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My Teaching Philosophy: Theoretical Musings of a South Asian-educated Instructor at an American University

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Abstract

For a prospective teacher at almost any level, clearly defining one's teaching philosophy has long been a mandatory requisite for applying and obtaining a teaching position in the US schools and colleges. However, in Nepal, this requirement is as yet unknown, and the demand to define one's teaching philosophy and set it to writing may pose a novel challenge for even the most experienced and cherished educator. In this paper, along with briefly introducing the current North American theory of teaching philosophy, I present a statement of my teaching philosophy, my evolving beliefs towards teaching writing, and my personal approach to teaching writing. Finally, I theorize my philosophy of teaching, drawing ideas from some renowned critical pedagogy scholars. I believe that these musings are worthy of reading for prospective and experienced educators who have not yet systematized their teaching philosophy, specifically, teachers of English who teach or wish to teach writing courses, stimulating them to be more closely focused on their approach to teaching and to carefully situate their teaching-learning activities within their teaching philosophies.

Keywords: Teaching Philosophy, Writing, Critical Pedagogy

Introduction

A "teaching philosophy" is a teacher's professional beliefs about the nature of his/her teaching and the actual practices s/he enacts in his/her teaching activities (Andrea, 2009). Defining teaching philosophy, Schonwetter, Sokal, Freisen, and Taylor (2002) state that it is "a systematic and critical rationale that focuses on the important components

defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and/or institutional contexts" (p. 84). A teacher's teaching philosophy makes a major impact on students' learning, as it assists the teacher to embrace a clear, conscious, coherent, systematic, and critical pedagogical approach. By creatively employing this sort of approach the educator can make students better engage and be drawn into teaching-learning activities, and this in turn helps learners to flourish and develop their potentials to full measure. In recent times, virtually all the North American institutions of higher education ask their applicants to submit statements of their teaching philosophy (Payant, 2016; Chism, 1997–1998; Peters, 2009), along with proof of academic credentials. It is one of the key requirements for hiring instructors and for teaching assistantships at most American universities. Further, faculty are required to submit "their personal philosophies of teaching when they are reviewed for reappointment, tenure, or promotion" (Pratt, 2005, p. 32). A teaching philosophy predicts to a great degree how a teacher views teaching, and how s/he intends to teach once s/he is in the actual classroom. Asking applicants to enunciate a defined teaching philosophy can help in the process of selection and hiring of educators, and perhaps can also help morally guide new teachers to translate their philosophy into practice in the classroom.

A well-defined teaching philosophy provides teachers with general guidelines to self-assess their teaching approach, and enables them to articulate their teaching beliefs and values to their students, their colleagues, and to search or teaching award committees (Iowa State University, 2020, np.) The root purpose of drafting a teaching philosophy statement is to have a clear perspective on teaching-learning. For Faryadi (2015) the principal purpose of a teaching philosophy statement is two-fold: "From the perspective of the academician, it is important that the teacher understands and selects suitable theories and guidelines for teaching; it is equally important to state clearly his [sic] own philosophy as an educator so that his actions in the classroom reflect his beliefs" (p.63). Of course, a teaching philosophy helps a teacher to choose appropriate teaching theories and guidelines and to determine his/her philosophical orientation to teaching.

Often, teaching philosophy statements are criticized for not having a standard format or content (Pratt, 2005). Yet teaching philosophy statement is not ordinarily guided by any specific genre theory of writing. There are no fixed or generally expected parameters or formats for writing a teaching philosophy statement; however, several items are usually embedded into it, such as a primary goal of teaching, approaches, and methods to teaching, the role of a teacher, and ways of dealing with students, understanding students and evaluating their work (Crookes, 2003; Kearns and Sullivan, 2011). Stylistically, a statement of teaching philosophy is ordinarily written in the first person (I, my, mine) in the present tense, ranging between one and two pages (Coppola, 2002; Korn, 2012). Teaching philosophy varies widely from one teacher to another; for example, one may want to embrace an experiential teaching philosophy, another a more reflective teaching approach, some favor critical pedagogy, some a consciously constructivist philosophy, and there is an endless variety of other platforms, pedagogies, and approaches. An experienced educator may well have his or her teaching philosophy, without being

strictly aligned with a single defined pedagogical or philosophical school. Qais Faryadi (2015) writes, "Teaching philosophy statements are solely individualistic as they reflect personal values and artistic preferences. How they are structured also depends on the learning environment and the needs of students" (p.65). Of course, as per need and milieu, a teacher can and must freely devise his or her teaching philosophy.

