PASAA
Volume 54
July - December 2017

Building a Culture of Peace through Critical Literacy with the Net Generation

Dumrong Adunyarittigun
Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand
Email: dumrong.a@arts.tu.ac.th

Abstract

Conflicts and violence either inside or outside the classroom can affect the quality of learning within the classroom. Critical literacy is proposed as a strategic instructional practice which aims at teaching a nation's citizens to be literate and raising their critical and social consciousness (Freire, 2007). This paper suggests how teachers, as intellectual labor (Smyth, 2011), can implement a critical literacy framework to build a culture of peace in a reading class where students hold different 'taken-for-granted' ideologies of being 'us' and 'them'. It also proposes how Net Generation students in our EFL classrooms can make a significant contribution to the transformation of conflicts and violence stemming from divisions, hierarchy of differences and inequalities of the society into peace.

Keywords: critical literacy, culture of peace, Net Generation

Introduction

Conflict in classrooms and communities has become commonplace. Conflicts in schools or out of schools such as in families or societies can significantly affect our students' motivation to learn, intellectual curiosity, learning performance and academic achievement (Johnson, & Johnson, 1995, 1996). Conflict occurs when an individual's needs, interests, wants or values are incompatible with someone else's, and this causes the individual to express an emotional reaction to the situation by showing disagreement and interfering with what someone else needs to get or to have (Mayer, 2000). Conflict and violence in our society stem from historical divisions, hegemony and privilege, and day-to-day inequalities. Shapiro (2010) pointed out that violent conflicts will take place when people see their view of the world as the only accurate and acceptable reality, when those who hold more power make social injustice or inequality, or when people fail to appreciate or recognize the presence or value of others. Emotion can exacerbate conflict (Mayer, 2000). In addition, when people decide to take sides, this makes them choose to listen to "us" and refuse to listen to others.

How about conflicts in our classrooms and schools? There are many forms of conflict in school. Araki (1990) and Johnson and Johnson (1996) pointed out that over eighty percent of the conflicts in school involved physical fights and verbal insults such as hitting, kicking, scratching, verbal harassment, gossip/rumor, threats of physical force and friendship relationship issues.

Categorically speaking, classrooms have been viewed as important contexts where effective approaches can be used to advance world citizenship, to give students opportunities to understand and practice in participatory democracy (Cohen, Christman & Gold, 1998), to support social justice and to resolve conflicts peacefully (Hill-Collins, 1986; Eisler & Miller, 2004; Langputeh, 2008; Wong & Grant, 2009; Mulcahy, 2011). They have become a context where inaccurate, misleading and adverse beliefs or prejudices against each other can be eliminated (UNESCO, 2000; Langputeh, 2008). However, this elimination is rare since teaching and learning in classrooms are often seen as repositories or what is called Banking Education (Freire, 2007). Learning is reception of knowledge deposited by teachers. Teachers

deposit their ideas and transmit beliefs to students. Within this context, the potential for students to learn and be creative is limited. The dominant ideologies and inequalities of the society are deposited upon them. Freire (2007) believed that this is a form of oppression and is seen as a field for the reproduction of inequality (Crean & Lynch, 2011). An alternative way to resolve conflicts and build a culture of peace for students in our classroom, presently identified as Net Generations, for your consideration is cultivating their minds with critical consciousness through critical literacy (Freire, 2007).

Freire and Macedo (1987) and Freire (2007) proposed that resolving conflicts and building peace require advancing citizens to criticize oppression and exploitation. Learners need to be empowered to struggle for learning and for the possession of power and equal status (Kellner, 1989). Critical literacy developed from Freire's philosophy is a strategic instructional practice which aims at teaching a nation's citizens to be literate and critical, and raising their critical and social consciousness and hopes to create a more just society through problem posing, dialog and critique of social and political problems (Shor, 1987; Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Hagood, 2002; McLean, 2006). In addition, learners will be ready to listen to multiple viewpoints, exchange ideas, raise critical questions, be aware of social problems and social injustice and be ready to defend themselves in a peaceful means. In this paper, I will review who Net Generations are and discuss what critical literacy is and basic conditions that maximize implementing critical literacy to nurture their critical consciousness. Finally, how to implement critical literacy to promote peace will be discussed.

Net Generation: Who are They?

