

## Revisiting *Pearl Harbor*: Resistance to Reel and Real Events in an English Language Classroom

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In this article, we draw on disruptive scenes in a postsecondary classroom to examine a critical incident concerning conflicting readings of the film *Pearl Harbor* (2001). We raise crucial questions for pedagogical work with popular film: Who speaks for whom about the meaning of a given film? Under what conditions do students resist particular readings of a film? How should teachers respond to acts of resistance in debates on the meaning of film? The use of popular film provides insight into language as a linguistic system as well as a site of struggle over meaning, identity, and power.

Key words: race, ethnicity, critical pedagogy, popular film

Dans cet article, les auteures traitent de l'utilisation, dans une classe au postsecondaire, de scènes prêtant à controverse tirées du film *Pearl Harbor* (2001). Elles soulèvent des questions importantes pour la pédagogie à l'aide d'un film à succès : Qui parle au nom de qui au sujet de la signification d'un film donné ? Quels facteurs amènent les étudiants à résister à telle ou telle lecture d'un film ? Comment les enseignants devraient-ils réagir aux actes de résistance dans des débats sur la signification d'un film ? Le recours à des films à succès permet de mieux comprendre le langage à la fois comme système linguistique et comme lieu de débat sur le sens, l'identité et le pouvoir.

Mots clés : race, origine ethnique, pédagogie critique, film à succès

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With increased access to television, videos, and DVDs, watching films has become a powerful and popular way in which international students experience the English-speaking world. Indeed, as Seung-Hee, a participant of a larger study<sup>1</sup> of students' viewing of film, reported, "When I arrived Canada [from South Korea], I didn't feel much differences and I couldn't find much new things that gave me shock.

Unconsciously, I learn North American culture through movie" (Mackie, 2005, p. 249). This statement suggests that popular American films may promote the adjustment of international students to the North American world. It also suggests that popular American films may essentialize North American culture. In this article, we argue for curriculum that invites students to resist cinematic assumptions about the essential quality of culture and ethnic identities.

Said (1993) has suggested that for European readers of Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, the novel was "as close as they came to Africa, and in that limited sense it was part of the European effort to hold on to, think about, plan for Africa" (p. 68). We argue that popular film has such a geopolitical impact on viewers. Film images become part of a visual experience of the world although viewers may be critical of a film's language, i.e., its characterization, script, mood, editing, and meaning. The separation between the events of life and film images and stories is more an exchange than a well-defined border. Certainly, as Chow (1995) has argued, being a reader means reading the visual as well as the written world.

A case in point is the often-heard response to watching on TV the unforgettable picture of two planes crashing into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001: "It looked like a movie," or "I thought it was a movie." Here the TV image of 9-11 may have sparked previous movie images and stories held in memory. Examples of these include the burning and collapsing sky scraper in *The Towering Inferno* (Allen & Guillerman, 1974), the takeover and destruction of a 40-story building in *Die Hard* (McTiernan, 1988), or the take-over of the U.S. President's plane in *Air Force One* (Peterson, 1997). Whatever the viewers' response to these movies, the reel image is drawn upon and interacts with the real (televised) image of planes bursting into flames and the towers collapsing. If a viewer's response to the movie was, "It was just a movie. That couldn't happen in reality," or "That was cool!" then seeing the TV images of 9-11 creates incredulity and confusion, among other responses. In this liminal space between real and reel, it is more difficult to shrug off the images in films and the banks of visual memories and stories that viewers may draw on in reference to their day-to-day life. Real and reel negotiate.

In the field of English language education, Duff (2001, 2002), Norton (2000), and Norton and Vanderheyden (2004) have raised the issue of access to popular culture. They argue that without knowledge of popular culture, English language learners in the target language community are positioned on the periphery of important language learning sites and relationships. However, with the exception of several conference presentations on practices with film in adult English language classes in Japan and the United States (Fluitt-Dupuy & Heppner, 2001; Nakamura, 2001; O'Brien, 2002; Tatsuki, 2000), popular film as a global educational resource has received little attention in the second language literature. What is currently available in the literature on film in English language education is not commensurate with the geopolitical power of film, nor does it do justice to the knowledge that many international students already have of popular films, stars, and directors.

