

12-11-2011

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Recommended Citation

Venegas, Patricia Eugenia (2011) "Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering.," *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research*: Vol. 13: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2470-6353.1086>

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An On-line Journal
for Teacher Research

A Review of Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering by Gerald Campano

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Campano, G. (2007). *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Campano's book offers a one-of-a-kind invitation for teachers to partake in action research as a fertile foundation for inquiry and for the development of new selves and new literacies. Through critical inquiry and interplay between reality and diversity in a "diaspora community" (p. 73). Campano's work inspires the construction of flexible and collaborative new knowledge—new knowledge that is embedded in the experiences of teachers and students in and out of school, family histories, and students' cultural identities. Campano's fifth-grade immigrant students, all from in an urban California school, engage in a collaborative endeavor that provides a framework for new kinds of learning and literacy development and that reflects cultural-historical approaches to learning. According to Pacheco & Gutierrez (2009), this approach "focuses on the relation between an individual's development and the context of development of which the individual student has been a part" (p. 60). Campano's own life-narrative of his Filipino heritage provides readers with a framework for considering inquiry and development in diverse communities and a rationale for new literacy practices in classrooms.

Organized into three parts—nine short chapters and a total of 120 pages—Campano's book leads readers through a coherent unfolding of considerations necessary for committing ourselves to action research in diverse communities. The first part of the book, *The Power of Inquiry*, describes

Campano's own cultural and historical knowledge gained from his Filipino grandfather, who traveled by ship across the ocean. Water acts as a symbol of loss and social transformation. It represents a "realm of unstable and evolving identities" (p. xiv), revealing the complex lives of immigrant peoples. Campano's family story involves a dialogue between generations and cultures. In this first section of the book, silenced voices from the past and the present shed new light on immigrants lived histories and the building of communities that can inform new curriculum grounded in the experiences of students. Remembering becomes an essential tool for cultural recovery.

In the book's second section, titled *Literacy Practices in the "Second Classroom,"* readers are introduced to an "alternative pedagogical space" or "second classroom" that draws upon the unique relationships forged within Campano's classroom. This space "develops organically by following the students' leads, interest, desires, forms of cultural expression, and especially stories" (p. 40). Within this space, new dialogues and relationships add personal and collective meaning to the anonymity of standardized curricula and pre-packaged literacy activities. By asking, "What would happen if I invited children from immigrant and migrant backgrounds to read, write, and speak from their own experiences and the realities of their lives?" (p. 31), Campano searches for answers that draw on the "sophisticated" insights of students as well as

family vignettes that foster reflection, memory, and transformation.

Critical inquiries highlighting history and language become both tools and products of various cultural investigations. Through participation in a *Teatro* [theatre] group or by participating in the *Dancing Across Borders* group, Campano's students cultivate affective and intellectual bonds that allow them to recognize the valuable cultural knowledge they possess. Words, as acts of agency, shape students' reflections, expressions of empathy, and correspondence. Critical inquiry provides opportunities for epistemic collaboration, the writings of rich texts, and the creation of cultural identities as writers, listeners and community members.

The final two chapters constitute Part III, Process of Inquiry. These chapters summarize what Campano learned from his students and invite teachers to work with responsibility and urgency towards the creation of "second classrooms." He reminds teachers that teaching is an ethical practice. Campano's book, *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering* inspires educators to expand their provincial notions of what counts as knowledge and curriculum opening up possibilities for forging ethical commitments.

Campano's Contribution to the Field

In an era of strong accountability where mandated state testing, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), too often guides educational policy, Campano's affirmative voice and inquiry process present the possibility of a different sort of "accountable" learning environment. For Campano, "to be accountable means—at its simplest—to be mindful of engagement with others, to learn productively

from and respond to the experiences of others, and to cultivate mutual empathy, and understanding. It is about relationships" (p. 46). As testimony to his belief that teaching is an ethical practice, Campano divorces himself, purposefully and philosophically, from the historical linking of immigrant students to deficit perspectives. On the contrary, his approach recognizes students' personal and collective experiences as promising seeds for creating brighter futures.

Through the description of students who returned to visit Campano, the commitment of these same students to follow dreams as well as through their raising of standardized tests scores, Campano illustrates how valuing students' cultures, histories, and communities establishes what Freire (1970/1996) referred to as a true dialogue. Campano's inspirational research and his ability to empower students from diverse backgrounds allow him to create "second classrooms" in schools that challenge standard curricula. He argues that teachers can accomplish this while regaining agency and becoming "intellectual activists." Ultimately, Campano's book invites teachers to apply a unique approach to literacy development that forges ethical and mutually beneficial relationships between teachers and students.

References

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