Net Generation or Net Gen is referred to with many terms such as Generation Z, Post-Millennials, Plurals, digital natives, iGeneration or Gen Next (Wiedmer, 2015; Rickes, 2016). They are those who were born from 1996 to 2009 (Young, 2009) and were born with PCs, mobile phones, gaming devices and the Internet. In other words, they are our current college students in our classrooms. In order to find ways to prepare the Net Gens to deal with conflict in the current contexts, teachers should understand their unique characteristics. This will help

teachers to implement their instruction to best serve the Net Gens' needs.

Characteristics of Net Generation

1. Multitasking. They are capable of working on many different tasks at the same time (Kleinschmit, 2015) and processing a great amount of information (Iorgulescu, 2016). The familiar picture of the Net Gens working on their tasks is that they prefer working on their projects on a PC or notebook, connecting to their Twitter and Facebook on their iPad, playing Line on their iPhone and others. They are working on 4 or 5 different screens at once.
2. Technology-reliance (Wiedmer, 2015). Net Gens are very proficient and comfortable with technology. Metaphorically, neither can they breathe nor live without being connected to technology. They use World Wide Web, text messaging, MP3, smartphones and tablets and have engagements with digital modes of information.
3. Social media interaction. Social media is Net Gens'common means of communication with their friends and families and even with strangers. On average, they use the smartphones about 15.4 hours per week more than other means of communication (Kleinschmit, 2015). They are confident in sharing their privacy or their personal details with virtual friends or strangers via Facebook and Twitter (Rickes, 2016).
4. Having short-attention span. Net Gens share information at a very fast pace or in milliseconds. After they receive information from any websites or social media, they read it and post it on their Facebook or Instagram in a very few seconds to share the information. Net Gens do not seriously spend appropriate amount of time considering the reliability of the information they have received (Wiedmer, 2015).
5. Preference for working independently rather than working in a team (Iorgulescu, 2016). Net Gens prefer working independently and feel reluctant to work with others in a team. The

aforementioned characteristics (Numbers 1-4) of the Net Gens create this characteristic. Their competence in using technology, having a great deal of communications on social media rather than face-to-face communication and having a short attention span affect their ability to listen, communication skills and interpersonal skills (Iorgulescu, 2016).

Then, teachers should find appropriate means of preparing our Net Gen students to competently use technology and tools of communication to navigate and critically evaluate a lot of information (Gainer, 2013), and to use the information to make informed judgments. The students will be properly trained to work cooperatively with other people with diverse opinions, to become critically conscious and to voice their own opinions, resulting in resolving conflicts and sustaining peaceful classroom and peaceful society. Critical literacy has become an alternative instructional approach to help our students reach these goals. Next, I will discuss what critical literacy is.

Critical Literacy: What and Why?

There are a number of meanings of critical literacy. In this section, a brief overview of the critical theory from which the idea of critical literacy is derived will be discussed and then multiple meanings of critical literacy in educational discourse from different scholars will be explored and extensively discussed.

The idea of 'critical literacy' is associated with Paulo Freire, the Brazilian philosopher, literacy educator and teacher. It is developed from the critical theory. Critical theory has the goal to explain and identify social problems with new theoretical insights (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Willis, 2011). It addresses connections of the individual to institutions, society and power and to economic and social class issues, language and society, racism, hegemony, inequality, oppression and power (Kincheloe, & McLaren, 2005; Au, 2009). Critical theory emphasizes the important role of individuals as an agent of social change with the ultimate goal of transforming society for the better (Kinchelow, & McLaren, 2005; Au, 2009). In other words, critical theorists are concerned with relieving human sufferings from social inequality and social injustice (Keller, 1993).

Education is a dichotomy: an instrument of domination and an instrument of liberation (Freire, 2007). Education has been proposed as the best approach to advance world citizenship and resolve conflicts peacefully (UNESCO, 1998; Eisler & Miller, 2004; Wong & Grant, 2009; Shapiro, 2010). Illiterate people have limited opportunity to economic and political progress (Graff, 1987). Freire (2007) argued that illiterate people are regarded as a 'constructed product of a society" tremendously creating injustice and unequal society. Education is also viewed as a process of depositing knowledge into students, or "banking education" (Freire, 2007). Critical theorists like Gee (1990) pointed out that education is ironically used to strengthen social inequality, to instill social norms and values designed by elites (Freire named this group 'the oppressor'), and to force lower classes (the oppressed) to accept those norms and values. When the oppressed are educated in this system, they can get the possession of knowledge, advantages, power, status and others, leading them to change their status to the oppressor. Subsequently, they will oppress the oppressed. Freire (2007) viewed this kind of education as an instrument of domination which will produce a never-ending cycle of unequal and unjust society (Hurn, 1993).