Precisely because popular film, especially from the United States, is seen globally in cinemas, on-line, and on television, we note that an effort to understand how film co-constructs ethnic identities, the English language, and education is much overdue. We are not arguing that international students need access to popular films to help them learn English and build cultural references, but rather that films should be scrutinized for their pedagogical possibilities and limitations. To this end, we have focused on disruptive scenes from a postsecondary class in which English language learners were engaged in an assignment of reading racial and ethnic representations in popular films, with a particular focus on the film *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001). The scenes of resistance from this class, which Mackie taught, raise three crucial questions for critical pedagogy regarding film in English education: Who speaks for whom about the meaning of a given film? Under what conditions do students resist particular readings of a given film? How should teachers respond to acts of resistance in debates on the meaning of film? In developing the class exercises that led to the scenes of resistance, Mackie was informed by a growing literature on film and critical theory, which we present in subsequent sections.

## FILM AND CRITICAL THEORY

In developing the assignment described in the next section, Mackie drew on the film *Anna and the King* (Tennant, 1999) as a model. Key works in cultural, feminist, film, and postcolonial studies helped to inform her critique of this film. The first work from film studies was Dyer's (1997) *White* which focuses on the construction of whiteness in photographic and cinematic images, a valuable text in its detailing of various technologies and techniques of positioning whiteness visually in public media, for instance in Tarzan movies. Although reading the visual world is the main thrust of Dyer's work, he begins by turning the lens on himself as a white man and his early experiences with ethnic and racial difference. Rather than the trite decontextualized positioning sometimes offered in, for instance, "I'm a white professor," Dyer offers a reflective account, locating his desire of racial difference in his difference as a gay man. Such racial self-location in this and other studies (Ahmed, 1984; Amin, 1997, 2001; Bannerji, 1997; Luke, 1998; McIntosh, 1988; Ng, 1993; Schenke, 1991) also underpinned Mackie's response to her students' engagement with *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001).

Shohat (1991a, 1991b) and Shohat and Stam (1994), scholars of film and women's studies, also influenced Mackie's pedagogical choices. In contrast to Dyer (1997), who is primarily interested in how photographic language such as lighting positions white and black actors, Shohat and Shohat and Stam offer various postcolonial and racial tropes and metaphors in films. For example, the master trope of the colonized land as feminine, as female body, as sexualized, as "the dark continent" (Shohat and Stam, 1994, pp. 148-151) is readily available in films that include scenes of English language education, such as *Out of Africa* (Pollack, 1985), *Miss Mary* (Bemberg, 1986), and *Where the Spirit Lives* (Pittman, 1989). In these films, the spaces of English education in Kenya, Argentina, and Canada respectively are surrounded by virgin land, in a pure state of nature, with bare and open frontiers. Seemingly unpopulated, they are therefore available for the exploration and exploitation that follow.

A final work that Mackie found valuable, from a feminist postcolonial perspective, was that of Kaplan (1997), who examined the colonial gazing relations between black and white characters in films

such as *Out of Africa* (Pollack, 1985). Kaplan maintains that who looks at whom signals a relation of power (Kaplan, 1997, pp. 65-66) in which whites are interpellated with power with respect to their gaze at black characters. Kaplan differentiates the white woman landowner and English school owner in *Out of Africa* from the white men in the film. The female character Blixen (played by Meryl Streep) works alongside the Kikuyu people on the land, planting and separating coffee beans; further, her male servant Farah (played by Malick Bowens) is foregrounded in many scenes that show how Blixen depends on him for translation, healing, and cultural knowledge (pp. 69-71). Kaplan's analysis, although limited in some respects (Mackie, 2005), provides an important lens through which to view popular films, particularly with respect to the question of who speaks to whom, how, and in what circumstances.

#### PEARL HARBOR: A RESISTANT READING

The scenes of resistance around the film *Pearl Harbor* took place in February 2002, in Mackie's class at the University-College of Western Canada (UCWC),<sup>2</sup> a small institution with an enrollment of approximately 3,000 full-time students. Approximately 200 of them are English language learners who are mainly full-time international students from Asian countries including China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The main goal of the English language curriculum at UCWC is academic preparation, and the majority of the students desire an undergraduate degree from Canada.

