

Problematizing problematisation: insights from critical pedagogy in a writing lesson in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Problematization is the means by which critical pedagogy attempts to destabilise power relations related to gender, race, class, identity etc. Studies in critical pedagogy in language teaching explore different ways of problematisation treating problematisation as classroom practice. However, they do not specifically address the teacher's struggle in employing problematisation and the learners' experience with it in classroom settings. Hence the complexity of problematisation remains neglected in research in critical pedagogy in classroom contexts. This article explores the notion of problematisation through an analysis of a writing lesson involving undergraduate students in Bangladesh. It analyses both the teacher's and a student's encounters with and reflections on problematisation throughout the lesson, and reveals that problematisation embodies complexities, and is empowering when it is self-reflexive.

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Introduction

The students in my undergraduate writing class were hotly engaged in discussion. The discussion on the state of their nation, Bangladesh, led them to explore the contention that *the people* of Bangladesh as a whole are corrupt. Rima, one of the most outspoken students in the class, declared that '90% of the high officials are corrupt', to argue for the given notion. The majority of the students in the class seemed to agree with her. The small minority who disagreed struggled to voice their counter-arguments, as they were drowned out by the high-pitched, exuberant voices of the majority.

As the teacher, I (Talukder) faced a dilemma in doing critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997, 2005; Luke, 2004, 2013; McLaren, 1989; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pennycook, 2001) in my class. I was aware that the majority of the students led by Rima were over-generalising. As critical pedagogy advocates problematising 'unjust assumptions' (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Kincheloe, 2008; Luke, 2013), I felt the need for problematising the act of over-generalisation. But the pedagogical dilemma I was struggling with was: When should I intervene? If I join the heated discussion, would I run the risk of 'silencing' some

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