Freire, in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2007), proposed critical literacy as an alternative which aims at teaching a nation's citizens to be literate and raising their critical and social consciousness (Wood, Soares, & Watson, 2006). It is viewed as an instrument of liberation (Freire, 2007). He believed that language and literacy are key mechanisms for social construction and social transformation. Critical literacy aims not only at helping people become literate but also at developing critical consciousness and making them become change agents for a better society.

In the next section, critical literacy meaning will be discussed and how critical literacy can be an alternative for social transformation.

Critical Literacy and Its Concepts

The question that has been asked by teachers is, "What is critical literacy?" Novice teachers and those who are interested in implementing critical literacy in their classrooms hesitate to do so since they are not certain of what it looks like in classroom settings (Lewison, Flint, & Van

Sluys, 2002), and there is no fixed form (Yoon, & Sharif, 2015) or unified approach to critical literacy (Luke, 2004, 2014). Is it critical thinking? Is it critical reading? In this section, the concepts of critical literacy will be discussed.

Critical literacy has been defined in different ways. It means different things to different scholars with a broad range of definitions from a pedagogical approach (Kretovics, 1985; Anderson, & Irvine, 1993; Hagood, 2002; McLaughlin, & DeVoogd, 2004; Soares, & Wood, 2010), strategic instructional practices (Freire, 2007; Siegel, & Fernanadez, 2000; Gilbert, 2001; Wood, Soares, & Watson, 2006), a social practice (Freire, & Macedo, 1987), and a philosophical belief system of how texts and language work, understanding about how texts are represented and constructed, and how readers' responses are shaped by social contexts and their experience (Luke, 2000; Beck 2005; Janks, 2014) and of the interaction of language and power relationships (Lohrey, 1998; Hammond, & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Hull, 2000).

In this paper, critical literacy is proposed as a strategic instructional approach that involves teaching reading skills with higher order comprehension which go beyond the level of decoding and detecting author's intentions and biases (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2011), metacognitive awareness strategies, critical awareness of how language, text and power are interconnected to one another. Students will become not only literate but also critical of what they read, their own values and responsibilities in society (Soares, & Wood, 2010) and inequalities and injustice in society (Kretovics, 1985). Students will understand and be aware that meaning of any text is not static, never neutral, unbiased texts (Beck, 2005), but always multiple, contested, shaped and bound by cultural, historical and political contexts (Gainer, 2013) and our experience as people of particular races, ethnicities, genders and social classes (Young, 2001).The control over text meaning constructed is undertaken by hegemonic groups (Morgan, 1997). Students of critical literacy class will be trained to raise their awareness that "the language of the text and the reader's response to it are not neutral" (Young, 2001, p. 4), actively observe and question the normative practices and ideologies portrayed in the text or in their world (Shor, 1987; Hagood, 2002; Freire, 2007), see things with different lenses from different angles (Molden, 2007), accept multiple

meanings and perspectives (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001), especially those that are different from theirs, justify and make meanings from the array of informational sources (i.e. texts, newspapers, multimedia, even virtual worlds) (Beck, 2005) and see the hegemony prevalent in their society and world (Wolk, 2003). The students will be engaged in the analysis, reconstruction and transformation (Luke, 1997, 2000) and become a change agent (Morgan, 1997; Cervetti, et al., 2001) to transform their existing society into a more just, humane, democratic, equal and peaceful world (Keller, 1993; Freire, 2007; Wolk, 2003, Beck 2005). They can understand social issues in relation to their contexts and empower themselves and ultimately take social action (Hammond, & Macken-Horarik, 1999; Hull, 2000).