The critical incident that we discuss took place in a class of 13 students, all in their early to mid-20's. Students were participating in an upper-intermediate, general reading, writing, speaking, and listening course, which met four days per week for two hours. There were approximately equal numbers of females and males, who had varying amounts of education depending on their age and country of origin. The students from China were 19 to 21 years of age and had completed high school; some had an additional year of English preparation school. The students from South Korea were older than the Chinese students and had completed their university degree or were in their fourth year of a university degree in South Korea. The male students from South Korea

had also completed two years of mandatory military training. The students from Japan were in their early- and mid-20's. Some had just finished high school while others were in the middle of a degree program in Japan.

Mackie, the teacher, had integrated various kinds of texts related to questions of race and gender in her curriculum during her twenty years of postsecondary English teaching in Canada, China, Greece, and Japan (Mackie, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003). For instance, in an effort to dislodge the colour-blindness of her whiteness, Mackie (2003) questioned how her own identity as a white woman has been constructed, and part of this questioning involved her childhood viewing of the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Mulligan, 1962). Mackie's curriculum and assignments were, therefore, an integral part of her interest in disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions about how people are socially positioned and how they might defend or resist these subject positions.

In this class, most of the students enjoyed lively and often playful discussions of the curricular topics that included kinesics, gender, aging, intelligence, beauty consciousness, media awareness, advertising, and popular comics. In the assignment for media awareness, however, the collegial relationships changed dramatically. The assignment Mackie gave the students was to work in groups to deconstruct the cross-cultural representations in an English-medium film of their choice, and then present their analysis in the form of a film critique. The student audience could comment on the respective film critiques of their peers by writing an anonymous comment that Mackie then read aloud. The student audience also voted for the best critique, and the most votes won a bonus point in addition to the grade Mackie assigned. This strategy of anonymous peer review was designed to encourage critical engagement with both the strengths and limitations of the respective film critiques. Importantly, Mackie's reading aloud marked the closure of the assignment. Other than listening, she did not expect students to engage with the comments from their peers.

Mackie modeled a film critique using clips from *Anna and the King* (Tennant, 1999), focusing on scenes in which Anna Leonowens (played by Jodie Foster) and the King of Siam (played by Chow Yun-Fat) and his son, Prince Chulalongkorn (played by Keith Chin) are juxtaposed in

terms of world knowledge and cultural sophistication. For example, in one scene Leonowens presents the world map, a prominent postcolonial trope in many popular films with ESL, as a surprise and a privileged piece of curriculum. The King's son opposes the world map's representation of Siam as not the center of the world and too small. A shoving fight ensues between the Prince and Anna's son. In the end, the map stays, and by the end of the movie when the King is bedridden and the Prince must take over, he is eager to stop Siamese customs such as everyone bowing in the presence of the King. Accepting the map of the world, like other curricular technologies, represents the necessity of progress vis-à-vis colonialism and letting go of the encumbered and limited past, another cinematic postcolonial position for colonial histories. In raising questions about the relationship between the characters, Mackie sought to provide a safe space in which students could resist the film's dominant representations. It is important to note that Mackie intended to model the genre of presentation and the language of critique, rather than to teach the students to be "critical" as such. Like Kubota (1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2002) and Susser (1998), Mackie's teaching experience had taught her to reject the essentialized and postcolonial view of Asian students as quiet, uncritical, and passive.

In response to the assignment, students worked together to analyze how the language of their chosen film constructed cross-cultural representations. Each group had three to four members with each member presenting a different part of the critique: introducing and giving a plot summary of the film; illustrating how the language of the film (script, costumes, dialogue, lighting, make-up) constructs cultural identities; and concluding with a reflection on how they responded to these cultural identities. Some students asked for clarification on the parameters of the assignment, such as how long their critique should be, while other students asked for help in reading the identities of their chosen film.

Mikiko, a Japanese student who was in the latter part of her degree program in Japan, was one of the students who sought Mackie's help. Because she had studied English in Japan, Mikiko's command of English was excellent. She was also well-prepared for each assignment. Because she attended another course that Mackie taught, they often shared small

jokes about the two classes and their assignments as they walked from one course to the next. Mikiko was in a group with two South Korean female students who were of the same age and academic preparation as Mikiko.