Some teachers articulate their teaching philosophy as a teaching philosophy statement while some do not articulate in the statement, but they have their clear teaching philosophy. To have one's teaching philosophy is considered important for the professional development of teachers as this works as a tool for reflecting on teaching for formative purposes (Payant, 2016). Reflecting on own teaching can involve teachers in exposing "their own beliefs of teaching and learning to critical examinations, by articulating these beliefs and comparing these beliefs to their actual classroom practices to see if there are any contradictions between practice and underlying beliefs" (Farrell, 2007, p. 9). To reflect individuals' teaching enactment, they can record their audio and video of a mini-lesson, keep a teaching journal and/or a language-learning journal, describe critical incidents, and identify teaching maxims (Farrell, 2007, 2014; Payant, 2014; Richards, 1996; Richards & Farrell, 2011). And in their leisure time, the teachers can reflect on their teaching--what went well and what did not go well and can devise a plan for further improvement of their teaching-learning activities. When teachers involve in reflecting on their teaching and update their knowledge and skills through professional development activities, their teaching philosophy naturally changes over time. Payant's (2016) study revealed evidence that in-service EFL teachers make ongoing amendments to their teaching philosophy statements for bureaucratic and reflective purposes. Indeed, teachers' teaching philosophy does not remain the same all through their professional life.

In the following sections, I present my own teaching philosophy statement, what writing instruction is for me, my approach to teaching writing, and the theoretical platform upon which my teaching philosophy is built. To argue my point regarding teaching-learning writing, I have incorporated ideas from the various composition (writing) pedagogies and theories, and for theorizing my teaching philosophy I have drawn ideas from seminal works that deal with critical pedagogy.

My teaching philosophy statement

I am guided by the philosophy of Paulo Freire--critical pedagogy, which follows the generative mode of teaching, prizing students' own views, experiences, learning styles, and cultures. I particularly value-generating ideas with students, motivating them to come up with critical views, and encouraging them to work in groups. Flexibility is my main principle which I always strive to embrace in my teaching-learning activities. I believe that simply being strict, not offering students the broadest possible options to learn, and imposing tasks without understanding students' feelings will not lead to accomplishing the greater objectives of education. So, in my classroom, I provide

students with ample opportunities to learn through favored routes, rather than being stuck on strict rules. I am never a blind follower nor am I ever blindly oppositional on issues and ideology; rather, I always try to look at teaching through a critical lens, and always contextually. Similarly, leading students to learn through dialogue with each other, relating content meaningfully to daily life events, and making students accountable for their work are also among my favored teaching techniques.

I believe that teaching, especially in higher education, is a process of making my students independent and analytical in their fields of study by valuing their knowledge, skills, experiences, and culture and enabling them to contribute to the knowledge-making process. Students come with great potential to work independently and think critically in class. For me, teaching is never to make students rote-learn and recite back a given text; rather, it is the sharing of experiences, experimenting with new practices, exploring new ideas, offering opportunities to engage in the work of learning. Offering students, a chance to put forth their views, to question, generate and inculcate ideas, to collaborate, share, reflect, and be accountable are the principles that have guided my teaching journey. Similarly, for evaluating and assessing students' work, I embrace the labor approach of Asao B. Inoue (2014). That is, along with the product of students' writing, I value their labor, sweat, honesty while grading their papers. I grade students' papers based on multiple drafts and multiple assignments.

The evolution of my beliefs towards writing

When I was a high school student and a beginning university undergraduate, I was led to believe that writing was merely reproducing. My belief in writing was shaped by the teaching I received. At that time, most, if not all, students in the milieu in which I studied (Nepal) were only taught to reproduce writing. Teaching writing was guided through a product-based approach both in high school and in college. Teachers would write ready-made essays on the traditional blackboard and students would happily copy them word-for-word. And, students would recite and attempt to replicate the model essays in the final examinations, believing them to be the most authentic, most powerful "Mantra" for fetching a good score on the examinations.

My beliefs towards writing changed when I started to teach at a college level. Through my reading, I came to know that writing is a process. Then, I tried to follow the process of my writing. I did much self-practice and a lot of struggle to produce better writing. I learned writing (the writing skill that I have currently) through observation, i.e. how other people have written articles, their ideas and structure of the articles, their sentence structures, words, punctuation, and other mechanics. I would try to practice accordingly. So, for me, in recent years, writing has been an "observation" and "matter of practice." Now I believe that writing is not an outcome of an individual autonomous entity, but rather is an upshot of a collective entity. Going through some writing theories has led me to conclude that a writer's experience, culture, context, audience, people, race, politics, subjective position, and many other factors come into play in writing.

