 2004) described it. In this relation, Jongsma (1995, in Virelli 2006) posits the efficacy of practicing CL inside the classroom as it develops higher level thinking skills among students.

In hindsight, Freire and Macedo (1987) defined reading as a process not only involving around “decoding the written word or language” but rather is “preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world”; thus ‘reading’ is reading the word and the world. This presupposes the idea that reading a text is not only focused on deciphering of words and symbols nor convened strictly on “mechanically memorizing” the language that is initiated by the teacher. Reading should be a product of personal reflection of the “world”— understanding the underlying culture, ideology, and even biases in the text.

The Department of Education (DepEd) takes CL as part of the language curriculum framework since 2013. However, its implementation and success depend on how teachers take it as part of the instruction, specifically, in terms of their beliefs about the reading process, the instruction, the learners, and CL. This is proven by Richards and Rodgers (2001 in Kuzborska, 2011), Johnson (1992), and Harste and Burke (1977 in Johnson, 1992). The implementation of any teaching practice including CL is greatly affected by the teachers’ perceptions about the learner and reading instruction. There are few researches concerning teachers’ different CL beliefs which hinder the implementation of critical literacy as observed among ES/FL classrooms. As a result, teachers’ beliefs are scrutinized in this present undertaking as they possess a direct control in the employment or choice of CL teaching practices. Hence, this study, metaphorically put, gives voice to how teachers practice and view CL in their classroom. Identifying CL beliefs, either positive or negative, is deemed to be significant as this can be a stepping stone towards identifying the problems of its implementation in the Philippines which in turn can help educators to frame effective solutions.

There are only few studies describing how CL is applied not only in the Philippine classroom but also among other EFL countries. Given the present condition, the researchers decided to explore how critical literacy works in the Philippines.

### **Objectives**

This study seeks to explore the different CL practices, beliefs, and lesson plans and/or logs used by teachers in the reading instruction. Specifically, this research is premised to find out:

- the Critical Literacy practices prevalently used by teachers in teaching reading;

- the teachers' teaching beliefs in terms of the reading process, instruction, learners and CL; and
- the extent to which Critical Literacy was used in the teachers' lesson plan.

### **Methodology**

This research used descriptive approach under the Mixed Method research design which used both quantitative and qualitative answers and means of analyses. Specifically, it took the explanatory sequential method wherein quantitative data gathering took place first before the qualitative analyses of the respondents' beliefs and their lesson plans. Creswell (2014) contended that this study was basically explanatory since the derived quantitative data can be explained further through qualitative data gathering; essentially, it was also sequential since the quantitative collecting of data must come first before any qualitative judgment can be derived about the phenomenon.

There were three phases of data gathering: the survey phase which made use of survey questionnaires, the interview phase which made use of interview questionnaires and the content analysis phase which made use of lesson plans as objects for scrutiny. The researchers employed the 6-step model of Creswell (2014) in analyzing the data from the last two phases.

Data and methodological triangulation were applied in this study for two reasons. First, there were many data to be gathered with different types of data gathering tools to describe the phenomenon under study. Second, data triangulation also played an important role in establishing validity and reliability in the qualitative result of this study. Carter et al. (2014) described it as "a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources." The utilization of different data allowed the researchers to examine and justify conclusions critically.

The target school was Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino High School (BNAHS) in Makati City. There were different sampling techniques employed for every phase. Since there were only eight grade 10 English teachers in BNAHS, all eight grade 10 English teachers participated in the first phase of the data collection. For the second phase, purposeful sampling was utilized, only 2 master's and non-master's degree holders were taken. The same sample was used for the third phase also. However, one master's degree holder and one non-master's degree holder wished not to participate with the lesson plan content analysis. As a result, only two respondents—one with master's degree while the other one was otherwise continued with the data collection.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***Critical Literacy Practices***