Mikiko and her group had chosen to critique *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001), a dramatic movie that entwines American love stories with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Mikiko, who was to present the second part of the critique, the illustration of cinematic construction of ethnic identities, gave Mackie her ideas about the representations of Japanese and Americans in the movie, but she was uncertain about how to apply cinematic language to the characters' ethnic identities. Mikiko thought the Japanese were unattractive and lacking in appeal. For example, with respect to the female Japanese characters, she said that the kimono costumes suggested to her a traditional dress that was not worn much at that time—an unmodern Japan whose representation she resented. Mackie and Mikiko discussed a range of ways the film distinguished Americans from Japanese, including the wearing of black clothes, the lack of a social life, family, or friends, and the devotion to warring, juxtaposing these with the portraits of Americans.

Overall, Mackie considered Mikiko's class presentation to be excellent. Some of Mikiko's clips made the students laugh as these showed just how explicitly the cinematic distinction was made between the dark unattractive Japanese and the colorful fun-loving Americans. The students' laughter at her chosen film clips indicated the extent to which Mikiko succeeded in convincing many of her fellow students that her resistant reading of the film was a valid one. While Mackie read the comments aloud, the students listened attentively. For this particular assignment, Mikiko's group won the most votes. The students' comments suggested that not only was the group's language clear and the critique well-organized, but Mikiko's analysis had taught them how the use of costumes, lighting, and plot could produce particular ethnic identities.

#### CRITIQUE AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

In contrast to the responses of a majority of the students, a South Korean student, who called himself John, was distressed by Mikiko's



presentation. John and Mikiko sat beside each other in class, and until that point, had constantly teased and joked with each other. John, who had finished military training and university, had lived in Japan for four years where he attended Japanese school and learned Japanese. His ambition was to be an international businessman. Among his many friends at UCWC were Japanese students with whom he spoke Japanese. Like Mikiko, his English was excellent, so he was one of the students who participated most often in class discussions.

As mentioned above, the student audience wrote comments on each critique, and voted for the best one. In his comment regarding the critique of *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001), John wrote:

You guys [the two South Korean students in the group] should have known [about the role of the Japanese in World War II]. At that time, Japanese soldier were more cruel. They have killed a lot of Chinese, Korean, American, and other Asian. However, Japanese government still hide that. I like Japan but truth must be know. (John, South Korean student)

Mackie read the comments out loud in class following the critiques. After she read John's comment, he added in an upset voice: "That was my comment. I want to know what the Japanese students think about what I said. *Do you know about the war?*" Until this point, the assignment had positioned students as social critics who analyzed ethnic stereotypes in films, and kept themselves at a distance from the text. John's response positioned himself quite differently. He was no longer a peer laughing at *Pearl Harbor's* (Bay, 2001) obvious racial stereotypes. He was a student actively engaged in resisting the assignment's parameters and Mikiko's analysis.

The class was unusually quiet. The friendly, talkative, and comfortable atmosphere changed completely. Indeed, no one said a word, and the Japanese students did not respond to John's challenging question. Mackie repeated John's question, "Do the Japanese students know about World War II?" There were three Japanese students in class that day. One said he knew about it, another that he did not know about it, and Mikiko said, "We don't learn in school."

When Mackie had a chance to talk to the students individually, John said that he liked Japan and Japanese students, who were his friends,

and that as a teenager he had lived in Japan for four years and was fluent in Japanese. He disagreed with Mikiko's critique because it made the Japanese look like victims when he believed it was Koreans and others who were the victims of the war. He differentiated the critique of Hollywood identities from his own more immediate experiences of the war. He drew upon language to express what Canagarajah (2002) calls a "burning desire to articulate the inequalities" (p. 18) on the topic.

The following day, Mackie spoke with Mikiko and one of her South Korean partners, Miga, about John's comments. After hearing his question, Mikiko told Mackie that she had researched the Internet to learn more about Japan in the war. Mackie asked her what she had learned, and, visibly upset, Mikiko's response was, "I can't say," adding, "We are under the control of our government. It's not our fault." The Japanese curriculum, tightly controlled by the Department of Education (Monbusho [Department of Education]), limits information about the atrocities the Japanese committed (Colley, 2003). Even now, the Japanese government will not recognize such colonial brutality as the Korean comfort women in Japan (Min, 2003). What started out to be a task in visual deconstruction became a difficult lesson in learning Japan's history in a new and disturbing light. It is important to note, in contrast, that Miga simply dismissed *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) as "just a movie" and certainly nothing to get upset about.

