

**The 10 - Minute Slot: Arena for Exploration of
Critical Pedagogy Possibilities Among
Tribal English Language Learners**

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Abstract

The inhibitions felt by tribal learners pose a challenge to their integration among peer, participation and academic progress. English is a foreign language and an unfamiliar one – given that the tribals live secluded and cut off from main stream population. The tribal learner often feels insecure in ELL classes. This could affect his overall academic development. In order to reduce his hesitation and draw him into active participation – the possibilities of strategic designing of curriculum and classroom activities might be explored. The use of CP, in encouraging enthusiastic participation among tribal ELL, has been attempted in an experimental study – and the results were found remarkable.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy, debate, problem posing, problem solving, socio-political issues, English language learning.

Critical Pedagogy, as espoused by the educational philosopher Paulo Freire, is the creation of a classroom atmosphere where students and teachers learn together. Students draw on knowledge that they are in possession of and this renders them capable to speak with greater authority. Societal Critical Pedagogy helps students challenge domination of any form. It helps them resist any form of social oppression. The tribal population finds integration with the mainstream difficult, as they sense a hostility and are aware that the mainstream views them, using Paulo Freire's words "as people from another world who happened to fall accidentally into their world" Freire (2009). Critical Pedagogy is a teaching approach that is inspired by critical theory and helps students analyse social issues and find solutions to them (Wikiversity). Ruth Harman and Kristen French (2004), have developed the praxis of Performative Critical Pedagogy, another strain of CP, which can be used to address these socio-political issues through dramatized performances by students. When students take roles in such drama or role-play performances, they internalize the character they enact, and language generation becomes very

spontaneous. Thus, Critical Pedagogy can help them take active part in the socio-political affairs of the country and be part of mainstream population and citizenry. As Henry Giroux (2010) postulates, Critical Pedagogy can create in them a ‘consciousness of freedom’.

Based on this pedagogy, the following study was attempted as a means to improve the recipient learners’ English language skills, general interest towards learning, social awareness and problem-solving abilities.

A class of 40 high school students of Standard 9 from Govt. Tribal High School, Meenankal, Trivandrum district was chosen. The last 10 minutes of every regular English class was set aside and used to discuss an issue related to the tribal learner’s lives. The issue posed a problem to which solutions had to be found. The issue was put before them for discussion. The discussion would require students to use their problem-solving skills, debating talent, communication abilities, spoken skill and reasoning.

The foreseen advantages of implementing this strategy are many.

1. **Awareness about problems they face:** Many tribal children are not aware of the practical problems faced by their parents and their community in general. Due to this, posterity is often caught unawares when faced with situations to which proactive measures were not found. In line with Ira Shor’s definition of Critical Pedagogy, which encourages a probe beneath apparent surfaces of issues (Empowering Education, 1992), such a discussion would generate a better awareness.
2. **Possible solutions:** With many heads working together at finding solutions to the problem put before them, the possibility of finding good, practical and creative ways of tackling troublesome issues is plenty.
3. **Reduces shyness:** The lively and fun-filled atmosphere created during the discussions among peer, would cause shy children to unconsciously shed inhibitions and participate – gradually, if not immediately.
4. **Confidence building:** These sessions provide ample scope for the exhibition of talent by students and in turn to be appreciated. Appreciation would reinforce their budding confidence.
5. **Awareness that the problems can be solved:** Many problems faced by the tribal-community looms large before them leaving them bewildered. They often do not realize that all problems should have a solution.
6. **General improvement in problem-solving ability:** These discussions and resultant solution-finding activities can improve the learner’s general problem-solving skills. He will learn not be shy away from problems but to face them head-on.
7. **Chiseling of life skills:** The improvement of one life skill often causes the unconscious sharpening of other life skills – thereby contributing to general personality development.

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8. **Improvement in communication and debating skills:** This is an important life skill, the development of which goes a long way in building relationships, asserting oneself, and carving a niche for oneself in one's social space. This dispels wrong notions about the correctness of noisy arguments and reinforces the need for decorum and etiquette while establishing one's point of view.
9. **Spoken language, fluency, pronunciation can be trained:** Repeated sessions as these, provide ample scope for the use of verbal language and therefore improvement in vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation.
10. **Reasoning gets sharpened:** Repeated discussions and arguments compel the use of reason and rationale. This would sharpen the learners general reasoning ability.
11. **Listening, comprehension, analysis and presence of mind gets quicker and more accurate:** Everyday sessions would help the learner be better prepared and improve his ability to concentrate, listen attentively, comprehend, sift and analyse information and the presence of mind to put forward fitting arguments.

