

Journal of Global Literacies, Technologies, and Emerging Pedagogies
Volume 2, Issue 2, March 30, 2014, pp. 125-127



Williams, E. (Ed.) (2013). *Critical issues in Literacy Pedagogy: Notes from the Trenches* (Revised Edition). San Diego, CA: Cognella. Pages: 260; Price: \$53.95
ISBN: 1621311341]

Book Review

By Stacey Duncan, PhD¹
New Mexico State University, USA

Eurvine Williams delivers a practical toolkit for educators interested in critical issues relevant to literacy teaching and learning. As adjunct faculty for teacher education programs and community college developmental education, this volume of studies done by scholars in each of those areas made this a direct reference guide go-to. I arrived as a graduate student to the field of literacy education; not knowing it was where I was in a sense already heading. Throughout my undergraduate studies, my passion surrounded language and culture and I remember asking why their significance is not embraced and engaged in education. Having been immersed in the fields of language, literacy and culture for the last 20 years, I find myself still asking similar questions about the state of literacy in this nation today, and what it is that continues to seem to perpetuate these critical issues as opposed to solving them.

What do teachers really need to know more about when it comes to literacy pedagogy, the essentiality of language and culture to the process of making meaning, and the changes in teaching and learning due to the fact that we are living in the most informationally stimulating times thus known.

There was much appreciation for Williams' beginning chapter on the historical and theoretical positioning of the discourse on critical literacy, where he describes the foundations of a critical literacy environment through a socio-psycholinguistic approach. He sets the tone for the rest of the book by recognizing it is in creating such spaces for knowing the word and the world in multiple ways that can help facilitate self-actualization and self-efficacy, while providing access to dominant and marginalized discourses through a celebration of their differences, and engaging readers in critical social consciousness as they make meaning through multiple modalities of communication. Williams eloquently reminds us that the primary application of critical literacy is in supporting the individual voice with the tools necessary to be actively engaged members for social change because "reading is a social and democratic activity" (p.14) – a participatory democratic practice that allows for both personal and public transformation.

¹ Stacey Duncan, PhD, is an assistant professor at New Mexico State University, USA.
ISSN: 2128-1333

Margarita Wulftange expands on the notion of supporting individual voices, by looking inward at the way student teacher literacy practices in the classroom reflect and/or reinforce their language ideologies. Her study considered the disconnect between theory learned in university courses and actual practice in student placement/teaching, and the possibilities of a deeper linguistic awareness or actual change in language ideology through reflective and refractive processes. Reminding us that our socialized linguistic ideologies and/or biases are always at play when teaching and learning, Wulftange exemplifies the fact that “people hold multiple language ideologies” (p.26). Her concluding implication is the need for teacher preparation programs and institutions of higher learning “to continue to provide spaces for STs [student teachers] to participate in refractive conversations that can discuss issues of bias in many aspects of their teaching practice” (p. 46). Such supportive critical literacy environments seem to be key in allowing not only students but also faculty to identify biases in order to be better aware and transform consciousness.

Using critical literacy and drama pedagogy to dialogue about race and racism in an early childhood classroom, Terry Husband illustrates the truth that young learners can handle in context. He proposes that the reason why children do not already engage in these issues in the classroom, leading to the assumption that children cannot handle these truths appropriately, has more to do with the way teacher’s structure such conversations. By creating what Husband calls “dialogical safe spaces” (p. 84) students were able to consider race, power and oppression through multiple perspectives and a “dialogically mediated curriculum” (p. 85) that results from an interactive dialogue driven engagement with texts. The use of drama pedagogy also allowed students to ‘live in the shoes’ of people in history, in a participatory and democratic way, deepening their understanding and involvement with the text. Husband’s study again essentializes the possibilities of critical literacy environments and the greater understandings available to both student and teacher in the learning process.

Much more is included in this edited volume, to name a few - Yolanda Salgado’s important distinction between the linguistic concepts of education and *educacion*, and how such affects parental and public conceptions of the role of schools. Salgado also considers the changing culture of technology in relation to the notion of literacy and language, positing that students today are all “technologically and socially multilingual and multicultural” (p. 128). Erik Walles also supports the necessity of redefining literacy and embracing technology as a form of engagement and motivation in adolescent literacy education, as he also reflectively notices his own hesitance as a teacher in the process. James Duran provides a curriculum design integrating technology in developmental reading courses, allowing students to use multiple modalities in making meaning from texts.

Throughout each chapter, one is challenged to disagree with the significance of engaging the critical issues presented, and their relevance to the state of literacy education today. As educators of any and all content, literacy is foundational to teaching and learning, but what is also rooted in that foundation is the need for more critical approaches for our students and our teaching craft.