

Promoting Critical Literacy through Self-Discovery-Based English Learning

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Abstract

The present study describes and explores an elective English course offered during the 2011 spring semester at a university in central Taiwan. The course invited 15 non-English-majors to approach, through comprehension and discussion activities, various texts related to self-discovery issues. This study focuses on how the course was implemented from a critical literacy perspective with two research concerns: (1) What was students' opinion of this self-discovery English course? and (2) How did students perceive themselves in relation to the three identities addressed in the class? With a mixed research design, this study analyzes quantitative data from a questionnaire and qualitative data such as classroom observations, students' assignments and artifacts, their final reflection papers, and follow-up interviews. In addition to a description of the implementation of the course, this research identified two recurring themes during the data analysis process. First, students positively responded to the classroom materials and activities, i.e., authentic texts and meaningful collaborative discussions. Second, many students realized that they had various social identities through the classroom exercises related (a) to who they were and (b) to their relationships with their family and with their friends. In conclusion, findings of the study show that the EFL classroom can make students reflective about their lives and responsive to the input of theme-based materials. This study suggests the potential for critical literacy in Taiwan and for the development of critical competence in students. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future instruction/research are provided at the end of the paper.

Key words: critical literacy, self-discovery, multiple identities, authentic texts, collaborative discussions

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