In hopeful anticipation of such positive changes in learner-behaviour and to ascertain its feasibility, the present study was conducted in a class of 40 students.

Methodology used:

1. Classroom Observation – (a) General class (b) Individual students
2. Grading Scale

Experimental Schedule

- Observation of regular class – 5 classes
- Division of learners (40) into two groups – Control and Experimental Group (20 learners each) through systematic sampling
- 10-minute slot classes – 20 classes – taken for Experimental Group
- Post-experimental – 5 regular classes – taken for all the 40 learners
- Observations are recorded - Pre-experimental and Post-experimental
- Progress-assessment using tabular grid based on predetermined criteria
- Record of Progress

Observations of Regular Class – 5 classes

1. Lecture method: The teacher disseminated knowledge and learners were passive recipients. Interactions between student and teacher or among fellow-students was minimal.
2. Lack of student participation: The scope for student participation was meager. Students answered information-questions asked by the teacher.

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3. Many disinterested/sleepy students: As all students could not be included in the classroom-activity, many seemed disinterested and sleepy.
4. Talking / distracted: Learners could not be kept attentive all along the class and they engaged in aimless talking. They were generally distracted.
5. Do not respond to questions: Many students seemed uninterested and did not respond to questions. Questions were met with incoherent answers, or 'I don't know' or absolute silence.
6. Under pressure when asked to answer questions: Students looked stressful when they were compelled to answer.

This study has used the following list of topics for discussion during the 10-minute slot.

1. The damage caused by floods to the tribal hamlets.
2. Threat of animal attack from forests.
3. Lack of medical facilities.
4. Dropouts among tribal school children.
5. Lack of transport and communication facilities.
6. Corruption among officials responsible for tribal upliftment.
7. Poverty and unemployment.

The above-mentioned topics were given for discussion. The teacher posed problems related to these issues. The teacher continuously facilitates active participation through prompting, encouraging arguments for and against a proposition. No answer is negated or rendered unworthy. They are instead clarified or modified to acceptable forms. Appreciation of good ideas and the attempt to speak become positive reinforcements.

Predetermined Criteria for Class Observation – General Class

1. Participation –No response/ lukewarm/ active/ noisy and lack of discipline
2. Enthusiasm and Interest – Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor
3. Ideas – Creative and rational - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor
4. Language use - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor
5. Productiveness of discussion - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor

Predetermined Criteria for Class Observation –Individual Students

1. Confidence - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor
2. Clarity of ideas and communication - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor
3. Fluency - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor
4. Vocabulary - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor

5. Sense of achievement - Very good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor

The following were noticeable positive changes in learner behavior during the course of the experiment.

1. Active participation: Students participated actively as the issues discussed concerned their own lives.
2. Inhibitions reduce: The enthusiasm exhibited by some students in discussing problems that affected all the students alike, impelled the shy students to unconsciously shed inhibitions and participate in the discussions.
3. Learners absorbed in activities of class: As the discussions attracted active participation by students, there was no scope for distraction.
4. Learners encouraged to speak in English: The strict instruction by the teacher that learners were allowed to speak only in English during the discussions, did not deter them – as the temptation to voice their ideas could not be resisted.
5. Fun-filled atmosphere in class: The discussions, arguments and counter-arguments generated fun and laughter in class making the atmosphere lively and inspiring.
6. Learners look forward to these slots: Learners keenly awaited these slots. No time was lost in having to coax them to speak.

Limitations of This Study

Constraints of time and other resources have permitted the study to be conducted in only one class. Results may vary when conducted among students of other schools or states.

Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations

The results of the study reveal that the immense possibilities of Critical Pedagogy might be explored to make English language learning interesting and fun-filled. This would not only improve the language ability of learners, it would also increase their socio-political awareness and strengthen their resolve to resist any form of domination. This way, a country's educational vision can envisage the formation of a well-informed, evolved and strong citizenry.

Till such time as a curriculum to suit the tribal community's particular learning habits and requirements is not formulated and implemented, the Department might provide for the integration of such methods into existing teaching methods.

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