Currently, I am guided by the following concepts of writing excerpted from the book, Naming what we know: Threshold concepts of writing studies (2016) edited by Adler-Kassner, and Wardle:

- Wring is a social and rhetorical activity (by Kevin Roozen in Adler- Kassner and Wardle, 2016, p.17).

- Writing represents the world, events, ideas, and feelings (Charles Bazerman in Adler- Kassner and Wardle, 2016, p.37).

- Writing is performative (Andrea A. Lunsford in Adler- Kassner, and Wardle, 2016, p.43)`

- Writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies (Tony Scott in Adler-Kassner and Wardle, 2016, p.48)

- Writing is informed by prior experience (Andrea A. Lunsford in Adler-Kassner and Wardle, 2016, p.54)

- Failure can be an important part of writing development (Collin Brooke and Alison Carr in Adler- Kassner, and Wardle, 2016, p.62)

- Revision is central to developing writing (Doug Downs in Adler- Kassner and Wardle, 2016, p.66)

- Reflection is critical for writers' Development (Kara Taczak in Adler- Kassner and Wardle, 2016, p.78)

My approach to teaching writing in the classroom

I am very eager to build my students' ability in writing by valuing their own experiences. My first job is to identify what experiences, skills, and understandings they have in writing. For instance, early-on I diagnose (asking questions) whether the students are familiar with the basic processes of writing and conventions such as brainstorming, generating ideas, preparing rough drafts, revising, editing, maintaining unity and coherence (flow); writing a thesis statement, topic sentence, and supporting details; writing an introduction, body paragraph, and conclusion, etc. After this, based on the students' past experiences and current skills, I proceed with my teaching and enable students to involve themselves in the knowledge-making process by bringing their thoughts and experiences to the table.

My foremost priority in teaching writing is to encourage students to pursue goals and ask questions. I consider that if there is no encouragement, students, in general, do not show their potentiality, nor do they feel confident in the learning process. Whenever appropriate I use encouraging words to respond to students' contributions. I believe that responding using encouraging words helps encourage students to make a continuous effort in their learning. Similarly, I encourage my students to be critical as well as promote them to be aware of societal inequity by providing them preferential

options in their writing assignments. That is to say, along with teaching writing skills, I encourage them to interrogate situations of injustice and unequal power relations in terms of race, caste, culture, and learning. Thus, my job is double: to teach students to "read their world while reading their word" (Rashidi and Safari, 2011, p.254). I give assignments relating to their own culture and previous experiences because doing so helps develop and reveal students' voices in their writing. I consider that every student has a multitude of lived experiences that have a key impact on their life. Making meaning from such experiences could be crucial for them because in learning to write they can often distinguish real-life learning that could transform their future. "Writing from Experience" is an assignment that encourages students to write an essay from their personal experiences (for instance, their home literacy experiences, school literacy experiences, society literacy experiences), which in turn enables them to make meaning which can be inspirational for their future.

I believe that students perform best when offered opportunities to engage in teaching-learning activities with appropriate methodology and support. A teacher's duty is to engage students in this work. Therefore, in my teaching, I typically ask students to work in pairs or groups. Allowing them to share experiences in this way helps them to learn from each other through joint collective work. Giving them a chance to interact with their classmates helps them to learn writing from each other as well as to build confidence in their own and each other's work. Additionally, they learn the essential skill of working in groups. From a class observation with instructor John Viener (pseudonym) at a university in the US, I have learned skills in conducting group work. I would like to use his technique to make my classwork more successful and meaningful. After assigning the classwork, he was moving around the classroom and monitoring students' work; helping students who were struggling to do the task. He was also reminding the class of the time remaining to perform the assigned work. After the stipulated time, he asked students to share their work with a classmate beside or nearby them. Following this, he asked the students to voluntarily share the task product they had produced— two students told what they had written on their papers (observation, September 26, 2019). In my classes, I would like to devise in-class writing activities for students to keep them busy with true learning, never mere "busy-work." I consider that asking students to work in the class makes them learn through "learning by doing." Similarly, I ask students to work with peers and in groups so that they can learn the skill of working together and get a chance to learn from their classmates.