In terms of McLaughlin and DeVogd list of CL practices, 8 or 100% of the teacher-respondents practiced problem posing while 3 or 37.5% utilized juxtapositioning. In terms of Lewison et. al. list of CL practices, 8 or 100% allowed their students to take action and promote social justice, and to interrogate multiple viewpoints through taking of perspectives, 7 or 87.5% let the students examine sociopolitical issue in the text in different angles, finally, 4 or 50 % let the students focus on how "power" in the society works. In terms of Behrman's list of practices, 8 or 100% of the teacher-respondents let the students create their own counter-texts, 6 or 75% let students read a text from the resistant perspective, 6 or 75% allowed supplementary texts, 5 or 62.5% conducted student-choice research projects, 4 or 50% let students read multiple versions of the story and only 1 or 12.5% let the students take social action for a particular issue presented in the text. In terms of Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model, 7 or 87.5% of the teacher-respondents let the students

function as code-breaker while reading, 6 or 75% of them let the students function as meaning-maker, 5 or 62.5% of them let the students function as text user and 3 or 37.5% of them let the students function as a text critic.

Based on the quantitative data, all eight grade 10 English teachers practiced problem posing, producing counter-texts, formulating solutions, and interrogating multiple viewpoints. However, only few teachers were interested in taking alternative perspectives, focusing on sociopolitical issues, text criticizing, reading multiple texts, and taking social action. It can be deduced that while almost all teachers were practicing CL there were still many CL practices with fewer teachers who practiced them.

### ***Teaching Beliefs***

#### *Reading Process: From basic to complex*

In terms of the reading process, teachers believed that reading should focus on critical consciousness building up from linguistic competence and basic comprehension of the story. Reading should be implemented in an integrated manner based on the readers' readiness, and should be done collaboratively.

#### *The Learners*

In terms of the learners, teacher-respondents believed that students should learn linguistic competence, personal relevance to the text, literal comprehension, ability to write, reading skills, cultural relevance of the text, and the critical ability of the students. In the reading instruction, the students were said to be active, critical audience of the instruction while other teachers still regarded them as passive receivers of instruction.

#### *The Reading Instruction*

In terms of instruction, Teacher A contended that the model of instruction should be dependent on the type of students: bottom-up for not-so-good learners but top-down for advanced students. Teacher D used the interactive model, both top-down and bottom-up model for learning. Teacher C, on the other hand, favored the bottom-up model. However, teacher B was trying to point out that before reading, there was always motivation like movie-watching, etc.

#### *Critical Literacy*

Based on their experiences, there were problems when they implemented CL. First, they needed to be cautious in saying those sociopolitical issues as this could influence the students' "innocent" mindsets. Second, students needed to be proficient in understanding the text first before CL was introduced. Third, if teachers used CL they tended to favor the use of the mother-tongue (Filipino) over English since students tended to participate and learn more through it.

Three out of the four teacher-respondents were aware of CL as part of the curriculum. Although teacher D was aware of CL in the curriculum, a classroom teacher had to choose as to which to prioritize in the lesson, of what should be taught in the classroom since there was a 'disconnection' between the curriculum and the list of competencies which were to be tested among students as released in the division office. CL was part of the curriculum and teacher D had good impressions about it, however, their teaching performance needed to be assessed based on the Mean Percentile Score of the tests whose content was different from the curriculum with that of CL. So, there was an existing competing priorities among teachers whether to focus on CL or just stick to the list of competencies that the students were supposed to be tested at the end of every quarter.

The respondents considered the level of proficiency of the students as a hindrance in the implementation of CL. One interesting reason cited by one of the respondents is that because the students had a low proficiency in the language, they were less likely to comprehend the text, also affecting the critical understanding of the text. One of the teachers even posited that the low level of

understanding of the text as brought about by the students' low proficiency in the language could really affect the achievement of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

One of the teachers believed that teachers were also encountering difficulties in implementing CL. Teacher B exclaimed that the scarcity of learning materials had also affected them. She considered the lack of reading materials to be used by the students as a hindrance to CL implementation.

In terms of the length of familiarity with CL, teacher A held a very long-before experience with CL for almost 21 years since 1996. While teachers B, C and D were all informed recently through professional development and the K to 12 roll out. Teacher A had come to know it when she was in her graduate studies. Teacher B had also graduated with master's degree and come to know it at the advent of K to 12. When it comes to the specific facets upon which the teachers had come to know CL, four teacher-respondents agreed that they started to know CL through professional development.