Basic conditions that help maximize critical literacy

1. **Meaning makers and strategy instruction**. It is very important to help learners become self-directed readers. Readers should be able to actively plan, organize, elaborate, evaluate and regulate their reading in order to construct meanings from texts. To become self-directed and strategic readers, learners, especially those who are struggling readers, may need to receive explicit instruction (Cotterall, 1990; Pressley, 1998, 2002; Gambrell, Block, & Pressley, 2002). To do so, Duffy (2002) suggested that students be taught three types of strategic knowledge: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge. Students should be introduced to useful reading strategies, receive training in how to use specific strategies and be aware of why and when to use them (Gordon & Pearson, 1983; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Raphael & McKinney, 1983; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Brown & Palincsar, 1987). These struggling readers have a repertoire of reading strategies and also know what strategies to use, yet they do not know how to implement them effectively and how to orchestrate their use with strategies (Adunyarittigun, 2005). Paris and his colleagues (1983) explicitly stated that “it is not sufficient to know about strategies, but a reader must also be able to apply them strategically” (p. 19). Many reading scholars (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Gordon

& Pearson, 1983; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Adunyarittigun & Grant, 2003) have confirmed that reading comprehension strategies must be taught explicitly. Therefore, it is essential to teach these readers how to make effective use of reading comprehension strategies.

2. **Using dialogue to optimize learning culture and promote critical literacy engagements in the cooperative and supportive learning environment.** Development of literacy learning is mediated and nurtured and takes place through dialogue (Freire, 2007). Dialogue is a form of communication that requires free, active, equal, and mutual participation by teachers and students (Endres, 2001). Freire (2007) underscored that the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher relationships must not exist, but the teacher's relation to students and the student's relation to one another should emerge. In other words, teachers must be partners of the students in the dialogue. According to Johnson and Johnson (1996), in this supportive and cooperative learning environment, teachers and students' dialogue will be more open and honest in informing each other and being willing to be informed. Students will trust each other and will supportively respond to each other's needs and requests (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996). Of course, this will lead to participatory action to search for solutions to mutual problems.

3. **Teacher as intellectual labor and a change agent**. Teachers have a very important role in the critical literacy classroom. To be intellectual labor and a change agent, teachers need to be open-minded and admit that they are not the single authority of knowledge in the classroom. When teachers have more knowledge in subjects than students do, sometimes they might ignore their students' views, dominate the talk and override the voices of students. This situation is called "emancipatory authority" (Lesley, 1997). Then, what should teachers do? Teachers need to value what students bring to their classroom such as their experience, belief, background knowledge and

culture, and attempt to transfer the authority to voice experience to the students. It might be difficult and complicated to do so at first since our EFL/ESL students might have their educational experience which expect their teachers to act as "the sole authority" (Shor, 1999). Our job as intellectual labor is not limited to helping our EFL/ESL students develop their English language ability anymore. We should facilitate and nurture the development of their minds and critical consciousness (Freire, 2007; Guetta, 2016) with the abilities to understand the diversity of their society, learn to emphatically listen to those who have views different from theirs, accept differences and diversities and work with others collaboratively.

Elements of Critical Literacy Classroom

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002, 2015) reviewed an array of definitions of critical literacy appearing in the research and professional journals and proposed four dimensions of critical social practices: disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical, and taking action to promote social justice. In addition to what Lewison and her colleagues proposed, analysis of a number of critical literacy articles has also uncovered that teachers of critical literacy classrooms incorporated four or more of the following elements into their classrooms.

1. **Implementing learner-centered perspective**. Critical literacy lessons build on students' background knowledge, experience, interest, need, problems and context (Freire, & Macedo), encourage them to have strong engagements with discussion of any issues that are relevant to their lives, society, and world (Beck, 2005) and the relationship of themselves with their world (Freire, 1970). Controversial, provocative and contentious issues about their identity, gender, political and economic issues should be a part of the curriculum (Haste, 2003; Wolk, 2003; Beck, 2005) and topics for contentious discussion in the classrooms. Students in our EFL/ESL class are encouraged to use their literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and their expertise in media and technology to read and understand the

world with a critical and conscious mind (Freire, 2007; Freire, & Macedo, 1987). Teachers can use different types of texts from different sources such as books, media, lyrics, fiction, nonfiction, film, popular culture, social media and the Internet (Alford, 2001; Behrman, 2006; McLaughlin, & DeVoogd, 2011). Their experiences are a major source of their knowledge (Freire, & Macedo, 1987). Students can be encouraged to self-select texts to investigate (Alford, 2001). This will make students have sense of control over the topic of the text (Alford, 2001) and have opportunities to use their own fund of knowledge as a basis of literacy to construct meanings from texts (Moll, 1994). Besides, students will be encouraged to produce work of their own choice such as reading logs, journals, research projects, and writing blogs to provide their readers with a personal response to the topic being learned (Behrman, 2006). They will choose a topic of their own interest and conduct extensive research on it, making students gain more control of their own learning (Alford, 2001).