I put effort to make class delivery variegated. For instance, sometimes presenting information through audio-video recordings, podcasts, and digital media, sometimes writing main points on the board, sometimes modeling, sometimes using students to model, sometimes asking a student to complete a classmate's incomplete writing, and many more ideas. I prefer to embrace Shipka's (2005) multimodal task approach in writing as it allows students to express their ideas through different semiotic modes such as pictures, videos, colors, songs, and other media. I find it a more flexible approach than traditional text-only composition pedagogy since it provides justice to students

who are good at other modes of communication besides simple written composition. As digital technology has now become pervasive in every part of life, it is worthwhile to embrace the widest possible variety of different modes (visual, audio, color, and sign) in teaching. Sometimes, some ideas are very difficult to express in words alone. In such situations, visual, audio, pictures, etc. can be good means of expressing and communicating ideas.

Usually, class is filled with challenges as students come in with different levels of understanding, knowledge, experience, and cultural sophistication. I believe that the challenges can be addressed in writing class through student engagement. But before the students' engagement, it is vital to understand what may cause them difficulty: Is it due to language, or the theme or content of the writing, or delivery, or other factors? After ascertaining their challenges, I encourage students to become more engaged by asking them to help each other. For example, students who are familiar with the cultural aspect of the content can help their classmates by explaining cultural matters; similarly, students can be asked to peer-review each other's work, an activity which assists them to find their errors and some of the problems in their writing. This work helps them to see their writing from a reader's perspective and also to get feedback and comments from their classmates in a non-threatening, non-instructor-driven context. Before asking the students to work and help each other, in order to avoid the typical weak and useless (for instance, "this is the best writing I've ever seen!") type of peer feedback, I provide students with well-defined, lucid rubrics for their peer review activities.

I am aware of the reality that university students usually come from diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and linguistic backgrounds. So, I strive to give space to their cultures, experiences, knowledge, and skills. Experiences and examples from their culture are cherished in my writing assignments and classes. Similarly, as Matsuda (2006) advises, "all composition teachers need to reimagine the composition classroom as the multilingual space" (p. 649), I take my class as a multilingual class and deal with students accordingly. Understanding multilingual students' attitudes, educational experiences, interests, and needs is a big asset for me since they guide me to devise teaching-learning activities as per their needs. Likewise, I consider that teaching multilingual students is always beneficial to instructors as these diverse learners almost always bring along different cognitive understandings, cultural practices, life experiences, and a different perspective toward teaching-learning activities. I believe that multilingual students' varying experiences and skills assist instructors to have a wider understanding of teaching.

In teaching writing, valuing and generating ideas from students is my first priority, while mechanical aspects, superficial issues, and so-called "standardness" are secondary. I consider that when there is no idea, there is no real writing. I believe that focusing on surface features such as word choice, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and format too often kills students' ideas. For me, text without ideas is like a dead body. So, I deal with the mechanical aspects and grammar last. In this regard, I emulate the idea of

Suresh Canagarajah (2006). He maintains that rather than focusing on correctness, we should perceive "error" as the learner's active negotiation and exploration of choices and possibilities. Relating to this, I also like to follow Lauren Rosenberg's (2019) idea:

It is important to teach students not to get hung up on correctness and rules of grammar. These issues can be reviewed during a late editing session. Of course, there is much to learn in terms of grammar mechanics and usage, but that is less of a concern than encouraging the student to write comfortably and confidently in the new language. (np)

Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and Council of Writing Program Administrators joint statement (2020) states, "A process-based approach to writing signals occasions for writers to write iteratively (repeating steps or redrafting), incrementally (breaking large tasks into smaller pieces), and socially (giving and receiving feedback and making decisions about which feedback to heed)"(np.).Yes, the process approach to teaching writing allows student-writers to write recursively and give them chance to work through a smaller section of writing projects. So, I embrace the writing process theory in teaching at the undergraduate level. When students know how to process their writing, no matter what language level they have, they can bring their voices out in their writing. I focus more on the composting process rather than the final product of writing. The process provides writers with a road to travel down. When they know the writing road, they are more likely to produce good writing. Along with the process, I make them practice writing. Without abundant writing practice, most students cannot produce good writing. Giving them ample practice makes them experience writing through the given road and see the difficulties they have to travel through. Similarly, in teaching writing, a teacher can follow heuristic procedures or systematic strategies as it helps the teacher to be on track. Though this is old fashioned, it has generative and evaluative power (Gleen and Goldthwaite, 2014), and some students may find it easier to follow in the initial days. Like Robert Graves, a great British literary figure says, I also consider that "no writing is good writing, only rewriting is good writing." So, I ask my students to rewrite and reread their work over a couple of drafts. Sondra Perl, in her article, Understanding Composing (1980), states that writing necessarily involves a highly recursive process, that is, "there is a forward-moving action that exists by virtue of a backward-moving action" (p. 36). I require that my students take this recursive approach, even though it most often requires overcoming significant initial student resistance.

