

should be propelled by their respect for the unalienable dignity of all people. In fact, Beaudoin asserts, what people buy is reflective of who they are, as their actions, rather than words, show others what they truly believe.

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Is This English? Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom

Bob Fecho
 Teachers College Press, 2004
 \$21.95, 173 pages

Reviewed by Meagan M. Carlevato

In *Is This English? Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom*, Fecho takes readers on an experiential and educational journey of inquiry-based learning in an urban English classroom. In order for this journey to find meaning, both the teacher and the student must take risks, cross cultural boundaries, and engage in self-discovery. This book provides a thorough overview of inquiry-based learning and how it has shaped Fecho's teaching strategies.

Inquiry-based learning is based on the construction and process of learning through active involvement and questioning. Students are more focused on developing information processing and problem solving skills. Fecho describes inquiry-based learning as "learning that required us to analyze, synthesize, categorize, and otherwise process or make sense of information" (p. 18). This allows the student to come to content understanding on his or her own terms and discovery through dialogue within the classroom with both the teacher and classmates. Fecho finds this strategy of self-discovery to be more beneficial than traditional classroom teaching. However, this strategy involves risk and stepping outside of one's comfort zone. Fecho reminds the reader that teachers must ask questions and delve into the diverse perspectives of the students in order for students to gain higher-order thinking skills. It is a much more student-centered classroom.

Throughout the book, Fecho discusses the concept of transaction in relation to inquiry-based learning and defines this theory of transaction as that “in which readers shape new text based on their experiences, and the text shapes the readers’ sense of themselves, that meaning, simultaneously social and personal, is made” (p. 45). The teacher and students are continuously learning from one another through their own experiences and class discussions. Both the teacher and the student are questioning one another and stating views and perspectives on various texts read in class. By allowing the students to transact with one another and state a variety of perspectives without being given “the meaning” of the text, Fecho illustrates that students find purpose in the experience of the transaction and are able to think critically and use the information learned in future transactions.

Fecho describes how the use of inquiry and the creation of a non-threatening classroom environment allows students to participate openly in discussions pertaining to life in a culturally diverse society. Fecho reminds the reader that there is a degree of threat and vulnerability when opening up about such tender issues as race, language, and cultural background. However, Fecho feels that these topics of controversy need to be discussed in a classroom setting through inquiry and not avoided in order for the students to understand themselves better. Students should be able to celebrate their diversity and talk openly about the topic. Fecho quotes John Dewey as saying, “The role of teachers is to bring their greater maturity and experience to the classroom in order to help students to interrogate those beliefs” (p. 89). The author stresses the fact that teachers need to participate in the transaction with the students in order to bridge the racial gap.

The author discusses the positive atmosphere elicited from inquiry-based learning and the positive responses from the students in such a unique classroom strategy. This style of teaching allows the students to challenge themselves during the learning and self-discovery process. Fecho notes the appreciation from students in taking responsibility for their own learning. This type of learning exudes excitement from the students and, as described by one student, “It’s like you are in the story yourself, you’re part of it, and you’ve got to figure out a way to solve the problems in the story” (p. 119).

Although Fecho is an example of gaining success through inquiry-based classrooms, traditional classroom strategies need not be ignored. Fecho does mention the use of the traditional classroom techniques when necessary, however, some traditional strategies, including but not limited to, memorization, textbook-based questions, and even some standardized tests do have value in teaching basic skills that further the educational value of the student. Traditional classroom instruction also has the ability to connect content areas,

enable higher-order thinking, as well as invite teachers to inquire along with their students. These techniques need not be the focus of the classroom, but they also cannot be forgotten as life skills as well.

Overall, the book provides wonderful insight into the inquiry-based classroom. Fecho describes his knowledge of instruction with such passion and excitement it is difficult not to want to put this practice into immediate action. Fecho reminds the reader to seek out the needs and the culture of the students in the classroom. The inquiry-based method will allow Catholic school teachers to educate the whole student through intellectual and social risks. Fecho wants “to see inquiry not as a strategy but as a way of life, as a way of knowing” (p. 156). Fecho’s vast positive experience of the highly rewarding inquiry-based learning brings a new meaning to the classroom.

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Literacy Leadership in Early Childhood: The Essential Guide

Dorothy S. Strickland & Shannon Riley-Ayers
Teachers College Press, 2007
\$19.00, 113 pages

Reviewed by Margaret M. O’Connor-Campbell

Today’s preschool leaders are asked to do more, know more, and produce “results.” (p. ix)

If you’re not an educator, administrator, or parent you might think the need for a book on literacy for preschoolers is a waste of ink and paper. Is not preschool where you learn how to play, get along, and take naps? Educators know that play is inherent in children and should be an integral part of preschool classrooms, but there is so much more. “Including books, paper, and writing implements in the dramatic play area to encourage children to incorporate literacy in their play activities is just one example of providing opportunities for children to learn literacy through play” (p. 45).