2. **Disrupting the commonplace**. Lewison and her colleagues (2002, 2015) enunciate this notion into a phrase "seeing the everyday through new lenses" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 382). In order to help students to have critical and inquiring mind, teachers should start from reconceptualizing their ways of teaching and learning from the 'banking education' model to the 'problem-posing' model. There are three interdependent elements to be considered: knowledge, students and teachers. In the banking education model, knowledge is viewed as a static reality and becomes "the property of the teacher rather than a medium evoking the critical reflection of both teachers and students" (Freire, 2007, p. 80). Teachers are the authority of the reality and are seen as the facilitator of students' learning. Then, the knowledge is transmitted from teachers to students. Students passively consume knowledge. In contrast, in the problem-posing model of education, knowledge is seen as 'a reality in progress, in transformation' (Freire, 2007, p. 56). Teachers help students build inquiring minds and engage students with questions. Knowledge is coinvestigated (Beckett, 2013) and constructed by teachers and students. In critical literacy classroom, students

will be exposed to different texts and issues and challenged with questions to investigate reality relevant to their lives, society, environment and their world. They will not passively accept the intended meaning of the author and will strive to question what they read in different angles (Freire, 2007). Classrooms are turned into sites of inquiry (Smyth, 2011) where questions are asked and examined. Teachers will pose questions that stimulate students' thinking to find options and possibilities. The problems should be sensitive and relevant to their life, local culture, belief, society and community (Schleppegrell, & Bowmann, 1995). The students will help each other resolve the problems through dialogue. These questions will range from comprehension questions to critical questions that help students see different angles of the issues. The following are examples of questions:

- Who is the intended audience of the text? Are you the intended audience?
- What are the purposes of the text?
- Does the author have any bias? Do you have any bias, reactions and attitudes towards the text?
- Do you agree or disagree with the text?
- Is the information in the text reliable and applicable to your lives?
- How do you feel about the issue? Does your experience or background influence your thinking or feeling? Why or why not? (Kempe, 2001)
- Whose voice is included in the text and whose voices are missing? What are their perspectives? (Luke, & Freebody, 1997; McLaughlin, & DeVoogd, 2011)
- What does the author want us to think? What language cues in the text lead you to think that way?
- How would you write this article to make it suit your community?
- What would be an alternative for presenting the problem?
- What action can you take based on what you have learned from the article? (McLaughlin, & DeVoogd, 2011).

Problem posing which is used as a means of learning in this class will make students start to question texts that they have

read or heard, for instance, whose voice is expressed and whose voices are missing in the text, or whether there are any biases in the text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). When students are able to pose problems, this reveals that they have thought carefully and critically. They will be less easily convinced to believe in any inaccurate, misleading or prejudicial information they have read or heard, and they will be less easily persuaded by information that causes feelings of hostility or animosity.

3. **Viewing and investigating an issue from multiple viewpoints** (Lewison et al., 2002, 2015). To understand and see a clear complete picture of an issue, readers need to read multiple texts on the same topic, no matter what side the author intends to take, appreciate advocating or resistant perspectives, carefully and astutely listen to multiple viewpoints, and analyze and synthesize the information. Teachers can help introduce students to the subjectivity of authorship (Behrman, 2006) or the stance of speakers. More importantly, students will learn that a text can be interpreted from various positions such as the author's view, the advocates' view, the resistant view (Alford, 2001) and even students' view. Students will be encouraged to identify different aspects of meaning from a text and learn that some readers may have different points of view based on their race, gender and language, sexuality, class and religion (Alford, 2001; Behrman, 2006). This, in turn, makes students learn to express their ideas and personal opinions from a variety of perspectives, leading them to expand their thinking and learning to understand a range of diverse beliefs and positions and more importantly to accept diversity of viewpoints (Green, 1988; McLaughlin, & DeVoogd, 2004). When students have opinions different from their peers, they will attempt to see the issues from different perspectives and different sides. This will lead them to seek for alternative explanations of the conflicts and understand the complexity of the conflicts and stances or beliefs of the oppositions (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004). This will gradually help diminish misunderstanding, hostile feeling and prejudice which are derived from inaccurate and misleading information (Langputeh, 2008). Finally, there is no space for

different "taken-for-granted" ideologies of being "us" and "them", contributing to the desire to settle disputes and negotiation by nonviolent means and relinquish the idea of taking sides. It can be concluded that critical literacy can become the key to build and cultivate a culture of peace in the classroom.