I find a repeating strategy very useful to reiterate the main message of a lesson (Martis, 2018) and to stick with the purpose of the lesson. I learned this idea from a class observation of Instructor Rossana Rivas (pseudonym) (2019) on "Proposal Writing". She was repeating the points that are required to consider while carrying out the research project she asked her students to execute (i.e. The first step is ….the second step is, the third step is ….). Likewise, she summarized her lesson in the end. In my classes, I would also like to summarize my lesson at the end of class, as this helps

students remember and note down the key points they have been taught during the day's lesson (observation, September 29, 2019). To make sure whether the students understand my teaching or not, at the end of each lesson I ask students to write or tell in a brief sentence what they understood as the key point from the lesson that I taught.

For me, evaluation is the rating of the efforts the students have put in from the beginning to the end of the project. So, while evaluating or grading their work I do not solely evaluate their product but I also evaluate the processes used, effort expended and sheer labor they invest in the process of carrying out the assignment. Their honesty, sweat, and sincere efforts are important aspects that need to be taken into account (Inoue, 2014) since, I believe, if their efforts are cherished they will be encouraged to make even more efforts to improve their writing. Likewise, responding to students' writing is extremely important. While giving feedback on students' writing, I embrace the idea of commenting on strong aspects of students' writing first (Gleen and Goldthwaite (2014). I believe that positive, specific feedback leads them to stay strong and can be instrumental for their further effort and work. In providing feedback, I prefer to follow an indirect and gentle approach. Similarly, I ask them to reflect on their project. Concerning reflection in writing class, CCCC and CWPA joint statement (2020) suggests writing instructors "establish occasions for reflection whereupon writers engage questions of self-awareness, messiness, decision and indecision, and the realization of self-set goals and/or course goals. Reflection serves broad goals of habit formation and attentiveness to development as recursive" (np). So, I teach my students how to reflect while they write (metacognition) as well as afterward. This leads them to think and analyze, and to note what went well and what did not go so well in their writing.

Theorizing my teaching philosophy

I have theorized my teaching philosophy based on critical pedagogy. The concept of critical pedagogy was originally propounded by the late Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Earlier, a similar approach was advocated and promoted by Antonio Gramsci as well as key thinkers from the Frankfurt School (Noroozisiam and Soozandehfar, 2011). The tradition that is today known as "Critical Pedagogy" has appeared over recent decades in "diverse incarnations" (McLaren, 2002, p. 83) such as post-modern pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, radical pedagogy, pedagogy of empowerment, transformative pedagogy, pedagogy of possibility, marginalized pedagogy, learner autonomy (Sharma, 2014), and the like. I keep all of these approaches in my theoretical toolbox for use when necessary.

Critical pedagogy entered the field of real-world education after the publication and worldwide translation of Freire's seminal book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972). It rejects the old "banking model" (Freire, 1972) of education; rather it follows a generative mode of teaching and advocates in favor of the interests of the marginalized and neglected in teaching-learning. It is a "decentering" pedagogy (Daspit & Weaver, 2000). In fact, by de-centering, the instructor strives to empower students for social transformation

and seeks to develop humanization in the education sector. Freire (1972) says critical pedagogy is for "personal liberation." That is, it offers favored preferences for students in teaching-learning activities. Thus, it is considered a democratic approach to teaching (Paudel, 2014). Monchinski (2008) writes "critical pedagogy is a form of democratic schooling" (p.203). As such, it is necessarily against the mainstream or "current traditional" pedagogy. Giroux (2002) writes that critical educational theorists attempts "to empower the powerless and to transform social inequalities and injustices" (p.29). Situating education in the context of social justice and students' empowerment is the aim of critical pedagogy (Paudel, 2014). Mclean (2006) remarks, "critical pedagogy has as its final aim changes in society in the direction of social justice. It has a respectable lineage" (p.1). Giroux, in a book chapter edited by McLaren (2002), notes critical pedagogy offers "preferential options" for the weak and for marginalized students. He further states that critical theorists focus on the shortcomings of "individualism and autonomy," thus liberal democracy (p.31). Giroux (2002) writes:

[Critical pedagogy] entails a preferential option for the poor and the elimination of conditions that promote human suffering. Such theorists are critical of liberal democracy's emphasis on individualism and autonomy, questioning the assumption that individuals are ontologically independent or that they are the autonomous, rational, and self-motivating social agents that liberal humanism has constructed (p. 31).

