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BOOK REVIEW: PERSPECTIVES AND REFLECTIONS ON RACIAL LITERACY AS AN APPROACH TO CRITICAL WRITING INSTRUCTION

Title of the book : Teaching Racial Literacy: Reflective Practices for Critical Writing
ISBN : 9781475836622 (electronic)
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In the EFL/ESL classroom, the reflective teachers have to address issues on ethnicity and racism so that they can provide conducive, friendly, and harmonious environment where learners can feel they are accepted regardless of differences and diversities. Ethnography, as mentioned in the book of Grayson (2018), attests the need for language teachers to consider the concepts of race and ethnicity when they teach writing in the language classroom. There are instances when new students and even old feel intimidated because they cannot feel sense of belongingness or they don't feel welcome at all in the class. Through the initiatives and techniques of the language teacher, the students can see gradually the connections between them and their classmates. John Dewey, as cited by Grayson (2018), points out the functions of progressive education in social progress. Nieto (2003) on the other hand, supports diversity and race by explaining the importance of multicultural education in framing relevant curriculum framework for literacy.

Racial literacy and racism are both unnoticed issues in the composition/writing classroom. The researcher-reviewer attempted to explain, appraise, and describe the features and contents of the book authored by Grayson (2018). For a more effective review of the material, the researcher compared his own experiences and thoughts to the objectives and perspectives discussed in the book. As a language teacher, the researcher himself does not only focus on speaking, listening, and reading but among other essential skills, writing is clearly and equally important. The task of instilling among learners the value of this area may not always be successful due to some factors. First, learners may not be inclined or interested with writing. Second, the learners have not yet developed vocabulary to understand their own skills in writing which means they could hardly see meanings and directions. Another reason is the poor grammar skills of the learners, obstructing their desire to write purposefully and meaningfully.

Many teachers are not aware that racial literacy exists as an approach to teaching writing. They have knowledge on other pedagogies such as differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, project-based learning and so on. But this racial literacy is stranger to them. The book illustrates how useful this approach is. For instance, when students are engage into writing, if the language teacher inculcates with students the essence of diversity and culture, most likely, the learners can

include (in their writing) various situations with respect and consideration to culture, ethnicity, and heritage.

It is noted that racism in the book refers to dominant culture and traits of the place and community where the learners live and interact. The book is effective in exposing to the readers and researchers the importance of being socially and culturally aware when they do writing activities.

Chapter 1 focuses on the glimpse and theories of the book. It emphasizes the importance of racism in teaching writing. Terms and issues are likewise presented. Chapter 2 provided detailed information on how to plan, prepare, and provide lessons for the literacy classroom. Chapter 3 deals with reading, writing, and modality where target readers can get holistic information for their instruction. It also advises teachers which selections and texts are appropriate for classroom purposes. Chapter 4 tackles the role of narrative lyrics as an approach to teach literacy. This is followed by Chapter 5, which discusses emotions and feelings in a racial literacy classroom. Chapter 6 is the next part, which describes and elaborates personal writing and position in writing. Chapter 7 advises language teachers the boundaries (and silences) of conversations in teaching racial literacy. Chapter 8 illustrates racial literacy as a form of service learning and community outreach. Lastly, Chapter 9 offers thoughts, suggestions, and activities on how students can deal with the challenges in racial literacy.

The author is insightful in elucidating that culture, literacy, and classroom are vital in developing the writing skills of the learners who are dealing with the challenges of the contemporary time. After their academic struggle and journey, they will go to the outside world (the worksite) where they will work and meet other people. Understanding about the culture of others plays significant role in making students dynamic and open to different situations and transitions. Meanwhile, the author is commendable in mentioning the role of literacy in preparing learners for social context and workplace. It is a big responsibility of language teachers to work on literacy education programs while they keep the minds of students aware on current events and traditions related to racism.

In one chapter, racial literacy is justified to be an important tool in critical writing instruction where students coming from diverse and multicultural settings are taught to write with social awareness. In the composition classroom, the students are involved in fruitful activities like sharing stories, feelings, and ideas. They can listen, respond, and interact with other members of the class and community, where they are living.

A part of the book discusses “prepare, plan, and provide” which is wealthy narration of how the language and composition teacher can implement racial literacy as a part of his instructional strategies. Among the complex processes learners have to do are observing, interpreting, questioning, and communicating. The book also instructs language teachers that in the planning and preparation stage, the institutional mission and vision has to be regarded with respect and obedience. Of course, the location is also important in the planning phase since it tells the participants what they should do and how they prepare for the writing tasks. Another concepts impressively stated by the author are discipline-based writing and interdisciplinary instruction both are outlined from the curriculum of the school.

Other plausible studies were tackled in this article to further support and explain the approach. Teng and Zhang (2019) investigated writing performance of a group of students using argumentative essays. The two argued and claimed that argumentative writing is known as the most notable and essential standardized assessment for second language learners. On the one hand, cognitive and metacognitive strategies are functional and important in building and developing the

motivational regulation strategies of language learners as revealed by studies of Teng and Zhang (2018) and Teng, Sun, and Xu (2018).

According to the book, a tool effective in facilitating conversation is "asking questions" where the teacher could creatively and critically collect ideas from the members of the class. In this way, learners can share their thoughts and experiences regarding the community they have grown up with. Furthermore, it is amazing that the book provided example tools and strategies which the teacher can use in order to facilitate the instruction clearly and effectively.

On the other hand, song lyrics can be used as framework to embrace racial literacy as stressed by Grayson (2017) in her book. She explained how songs and lyrics are powerful tool to motivate students in expressing their thoughts and feelings bringing them closer to the goals of racial literacy.

Conclusion

Teaching writing skills is not a piece of cake. Learners always come to school with varied interests and reasons but it may not indicate they are all inclined into writing. To make learners proficient in writing is indeed a challenging task on the part of the teacher. A racial literacy is one of the effective and appropriate approaches that can be infused by the teacher to make classroom experience holistic and engaging. This article depicts issues about the use of the approach in an EFL and ESL classroom. Furthermore, some steps to racial literacy were examined by the researcher to ensure their effectiveness and relevance in teaching composition writing. The researcher realized that writing instruction can be exciting and informative if other approaches will be tested and applied in the classroom. From his personal observations and experiences, he realized that learners do not anymore stick to traditional walls but prefer something functional and authentic.

From the concepts and insights shared by the book, a great number of students and teachers can enjoy engaging in writing activities because they feel they are equipped. It is no doubt that the book authored by Grayson (2018) is highly recommended. Not only it does guide language teachers to teach racism in the writing class but it also orient teachers on how they could enhance themselves as better writing teachers who are at the same time, socially and culturally aware.

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