

**Troubling essentialised constructions of cultures:
An analysis of a critical discourse analysis approach to teaching
and learning language and culture**

Thesis submitted by

Mehtap Kocatepe BA, MA

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the ways in which a group of international students respond to a critical discourse analysis approach to teaching language and culture. It reports a qualitative case study of the implementation of two five-week programs in two existing classes in an ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students) centre.

In the field of foreign/second language teaching there are persuasive arguments for the introduction of an explicit focus on culture through language in ways that raise students' awareness of cultural diversity and trouble the stereotypical, normative assumptions that underpin many cultural representations. Working from this perspective, I used critical discourse analysis as the basis of a program designed to contribute to the development of a critical awareness of culture with the aim of encouraging students to engage with new, hybrid and transcultural forms of representation, identity and social participation.

The data, consisting of recorded classroom interactions, interviews and reflective student journals, have been analysed drawing on postcolonial theory. In particular, I focus on the discourses that constitute students' responses to the pedagogical intervention and explore the subject positions they appear to take up. The research seeks to add to a growing body of work that explores the links between the deconstruction of cultural essentialism in texts and reconstructed understandings of difference and diversity. The present study showed that the use of the analytical tools of CDA in conjunction with ethnographic methods was effective in encouraging students to problematise the circulation of hierarchical categorisations in various text types and to recognise cultural hybridity and complexity. Some students demonstrated that a deconstruction of textual realities and the conceptualisation of alternatives led to the disruption of self/other margins and facilitated students' negotiations of difference in the fluid, hybrid spaces in-between familiar and foreign, local and global discourses, relations and identities. Responses from a number of students suggest that some elements of the program constituted particularly effective components of a critical discourse analysis approach to teaching and learning culture and the thesis explores ways in which these elements could be developed in future programs.

The thesis also incorporates a self-reflexive analysis of the research where I question my own role in introducing a particular way of approaching texts and viewing the world. In particular,

some students perceived this pedagogical intervention as an imposition of my own ideals of appropriate methods of questioning and ways of defining and identifying discriminatory views and practices. This highlights the complexity involved in using the authority of teaching to make available to students a particular worldview with which they can resist authoritative worldviews. The data suggest that a critical discourse analysis approach and its attendant strategies for problematising and questioning the legitimacy of assumptions and claims in a text might have created, at least for some students, the conceptual space to turn a critical gaze on the pedagogy to which they were exposed.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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