Critical pedagogy is guided by context (kairos). Monchinski (2008) writes "All forms of critical pedagogy respect the context in which knowledge creation and transmission occur. Knowledge in critical pedagogy is situated and context-specific…[it] attempts to organize the program content of education with the people, not for them" (p.123). By focusing on the context and local realities, critical pedagogy also reintroduces pluralism and decentralization (Holliday, 1994).

Critical pedagogy performs some functions in education. For instance, critical pedagogy does not take anything as hallowed; rather it examines and sees every assumption with critical eyes (Monchinski, 2008). Another function of critical pedagogy is to raise awareness among students, it functions as a form of "conscientization". And this conscientization "represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness" (Freire, 2005, p.15). Giroux (2002) writes that "the task of critical pedagogy is to increase our self-consciousness, to strip away the distortion, to discover modes of subjectivity" (p.54). Critical pedagogy, along with the teaching context and skill of a particular instructor and course, aims to develop students' awareness of social structures. Thus, this pedagogy pursues a "joint goal" (Crookes & Lehner, 1998, p. 320), where teachers should have the double mission of making learners "read their world while reading their word" (Rashidi and Safari, 2011, p.254). Discussing educators' job, Giroux (2004) writes:

Educators need to develop a language of possibility for both raising critical questions about the aim of schooling and the purpose and meaning of what and how educators

teach… In doing so pedagogy draws attention to engaging classroom practice as a moral and political consideration animated by a fierce sense of commitment to provide the conditions that enable students to become critical agents capable of linking knowledge to social responsibility and learning to democratic social change (p. 41).

Looking at education as a political enterprise, critical pedagogy aims to raise learners' critical consciousness to be aware of their socio-political surroundings and to fight against the status quo. The intent is transformation both in the classroom and in the society (Norton and Toohey, 2004) by giving space to a "transnational perspective" while embracing "flexibility and innovativeness" in teaching-learning activities (Lissovoy, 2008, p.160).

Critical pedagogy [CP] is a praxis that demands "action and reflection" (Freire, 1985). This makes teachers theorize their practices while at the same time, it says to the teachers to practice theories. Similarly, praxis gives chance to teachers to reflect on their practices. Regarding this forever-fluid dynamic, Monchinski (2008) writes:

Praxis involves theorizing practice and practicing theory… CP involves an ever-evolving working relationship between practice and theory. It is a relationship that is always in progress, involving a constant give-and-take, a back-and-forth dialectical informing of practice by theory and theory by practice. As praxis, CP cannot be stagnant. It demands reflection and reconceptualization between what goes on in our classrooms, why it goes on, and what and whose ends are served (p.1).

The praxis of critical pedagogy refers to "action and transformation." It values the importance of the individual and her interests which demands "thought and deed together, reflection and action" (Monchinski, 2008). Critical pedagogy values a dialogical praxis and formulates a scientific conception in which both teachers and students engage in analyzing a dehumanizing ontology and condemning it, opting instead for transformation, for liberating human beings (Freire, 1985). Dialogue increases the creative power of the teacher as well as students, and "thereby reflects the democratic commitment of both" (Monchinski, 2008, p.133). Dialogue reveals the love "of responsible subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination" (Freire, 1997, p. 70). It makes the participants humble, as no one attempts to dictate for all. Dialogue allows for the free exchange of opinions, the airing of differences, the reaching of consensus, and reflection upon action. An ethic of care stresses the need for teachers to be attentive. This means teachers must be active listeners who take seriously what their students say, are able to read between the lines, and hear what is not said (Shor, 1980, p.101). Modeling democratic practice is one of the goals of a teacher-student relationship where democracy acknowledges a place for expertise while respecting everyone's right to a voice. In fact, dialogue between teachers and students is a part of the democratic form we wish to model for our students. Only through dialogue and critical thought will our students and we arrive at conscientization, or consciousness-raising (Monchinski, 2008).

