
The ESL Classroom: Teaching, Critical Practice, and Community Development

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THE ESL CLASSROOM: TEACHING, CRITICAL PRACTICE, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. Morgan, Brian D. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998. 167 pages. Cloth (ISBN 0-8020-4334-8) \$40; Paper (ISBN 0-8020-8254-1) \$14.95.

Many ESL teachers have expressed interest in learning more about critical pedagogy and how it might apply to the ESL classroom. However, they sometimes complain that most books and articles about critical pedagogy are very theoretical, often full of jargon, and rarely speak in concrete terms of what critical pedagogy might look like in a real classroom. Morgan's new book, *The ESL Classroom*, addresses these concerns in a thoughtful, useful way, addressing theory but mainly focusing on practice. Thus this book makes an ideal introduction to critical pedagogy (or, as Morgan terms it, "critical practice") for the classroom teacher.

The first chapter provides a succinct, useful introduction to "critical practice." Some of the principles the author discusses are the importance of critical thinking, the idea that language is not ideologically neutral, the fact that students' language needs are interdependent with their social needs, the important role of students' experiences and expectations in developing the syllabus, the dialogic nature of teaching, and the importance of the idea of "community" in critical language learning.

In the following five chapters, which form the bulk of the book, Morgan describes in very concrete terms, what happens in his own classrooms in a community centre in Canada, where he teaches adult immigrants. Each chapter begins with a few paragraphs of discussion of relevant principles, then quickly turns to actual, detailed lesson plans, annotated with Morgan's explanations of why he chose each activity or element of the lesson, and how the lesson was received by the students. One chapter, for example, discusses reasons for teaching political issues in the classroom, and describes a unit the author taught on the Gulf War.

The seventh and final chapter addresses teachers directly, asking them to become aware of the political and social forces which affect their students' lives. The author also asks teachers to consider critically their own professional situations, including forces

which privilege theorists and scholars and marginalize classroom practitioners within the profession. Morgan feels strongly that classroom practitioners should learn about current theories, yet must question and test those theories, choose which aspects are useful and beneficial, and trust their own knowledge of their students and their needs.

The ESL Classroom would be an excellent supplementary text in a TESL methodology class. It is equally of interest to ESL practitioners who are willing to question their own teaching practices. This is a professional book of real weight and merit which is also accessible, thought-provoking, and compelling.

About the Reviewer

Stephanie Vandrick is Associate Professor in the ESL Department at the University of San Francisco. Her research interests focus on critical and feminist pedagogies.