#### CRITICAL PRAXIS WITH POPULAR FILM

After the class engaged silently with John's question, Mackie struggled to determine how best to respond to the evolving events. She had several options. The first and by far the easiest was to create distance from the moment, the topic, and the realities of the disruption. Mackie dismissed this option because she wished to acknowledge both Mikiko and John for the risks they had taken, and for the learning that had taken place. Another option was for Mackie to give her personal opinion on the events of the war. She was drawn to this option because she felt that failure to address the Japanese role in World War II would deny students' critical knowledge that might promote more transnational interaction in the class. She reluctantly decided against this option because she was concerned that speaking against the Japanese

government's educational policy would further shame Mikiko and the other Japanese students. She believed that the Japanese students had already felt public shame when John had posed his question to them. Mackie assumed that Mikiko had already learnt a great deal about Japan's role in the war, and was more aware of a South Korean view of Japanese silence regarding the war.

Mackie instead chose a third option to respond to this critical incident. She sought to provide a wider context in which to understand not only the events of Pearl Harbor, World War II, and Japanese culpability, but a way to understand how it might be possible to challenge the Japanese government's silence concerning the war. She chose to examine Canadian atrocities against ethnic minorities as an example of how governments can be made to accept responsibility for racist social practices. She began by explaining instances of racism throughout Canada's history, including the near genocide of First Nations people; the Komagata Maru incident in which 400 people from India were refused entrance to Canada in 1914; and the internment of Canadian citizens of Japanese descent during World War II. She emphasized the third example, describing the loss of private property and the Japanese experience of human rights violations.

Mackie then asked the students if they thought that she, as a Canadian citizen, was personally responsible for these actions. The students replied emphatically that she could not be held responsible because she was not even alive at the time. She then described the compensation that the Canadian government granted to Canadians who were interned in camps during the war. She explained that this was the result of a collective campaign against the government by the families who suffered loss through internment, rather than through the initiative of a generous government. She explained further that the First Nations people were continuing their struggle with various levels of government even to the present day.

When this class was over, Mackie approached Mikiko and Miga and asked them whether her comments had made sense to them. Mikiko replied that it was interesting that a country like Canada had such a racist history, while Miga made the surprising comment, "Yeah, so what?" articulated in a frustrated tone. Miga wanted her to go further to

make the specific point that ordinary Japanese citizens should resist their government's policy of silence regarding its role in World War II. She was suggesting that it was the teacher's responsibility to encourage the Japanese students to put collective pressure on the Japanese government to change the official school curriculum.

Two interesting issues arise in relation to Miga's response. The first important point is that Miga had changed her initial understanding of the assignment in which she saw *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) as being "just a movie" to seeing the film as a possible catalyst for political change; she wished to take up John's call for action from Japanese students in the classroom. The second important point is that Miga also resisted Mackie's comments, suggesting that Mackie had not been sufficiently proactive in insisting on the need for action on the part of Japanese students. Mackie was again left wondering what might have been the most appropriate response to the critical incident, and whether her desire to maintain a safe environment in the classroom was misguided.

#### THEORIZING THE PEARL HARBOR CRITICAL INCIDENT

We have been discussing a variety of ways that critical work with popular film and education is practised. In Mackie's English language classroom, the use of film, the assignment, and the students' previous experiences created powerful moments of resistance, learning, and educational change. The film *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001), in particular, provided a rich opportunity for students with diverse identities and investments to learn that a film, as a socially constructed "text," can be a site of struggle over meaning, identity, and power. Bodies and histories collided over meaning.

What we have yet to do, however, is to theorize the reel and real events that took place in Mackie's classroom in February 2002. With Pennycook (2004), we agree that "trying to be a critical educator is more often about seeking and seizing small moments to open the door on a more critical perspective" (p. 341). What "critical perspective," then, might we bring to the debates over *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001)? It is useful, we believe, to distinguish between pedagogical practices that promote "critical thinking" and those that promote "critical praxis." We would like to make the case that both Mackie and the students were caught in

the tension between the assignment as an exercise in critical thinking and an exercise in critical praxis.