4. **Focusing on sociopolitical issues**. According to Freire and Macedo (1987), critical readers should not only read the words but also "read the world". Students will learn how language influences and shapes their identity and also realize who they are as a part of their culture and society (Shor, 1999). Teachers should help connect literacy lessons to the lives of students and help them connect to their community and to their world (Wolk, 2003; Smyth, 2011). Lewison and her colleagues (2002) strongly postulated that teachers who implement the critical literacy approach should incorporate sociopolitical issues into their language arts classes. Besides learning reading, writing, listening and speaking, students will be engaging in learning how language, power, sociopolitical systems and issues are interrelated. Students will be given opportunities to make use of language to critically question, discuss, debate and critique problems in their school and society and vigilantly challenge 'the taken-for-granted' ideologies of injustice, marginalization and disenfranchisement in their classroom, family and society (Luke, 2012). This will make students challenge and resist the mainstreams that marginalize them (Luke, 2012) and motivate them to take actions to make changes.

5. **Promoting social justice through action** (Lewison et al., 2002; 2015). Promoting social justice through action does not mean only encouraging our students to join or support protest movements. Critical literacy teachers encourage students to engage in praxis (Freire, 2007). Students become conscious of issues and problems in their lives, classrooms and communities which are the origin of conflicts such as poverty, oppression, injustice, inequity, hegemony, marginalization and democracy. They critically investigate the reality of the issues and become aware of their role as change agents (Freire, 2007). Literacy is

used for helping students achieve a critical perspective on language and power. The forefront of critical literacy is praxis—reflection and action upon the reality in order to put it into action. The students become linguistically equipped in order to understand how language is used to dominate others, to defend themselves and other marginalized groups in the world of political, cultural and social conflict (Endres, 2001) and also to struggle against social inequity and injustice (Freire, 2007) and an oppressive culture (Endres, 2001). Students learn how to apply critical literacy to conduct research to investigate and understand problems and practices of privilege and injustice existing in their society and community, and to find solutions for those real-world problems (Lewison et al., 2002; 2015).

A vignette from the field

The political unrest in Thailand in 2010 has led to a dramatic change in Thai society and has also had long-lasting effects on its citizens. Thai people started to hold "taken-for-granted" ideologies of being "us" and "them". At large, they had different political ideologies and started to take sides clearly as either the Yellow Shirts or the Red Shirts. The Yellow Shirts, formally known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), is a coalition of protesters against the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Its members include royalists, ultra-nationalists and middle class in the urban area. The Red Shirts, formally known as the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), is a political pressure group and the supporters of the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Its members are mainly people from rural areas and working class in Bangkok and include students and left-wing activists, progressive intellectuals and democratic activists (Askew, 2010; Ladd, 2012). The polarized political situation was developed into conflicts and violence in Thai society. The conflict and violence in Thai society stemmed from historical divisions, hegemony and privilege, and day-to-day inequalities. From April to May 2010, the political tension became peaked and turned into unprecedented violence in Bangkok, causing over 50 dead and hundreds wounded and many buildings destroyed by arson attacks by the unidentified (Rougheen, 2010). Finally, the political unrest was

ended by a coup d'état on May 20, 2014 to resolve the situation. Even though protests on the streets ended, the conflict does not seem to end completely. The seeds for conflict have been sown in the society, even in the classrooms.

Most educators (Wong & Grant, 2009; Eisler, & Miller, 2004; Mulcahy, 2011) advocate that teachers have a crucial role to cultivate seeds of global citizens who significantly contribute to supporting social justice and building peace in the society. In this paper, critical literacy is proposed as an alternative means to resolve the conflicts in a peaceful means since this will develop students with conscious and critical minds. They will become linguistically armed to be ready to listen to multiple viewpoints, exchange ideas, raise critical questions, and beware of social problems and social injustice and is ready to defend themselves in a peaceful means.

