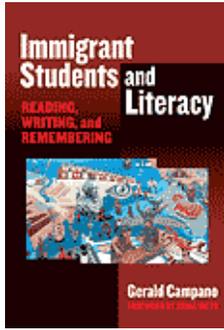


Professional Book Review

Campano, Gerald. (2007). *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering*. New York: Teachers College Press. 160 pp, ISBN: 0-8077-4732-7 (pbk). \$21.95.

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Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering captures the voice of the immigrant student, a voice that informs practice. Campano argues that collaboration between the teacher and student creates a “second classroom” (p.4) where inquiry into the cognitive and emotional domains of learning is fueled by daily interactions with students as well as the community. The storehouse of knowledge gained from this second classroom informed the author’s practice and transformed him into an advocate for validating student diversity as the key to student engagement and success.

Part One of the book provides rich qualitative data through interviews, narratives, personal reflections, student writing, and oral history. Campano, a descendent of a Filipino American, describes his own classroom experiences as a first-year teacher in a predominantly Filipino American community in California where he “negotiated boundaries” to “enable contemporary students from immigrant, migrant, and refugee families [to] become more effective agents in their own educational development by drawing upon their own life experiences, values, and literate practices” (p. 14). Students forged bonds with each other, the community, and the classroom through recounting narratives that created pictures of each individual’s cultural and family history that “nourished a rich imaginative landscape” (p. 25). Campano argues that teacher practitioners should use these stories as a “curricular resource” (p. 37).

In Part Two, Campano examines the literacy practices that emerged from validating these cultural identities. He began by redefining accountability as being “mindful of engagement with others, ...learn[ing] productively from and respond[ing] to the experiences of others, and ... cultivat[ing] mutual empathy and understanding” (p.46). This reframing led the author to become active in the community and to encourage students to write about strength found in the “the intermingling of ethnic and class sensibilities” (p. 50). These autobiographical narratives revealed that his students were articulate learners who often chose to remain silent. After voicing their narratives, students began meeting in after-school groups to discuss cultural identity and community concerns.

Critical examination of the ambiguous nature of each individual's complex cultural history fostered greater student empathy and ethical understanding for classmates and community. Multiethnic students sought to define two worlds – the past and the present. Campono explains, "Rather than be passive receivers of history, the students may draw on group experience in order to give new intellectual and ethical resonance to their lives" (p.56).

For example, Campono's students collaborated through "teatro," a culturally rich ensemble writing and acting troupe that highlighted "beautiful variations of student identity, knowledge, and expression on stage" (p.103). Students acted out improvised or collaborative scripts that were their "testimonio," their stories of struggle against social inequality.

Part Three of the book provides a description of how the author modified his professional understanding as a result of collaborating with his students. Since no structure for community collaboration existed, he birthed one by partnering with activists, students, colleagues, and members of the community. These stakeholders were invited to share in the examination of student literacy that emerged from his classroom.

As a teacher researcher, the author argues effective teachers must be willing to glean knowledge from their students through collaborative inquiry: "Inquiry as a *stance*, as a type of spatial orientation, involves resisting the stifling urge to categorize in order to make room for the individual children themselves to more fully develop and articulate their own experiences so we can question our own, ingrained assumptions" (p. 117). The teacher researcher must be interested, vulnerable, and relational. Thus, the teacher must maneuver through the standardized curricular requirements of the educational system, recognize the need for continual growth as a practitioner, and affirm the social context of education through "systematic improvisation" (p.112).

Campono views himself as an advocate for disenfranchised youth whose cultural background and life experiences were sterilized by standardized testing measures. He argues, "Curricula are manufactured to homogenize learning experiences and rank children on a unilinear scale, threatening to further marginalize some of our most vulnerable students" (p. 28). Through incorporating creative literacy strategies that addressed the social and political contexts of education, his students gained a voice that resulted in significant academic progress on standardized assessments.

This book is a challenge to educators who are seeking to engage students who often feel like outsiders in the school environment. The author's investment in the community and his collaborative work with students allowed him to develop creative instructional strategies that would benefit any classroom. The pedagogy that emerged

from this qualitative study highlights the value of fostering sound literacy skills and incorporating cultural history into the curriculum.