Teachers who use popular film to promote critical thinking seek to promote equality, equal access, and an attitude of tolerance toward minorities. In this view, films hold meaning, that is, the meaning is understood to be fixed within the text of the film. The critic is separated from the film, with the assumption that the critic has enough distance from the film to analyze it “objectively.” Although few connections are made between the film and wider social practices, viewers are invited to connect to the film on an academic or linguistic level. In promoting critical thinking in the viewing of a film, the teachers may ask students to identify, for example, the genre of the film; the good guys and the bad guys; the quality of the acting, dialogue, or ending of the film; and the students’ favourite or least favourite scene. Teachers may ask students to discuss their opinions of the issues that the director raised, and if they have been in a similar situation as represented in the film. At its most socially conscious, this kind of skill-building may also require that students identify stereotypical images of minorities and how the film essentializes groups. The assumption here is that once students have identified cinematic stereotypes, they may question their own constructions of particular groups.

In the initial assignment that Mackie gave the students, she sought to develop such critical thinking skills in her students. She modeled for the students how to summarize the plot of the film, how to analyze the language of the film, and how to critique a director’s decisions. She assumed that the students would objectively read their respective films for the purposes of a progressive literacy, a literacy in which students would develop language and an awareness of genres, as well as a sympathetic approach to cultural minorities. Further, she encouraged critical class participation by asking students to write anonymous reviews of their peers’ critiques. She did not expect that any students would resist the parameters of the assignment, and she did not expect that any students would disrupt the class, curriculum, or community.

Indeed, most of the students, of whom Mikiko is a prime example, had no difficulty with the parameters of the assignment. Further, most students, in writing their peer review comments, were content to view

the film as text, in which meaning remained fixed and unconnected to the identities, histories, and investments of particular viewers. Not all the students, however, were happy to adopt a distant and objective stance with respect to the critique. John resisted the parameters of the assignment, insisting that the meaning of a film is not fixed in time and space, but a site in which viewers' identities were implicated and negotiated. Miga's response, initially at least, was consistent with the expectation that the assignment was simply an exercise in critical thinking and academic analysis. Dismissing John's concerns, she argued that *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) was "just a movie" that provided an exercise in deconstruction.

In response to John's intervention, what began as an exercise in critical thinking shifted to an exercise in critical praxis, an approach to pedagogy that assumes that teaching is not a neutral activity, but a set of practices informed by critical theory, including feminist poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and queer and critical race theories (Pennycook, 2001, p. 5, p. 42). Such practices question modernist notions of science and language as objective systems and posit a view of society and subjectivity as discursively constructed within larger relations of power. As such, critical praxis is centrally concerned with the multiple ways in which meaning is constructed, and how both individuals and groups struggle to appropriate textual meaning in the interests of greater power and possibility.

When John began to question Mikiko's reading of *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001), Mackie had to confront not only a challenging student exchange, but an entire contested history spanning generations of time and continents of space. The meaning of the film *Pearl Harbor* became a site of struggle in which student identities and investments were highly implicated. Students were no longer simply film critics; they were embodied in time, space, and history. In the first reading of the film, Mikiko, like Miga, saw the assignment as an interesting activity in language learning and deconstruction; she exercised her analytical eye, applying it to the Hollywood genre. Her critique was an excellent example of what Mackie had expected. She effectively taught the students how to read and thereby resist cinematic stereotypes. Then, in the space of 24 hours, her critique of the film took on a very different

meaning as she sought to engage more actively with reel and real versions of *Pearl Harbor*. At the same time, she struggled to reposition her own identity. Miga, likewise, began to question her earlier dismissal of *Pearl Harbor* as “just a movie” and began to articulate a different set of investments with regard to the film as pedagogy.

#### SELF-REFLECTION AND CRITICAL PRAXIS

The situation called for great self-reflexivity on Mackie’s part, a central motif in critical praxis that has taken a variety of forms in recent educational work with film. For Butler (2000), self-reflexivity involved responding quickly to education students’ time restraints in completing the research protocols she had set out for them and changing her initial protocols so that her project would fit better with the students’ busy lives. Here, self-reflexivity interpellates students or research participants with power and the teacher/researcher as making changes based on that power. Self-reflexivity also comes to mean a critical awareness of one’s politics and the limitations of that knowledge, a kind of hyper-reflexivity. Kelly (1997) is an exemplar here in her examination of the film, *To Sir, With Love* (Clavell, 1967). Another example of reflexivity is in Smith’s (1999) work where she is inclusive of other readings of the film *Lean on Me* (Avildsen, 1989) but acknowledges both their resistance to her reading and her own resistance to adopting theirs. In working through issues of race and desire (Mackie, 2003), self-reflexivity begins with a call to question discourses of whiteness and gender and to recognize how these inscribe subject positions.