Classroom context:

I was responsible for teaching a reading class for English major students at the upper intermediate level in a university in Thailand. Twenty-one third-year students (7 males and 14 females) were in this class. The students in this class learned and practiced various reading skills such as using context clues to determine word meanings, finding main ideas, understanding organizational patterns of expository texts, reading and interpreting graphics and understanding academic journals. I decided to implement critical literacy practice into my reading class. The 15-week lesson plan was designed in order to cover the course content requirement and supplemented with academic reading materials about issues of conflicts in Thailand. The students in this class made use of reading strategies to read and discuss those articles. The following were assigned as supplemental readings for the class:

- The strategy of applying peaceful means in resolving conflicts in Thai society by Pichai Rattanapol (2006)
- Towards an acceptable fair society by Pasuk Phongpaichit (2009)
- Peace building in southern Thailand: From education for peace to peace education by Sukree Langputeh (2008)
- Social development and security of people in the south of Thailand by Ahmad Somboon Bualuang (2006)

The students worked in groups and chose an article that was on the list of supplemental readings and that they were interested in to read, did further research on and led discussions in class. When they did further research on the chosen article, they were encouraged to read and investigate the same issue from multiple texts. With their expertise in technology, the Internet was the main source of the information. Besides, they were asked to write a reflective journal on conflicts in Thai society and to propose means to resolve conflicts in Thai society. This was an opportunity for my students to produce personal responses to the topic being learned. Then, they could choose to publish their ideas in forms of blogs or papers. In this class, pairs of students were asked to conduct a student-choice research project. Doing a student-choice research project was a means of providing the students with freedom of identifying an important topic of their interest, conducting extensive research on it and applying critical lenses to learn and analyze the issues. The students had a great control of their own learning (Behrman, 2006). Some examples of the student research projects are:

- Sexism in Thai Buddhism
- Influence of media on violent behavior in schools
- Rethinking nationalism concept in the southern Thailand insurgency
- Relationship between sexual abuse on campus and masculinity
- Thai values and seniority system in Thai organization as a contribution to business performance decline
- Motivation in the advertisements that have impact on women's decision to buy brand name cosmetics
- Student pregnancy and Thai social value
- Forming different identity in social networks
- The role of women in cosmetic product advertisement
- The reasons why FedEx Express (FedEx) opened its new South Pacific Regional hub in Singapore

At the beginning of the semester, I interviewed the students in order to find out what they thought about conflicts in Thai society. Most of them learned about the world unquestioningly. Specifically, they obtained information about politics from one-sided, preferred media.

Some of them expressed their boredom to the political conflicts in Thai society. They did not want to get involved in any activities related to politics and thought that they could not do anything because the conflicts were far beyond their ability to handle. A few of them offered reasonable and compromising means to resolving the conflicts. The following is the excerpt from the interview. The students' names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms.

> *I can't do much to solve the problem. I can start from myself to have careful consideration and open mind to listen to others even though their opinions are different from mine.* (Tor)

> *This conflict is out of my hand.... I think the best way I could do is trying not to involve or be a part of the conflict. I will not pay my attention to this issue and I will avoid talking about this. I will not join any protest or any political campaign, either. No matter whom I vote for wins in the election or not, I will accept the result. It may sound worthless, but at least, what I do doesn't make the situation get worse.* (Danai)

At the end of the semester, I interviewed the students in my class to investigate their view of conflict and how they dealt with conflicts. The following were observed in my class:

1. Critical awareness makes students become critical thinkers, not be convinced very easily and committed to transform their society.

Students have developed their ability to think systematically and critically. After they read a text, listened to others and discussed what they read, they had to think, question the text or what they have listened to, and support their ideas with reasons. Problem posing was used as a means of learning in this class. Students started to question texts that they read, for instance, whose voice is expressed and whose voices are missing in the text, or whether there are any biases in the text or messages that they heard and tried to seek for reality (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Posing problems by these students reveals that they have thought carefully and critically. Yet, their opinions or stances should be based on their careful thought and

analysis of multiple sources of information. They achieved a critical perspective on what they have read or what they have heard. In addition, they learned from others through dialogue and inquiry; as a result, they become linguistically and strategically armed and empowered in the classroom.

> *After I listen to other people's opinions, I might either agree or disagree with them. When Nicky raised a point about violence in the 3 utmost provinces in the south of Thailand, I don't think his points were clear enough and unreasonable. I tried to analyze the points and to argue with him. Yet, I had to listen to his points very carefully and tried to understand from his standpoint. If it's reasonable, I might accept that…* (Phat)

2. The students in the critical literacy classroom learn from multiple perspectives, the issues of coexistence of marginalized groups and interdependence. This leads them to a peaceful means of resolving conflicts.