As gleaned from the interpretation, teachers had setbacks in implementing CL due to students' proficiency, lack of resources, and discreet-point test system. They were all aware of CL but not all teachers had a positive take about CL brought about by their different experiences with it in their instruction.

#### ***Lesson Plan Content Analysis***

##### *Pre-Reading Activity*

Teacher B introduced the lesson by letting the students recall any Filipino politician who betrayed his/her fellowmen. Afterwards, she asked the students to define the word 'epic' and give examples of it. On the other hand, Teacher D's lesson plan had the following pre-reading activities: motivation through viewing, statement of the objectives, building the background of the author and the setting of the story and vocabulary development.

##### *During Reading Activities*

Teacher B instructed the students to just read the selection silently; whereas, teacher D assigned a paragraph per group to be read in unison (choral reading). During reading, teacher D asked the students question for every paragraph, this is the Direct Reading-Thinking Aloud Method of reading.

##### *Post Reading Activities*

After reading, teacher B asked students to describe the characters of the epic. Next, the students were expected to answer questions and discuss it with a partner. With that, the day 1 for the 'The Song of Roland' ended. The second day resumed with the recalling of the characters in the story followed by asking the students about the importance of asking someone for help when in need. Next, teacher B allowed students to make a short dramatic presentation about a certain problem wherein there is betrayal in the Philippine society. Then, the group discussed the best solutions for the problem emphasizing how to build ties. Finally, she asked the students about what they learned from the selection. Meanwhile, Teacher D gave a short quiz about the story which focused on the basic comprehension of the text like the sequencing of events in the story. Next, through round table discussion, teacher D allowed the students to discuss the character, setting and the theme of the story critically and collaboratively. Teacher D wanted the students to underpin the sociopolitical relevance of 'justice' from the setting in the story to the present Philippine society. Moreover, in the enrichment activities, students were expected to make their own movie adaptation of the story under study in the Philippine setting. Finally, teacher D allowed students to make their own creative presentation in order to raise awareness about the effects of discrimination.

## Conclusion

Since the lived experiences documented in this present undertaking only came from the four respondents, only moderate generalizations were drawn from the qualitative results. In light of the findings of the present undertaking the researchers therefore conclude that:

1. All eight grade 10 English teachers practiced problem posing, producing counter-texts, formulating solutions and interrogating multiple viewpoints.
2. Teachers hold various beliefs and assumptions about the reading process, the learners, the reading instruction which inform the implementation of CL.
3. Teachers believe that reading should focus on the development of critical ability of the students as scaffold by their basic comprehension of the text. In order to achieve CL, teachers believe that students must be taught with the basic comprehension and literal understanding of the text as well as the linguistic conventions before putting forth CL.
4. While some of the teachers regard students as the center of the educative process, thus learner-centered; there are still few teachers who consider students as passive receivers of instruction.
5. Teachers believe that Junior High School students might be too young in terms of their 'mindset' to understand the complexities of Marxism as well as other social issues as parts of CL in teaching literature.
6. Teachers believe that CL is beneficial to students especially in making decisions for themselves; however, if teachers wish to employ CL, they need not to be strict with the use of English as a medium of instruction instead use Filipino.
7. Almost all teachers are familiar with CL. However, teachers need to make a hard decision as to which to prioritize— CL or other skills as predetermined by the institution which are to be tested quarterly.
8. Teachers feel that there is a disconnection between curricula— one from the DepEd wherein CL is included and the second list of predetermined skills to be tested by the institution and the division office.
9. Teachers believe that the students' level of proficiency in terms of the language and reading performance truly affects the achievement of CL.
10. Teachers mention lack of available resources like time and reading materials as one of the problems which hinder the implementation of CL.
11. Teachers believe that through CL, students with different cultural background could take perspectives and establish harmony, broaden their horizons, respect individual differences and establish social responsibility.
12. They also believe that it is their job to guide patiently low academically-achieving students in order to achieve CL.
13. Using McLaughlin and DeVogd's contention about lesson planning for CL, both the lesson plan of teacher D and the lesson log of teacher B are able to show CL before, during and after reading. Thus, triangulating the CL practices and CL beliefs.

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