In responding to the set of events precipitated by Mikiko’s critique of *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001), Mackie engaged in much self-reflection about an appropriate pedagogical response. She realized that her assignment, while encouraging critical thinking, also called for critical praxis. The rationale for her choice of response to the critical incident, in which she sought to locate Japanese actions within a wider international context, was multiple. A major concern was to maintain a sense of community in the class, and ensure that both South Korean and Japanese students considered the class to be a safe space for discussion and debate. She also wanted the students to understand that violations of human rights are universal and that people need to be constantly vigilant about

struggles for social justice. But her primary rationale was to model for the students the position that acknowledging a country's historical injustices is not tantamount to being a disloyal citizen.

However, the third option Mackie chose is not without its problems. First and foremost is the possibility that Mackie felt white guilt over Canada's racist actions, and that positioning students to absolve her, the authority figure, of this guilt would be problematic. Another problem is the possibility that the students were left believing that Canada is a model country with regards to addressing its human rights violations, possibly creating an unfavorable contrast to their own countries. A final difficulty with her choice is the lack of discussion of Japanese-Canadian redress and how citizens of other countries might redress their human rights violations. It was this very issue that led Miga to challenge Mackie's pedagogy. Indeed, Mackie remained highly conflicted about her pedagogical choices.

The work of Simon (1992) aids in the analysis of Mackie's self-questioning. Simon has argued persuasively that critical praxis assumes ongoing and perpetual struggles for a vision of the world that is "not yet":

Affirming a commitment to a project of possibility ... will require forms of teaching and learning linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside their immediate experience, and to envisage a world that is "not yet" – in order to be able to alter the grounds on which life is lived. (p. 57)

Simon suggests that the search for the right pedagogical practices and the appropriate responses to critical incidences in classrooms is perhaps misplaced. Critical praxis presupposes that the desire for a world that is "not yet" will remain an ongoing struggle, in which both teachers and students constantly negotiate their claims to knowledge and power. At the heart of such negotiations are shifting identities and changing possibilities. Notwithstanding Mackie's self-questioning, her pedagogical practices had opened up increased possibilities for discussion, debate, and disagreement. The students were taking risks, struggling with ongoing relations of power, and appropriating forms of



knowledge outside their immediate experience. It is clear from the ongoing debates in the classroom that critical praxis can still remain a safe place for critical engagement, while not necessarily remaining a comfortable place for all.

#### CONCLUSION

The classroom discussion on *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) illustrates the pedagogical untidiness of providing space for critique and resistance. Mikiko's resistant reading and the students' responses to her critique underscore the multiplicity of ways popular films are read and resisted. For some students, meaning remains fixed in the film as text; a film is "just a movie" that bears little relationship to contemporary realities. For other students, meaning is discursively constructed by different stakeholders with conflicting claims to knowledge and power. For yet other students, the meaning of a film shifts as they appropriate new forms of knowledge and experience. The challenge for a teacher is to consider what pedagogical practices might create possibilities for both individual and collective growth. There are no easy or correct answers.

Drawing on the reel and real events around *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001), we have concluded that an agenda that includes both critical thinking and critical praxis with regard to the use of popular film in English language education provides exciting possibilities for engaging students in discussion, debate, and critique. Most importantly, students have the opportunity to explore the power of language as both a linguistic system and a social practice. Seeking and seizing small moments in the classroom does indeed provide insight into learning, resistance, and educational change for both students and teachers.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The article is drawn from a larger study (Mackie, 2005) that analyzed

popular films in the context of English language teaching in postsecondary classrooms, for example, *Out of Africa* (Pollack, 1985), *Good Morning, Vietnam*, (Levinson, 1987), and *Miss Mary* (Bemberg, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> We have used pseudonyms for names and places.

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