
Reactions: Multicultural Reading-Based Writing Modules

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REACTIONS: MULTICULTURAL READING-BASED WRITING MODULES. Roni Lebauer and Robin Scarcella. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice-Hall, 1993. 356 pp. \$17.75.

Reactions, according to its authors, is a writing text for upper intermediate/advanced ESL students which uses thematically-grouped readings with a multicultural perspective (p. vii).

Organized in three modules "Learning a Second Language," "Education," and "Stereotypes," the text presents four or five authentic readings on each topic as well as two or three additional readings at the end of each module for a total of 21 readings averaging 1,500 - 2,000 words in length. Each reading is followed by a vocabulary gloss and True/False comprehension questions as well as an "interaction" activity directing students to discuss questions related to the reading.

As a writing text, *Reactions* engages students in a variety of writing tasks ranging from a "short writing" assignment for each reading, most often writing a letter to a character in the passage, writing a short response to an issue raised by the passage, or writing a response to the reading from a point of view different from that of the passage. Each of these tasks is preceded by two or three authentic model passages by student writers in which students are instructed to locate and correct a specified number of particular grammatical errors. With each reading, students are directed to write a journal entry recounting personal experience related to the issues raised in the passage. Finally, each module concludes with an essay assignment on a choice of two topics.

Although the authors acknowledge the importance of drawing attention to the processes employed during writing, the approach they take to fostering process awareness for the student users of *Reactions* may be problematic. The six essay topics assigned in *Reactions* are each accompanied by several pages showing the development of an essay on the topic by another student. "The student's planning notes are followed by a first draft, with marginal instructor comments, which in turn is followed by comments and ratings on such criteria as content and organization by student "peer" writers. A second draft with marginal instructor notes follows, and in turn a final version of the essay is presented. While this text-based presentation may be fascinating for the teacher or researcher, it is likely to prove tedious if not

confusing to the student writer. Further, despite the author's admonitions to avoid seeing this text as a model, this presentation introduces a risk that the student may do just that. An instructor using *Reactions* might be well advised to have students develop their own essay drafts before viewing the various stages of the process model presented. Additionally, an instructor would perhaps want to supplement the "Essay Writing Checklists" which follow the essay assignments because these present yes/no questions without providing evaluative strategies. (For example, "my essay sufficiently answers the question or addresses the topic" is a difficult question to answer unless student writers have developed procedures for assessing their texts.) As a writing text, *Reactions* requires a good deal of supplementary instruction in writing processes.

As a text aimed at upper intermediate-advanced university ESL writers, *Reactions* has some other problems. Arguably, the grammar appendix deals with grammar items which these students are likely to have a good grasp of already (e.g., countable-uncountable nouns, subject-verb agreement, simple-continuous verb tenses, passive voice, and participles). Likewise, the appendix dealing with relative clauses presents a syntactic description rather than a rationale for relative clauses as functional units enabling writers to enhance unity through subordination.

The major strengths of *Reactions* are the engaging topics covered by the readings and the effort to involve students in personal and meaningful responses, both oral and written, to these provocative passages. As a reading text, *Reactions* goes a long way. As a writing text, however, it falls somewhat short of its aim.

About the Reviewer

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