In critical pedagogy, teachers adopt the role of transformative intellectuals, since they seek to act as agents of transformation in their society. Smyth (2011) writes "Teachers must go beyond the roles of technicians, managers or efficient clerks imposed upon them by others and be unwilling to continue to accept the way things are in schools" (pp.23-24). So, often it can be challenging or even dangerous for teachers when they choose to or are required to play a dynamic role. Thus, teachers must be willing and able to situate their teaching on the basis of realities, and they should be trusted to devise their own praxis of teaching-learning activities (Mclean, 2006). Critical pedagogy demands work from the teacher--teachers need to be engaged and should be imaginative, not frightened of leaving their "comfort zones" and "taking risks" in the classroom, Critical pedagogy stresses a commitment to education, by teachers who will link the subject matter both inside and outside the classroom (Monchinski, 2008). That is, teachers should be able to bring societal and cultural issues into the classroom. Simon (1992) presumes that "teachers are cultural [and political] workers' and, as such, they engage in a process of helping students, 'challeng[ing] and assess[ing] existing social conventions, modes of thought, and relations of power" (p. 35). Of course, teachers' job is to encourage students to investigate their own cultural practices, and thus, should ask students to challenge and evaluate their own practices in terms of power relations in society. Nemirof (1992) argues that the role of the teacher is not that of one who imposes beliefs and opinions, nor one who is seen as the owner of the Truth, but the one who mediates discussions, listens and questions, and, most important, creates a space in which students are allowed to learn, speak and change their minds without being judged by others. Regarding teachers, Kohl's (1983) argument is that teachers should form theories for themselves and test them by translating theory into their practices, fulfilling their responsibility as intellectuals. Along this line, Kohl writes that an intellectual is a person who knows about his or her field, has a wide breadth of knowledge about other aspects of the world, who use the experience to develop theory, and questions theory on the basis of further experience. But, more importantly, as Kohl argues, an intellectual is above all one who dares to interrogate authority and who refuses to act counter to his own personal experience and judgment. Smyth (2011, p.2) envisions a best-case where teachers function as intellectuals; students are activists, and communities are politically engaged and connected.

Critical educators must thus be "transformative intellectuals" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) who should be interested in individual students' success as well as being concerned in their teaching with enabling students to think critically and act critically, to lead them for social transformation. Foucault (1980) argues the teacher as a critical educator should play the role of the specific intellectual. S/he should relinquish any claims to universality and objectivity and instead engage in local cultures and realities. All pedagogy, like all politics, is local. Valuing local exigency, Kumaravadivelu (2001, p.539) writes "To ignore local exigencies is to ignore live experiences". In fact, in a critical-pedagogy framework, the class works as a learning community (Crookes & Lehner, 1998) and the teacher should be considered as an integral member of the community, who would also engage in the praxis of teaching.

Conclusion

In this paper I presented my teaching philosophy statement, what writing is for me, my evolving ideas for teaching writing at the undergraduate level, and then, I theorized my teaching philosophy, drawing ideas from renowned scholars of critical pedagogy. The ideas about teaching writing were incorporated from some seminal works from composition theory and pedagogy.

I argued that teachers should follow a process approach to teaching writing and students should be supported by instructors, something which can be done by offering learners alternative options to carry out their assigned writing tasks, giving space to their cultural practices and previous experiences in writing classes, asking students to learn by peer-reviewing each other's papers, giving them multiple opportunities to improve their writing, providing lucid instructions and rubrics for carrying out, and evaluating their assigned writing projects.

Further, to develop students' writing ability, I argued that teachers should prize students' sweat and effort over their mere final product, their ideas and voices over bare mechanical and grammatical accuracy. Based on experience I believe that the best and most practical way for interested students to improve their grammatical and mechanical accuracy is through "learning by doing" in the process of their reading and studying, and through intensive guided writing practice over time.

As in some countries like Nepal, the idea of conscious and systematic teaching philosophy is still considered a new concept, this paper provides some ideas on teaching philosophy, teaching writing, and theorizing teaching philosophy and contributes to those professionals who want to determine their teaching philosophy and translate it into practical teaching-learning activities. I believe that in Nepal and elsewhere, future researchers have broad opportunities to extend this study, for instance, unpacking school-level teachers' teaching philosophy in ELT, or English teachers' attitude and beliefs towards a teaching philosophy.

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