The students in this class read many articles and discussed about people in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand where violence and bombing have taken place continuously in the last decade. People in these three provinces have different cultures from those in the central part of Thailand. The majority of people are ethnic Malay Muslims. The students were aware of the existence of these people. Through inquiry and dialogue in this class, the students learned about the situation in the south. They exchanged ideas and asked questions to clarify their understanding of that area. This led them to develop a new and richer understanding of the issue and an alternative means of resolving conflicts and violence in the south: allowing Yawi (spoken in the south) as an official language in those three provinces.

> Teacher: What are the good points of allowing Yawi as the official language in the south of Thailand? Or bad points?
>
> Student 1(Nicky): The good point is that it's a sign of acceptance, a sign of our respect towards their rights, their pride of being Muslims, being Malaya. And I think, in the situation like this, which is very harsh, I don't like to say this … but we have to give them what they want … to make them feel like they are being respected. But there are also drawbacks ……. later.

Teacher: Nicky, why do you think letting them use Yawi as the official language is a way to show respect to them? Why is it so important to show respect to people?

Student 5 (Koon): Respect in difference……. We are in the central of Thailand and they are in the south. They speak their own language. We respect in difference.

Teacher: Don't you think that …… when we have to contact government officials, you should use, you know, Thai official language to speak to the officials instead of speaking Yawi. Don't you think it's a way that makes people laugh at you, tease you?

Student 1 (Nicky): I think this situation is a little different. What we are talking about is making Yawi language as an official language in their territory. What you have said, I'm not sure if I'm correct, you said that if you go to do business in any government office, we have to speak official language, which is Thai. That might be the case. If we go to different regions, it's not our own territory. But like I said before, it's their territory, their home. Why should we force them to speak other languages in their own home?

3. The students respect differences, leading to understanding stances of the oppositions.

In the classroom, students discussed conflicts and the root of conflicts in Thai society. They attempted to look at the conflicts from different perspectives and from different sides and to seek alternative explanations of the conflicts to understand the complexity of the conflicts and stances or beliefs of the oppositions (McLaughlin & De Voogd, 2004). This gradually helped diminish misunderstanding, hostile feeling and prejudice against each other which are derived from inaccurate and misleading information (Langputeh, 2008). Finally, there is no space for different "taken-for-granted" ideologies of being "us" and "them", contributing to the desire to settle disputes and negotiation in nonviolent means and to relinquishing the idea of taking sides. It can be concluded that critical literacy becomes the key to build and cultivate a culture of peace in this classroom.

> *I learn to listen to others more. I can understand other people's stances. I learn to trust. I learn to open my mind and to listen to others.* (Pat)

> *I am an advocate of the yellow shirts. I have been listening to the radio channel of this side. I listen to the program almost every day. I believe in what I have learned from this program. When we talked about the other side (the Red Shirts), I kind of had bias towards them. I started to learn to listen to others and try to understand them. I found that they are not that bad … I think when we read any newspapers or listen to radio programs, we should get information from different sources, not just one single source.* (Arat)

To sum up, building peace may be considered "utopian", but it is desirable for every citizen to attain and is worth waiting for. Again, education is the best hope for resolving conflicts in our society, our nation and our world. Our responsibility, as English teachers, is not just helping our students develop their English ability. Our job is far greater than that. We need to help grow, cultivate and nurture our students from many walks of life to make them be citizens who have critical minds with social consciousness and who can transform violence and conflict in our society and in our world into peace. This demands our strong determination and courage to grow the seeds of citizenship. Critical literacy is a promising approach to make our students, our seeds of democratic society, become critically informed, aware of social justice and committed to transform conflicts into peace in our society.

Acknowledgements

This work is a part of a research project supported by the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University. I would like to thank Dr. Malinee Prapinwong from Kasetsart University, Dr. Thomas Hoy from the Department of English and Linguistics, Thammasat University, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on the earlier draft of this manuscript. My appreciation is also extended to Mr. Daniel Richardson for proofreading this manuscript.

The Author

Dumrong Adunyarittigun is an associate professor in the Department of English and Linguistics, Thammasat University in Thailand. He earned a Ph.D. in Reading Education from the University of Maryland College Park in the U.S. His research interests include reading comprehension, self-perception and motivation to read, language assessment, and critical literacy to promote peace.

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