


Chapter 17

Culturally–Effective Responsive Teaching in English Language Learners’ Literature Classes: Investigating the Value of Reader Response Theory (RRT)

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ABSTRACT

Teaching literature has been regarded as crucial to the ability to use language. There has been an upsurge of interest in using literature in language learners’ classrooms. In literacy classes, students bring their imagination, memories, thinking processes, morals, social values, historical knowledge, and prior knowledge to the text. They could extract meaning from texts as fully aware of the specificity of their cultural backgrounds and others through experiencing, exploring, hypothesizing, and synthesizing processes. The role of pedagogy drives the literary practice and leads to how knowledge is produced and how subject positions are constructed in historical, social, and political manners. This chapter raises some of the issues and debates related to using literature with language learners. It highlights some pedagogical strategies that could equip instructors with the tools to alleviate students’ tension and elevate their human motives and psyches to make the learning constructive and dynamic.

INTRODUCTION

Art is how a person makes sense of the world, and Literature transforms the world into words and words into the world. Pamuk (2007) argued that Literature is one of the most valuable human tools created to understand oneself. It is the way to discover the internal feelings and illustrate them to be consciously manipulated patiently. Teaching literature in schools has been deemed a hot debate between students and

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instructors. Teaching literature in classrooms is not to produce approved interpretations of the selected texts but to develop strategies and knowledge that enable readers to make sense of the text to avoid raising tensions throughout the learning progression (Yosso, 2002). Thence, Literature could equip teachers and students with the tools to alleviate these tensions within the teaching and learning experience.

Literature introduces English learners to various themes and perspectives on language acquisition. Literary analysis, therefore, helps students attest their lives' assumptions and provides them with the tools to reshape their life goals. If teachers carefully choose the in-class literary texts, students will feel that the classwork is relevant to their lives. Literature provides students with access to other cultures and worldviews. Some literary texts could present some life realities, yet they are fictional. Literature has been enriched by the use of Critical Theory in Education. However, Structuralism, Deconstructionism, Marxist Criticism, and Feminism became the tools to read the literary texts effectively (Rossner, 1983). These different academic approaches secure the means to experience a lot of linguistic-related themes.

Although teaching Literature has been a dynamic field for years, educators have a high uncertainty regarding the accepted teaching trend. The generally accepted view is that Literature teaching has something to do with the selected text at language "above" or "beyond" the words transcriptions. Reading literary texts is an active dialogue between the reader and the writer. Readers bring their experience, imagination, memories, thinking processes, moral and social values, historical knowledge, and prior knowledge to selected texts. These factors direct the learners' analytical perspectives of the raised literary text toward specific learning development interpretations. The coined thoughts and variations might be different from the actual intentions of the authors of the explored texts. Consequently, by integrating language learning and Literature successfully into the curriculum, learners will probably share a common belief within their active participation in a way that builds their critical thinking.

The published texts reshape the dynamic relationship between the author and readers. The authors lose their power over the written text once it is released. The readers declare the death of the author accordingly. The process of receiving the written text could be different; therefore, learners are classified based on their crafted ideas and reflections (Barthes, 2001; Richter & David, 2007). For example, learners assigned to read a play by Shakespeare look a little skeptical because of the Shakesperean unfamiliar language and his plays' themes. Educators, from their side, need to understand the reasons for this skepticism to engage learners in the learning experience actively. Jean-Paul Sartre stated that readers are complex beings that give life to literary texts in a new environment and through different reading conditions and lenses (Ben, 2014). Consequently, the pedagogical practices could drive the learning experience inside and outside the classroom. It raises how knowledge is formulated and how historical, social, and political subject positions are constructed.

Literacy education's primary objective is to let students make a difference in their lives and the lives of others. Literature would no longer occupy the center of cultural reproduction of any society since students' self-consciousness might form the intuitive social dimensions, guiding those active learners in their communications (Donnelly, 2012). Educators, though, are agents in the circulation and accumulation of developing societies' cultural capital. Therefore, the value of Literature is no longer conceived as an abstraction but as a commodity (Danielson, 2007). To this point, Literature education could guide learners to apprehend their identities and make sense of the factors that might impact them to achieve their goals in their given educational environment.

Based on Aida Walqui's research (2002), three fundamental factors influence students' ability to engage in Literature classrooms. First, the learner's language proficiency includes vocabulary knowledge, background experiences, prior knowledge, and motivation. Second, the text complexity includes

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