

Using Critical Literacy in Early Childhood

We live in a globalized world which is also very diverse. The opportunities to interact with different cultures has increased the need for people to develop skills such as critical thinking, interdependent dialogue and reflection in order to be able to analyze and solve complex problems. Children are exposed to political and power issues from early on. These experiences shape the development of their beliefs about power and inequality in society. Educators are influential in the development of positive attitudes and behaviors for an egalitarian society (Pohan, 2000). One of the tools used in education for developing reflection, critical thinking and values is children's literature. Books are a universe filled with ideologies, values, beliefs and worldviews (Taylor, 2003). Children's literature can be used to influence young reader's views about themselves and the behaviors accepted within their culture (Chaudhri, & Teale, 2013).

Some authors pose reading as a social practice where texts can be constructed and reconstructed with different messages and meanings (Luke and Freebody, 1997). As educators of young children in a multicultural society, "we can either teach literacy as a series of skills, or we can teach it as if words matter" (Powell, Cantrell & Adams, 2001, p. 780). Critical literacy is an approach that equips teachers and students with a structure that helps to alter inequality (Vasquez, 2014). When using critical literacy, students analyze their world and consider actions they may take to transform it (Gregory & Cahill, 2009). Critical literacy can promote discussions about power, gender, social class, religion, culture and race that are presented in texts children read or listen to during read alouds (Comber, 2003). Regardless of all the potential benefits that using critical literacy may bring, by teaching students not only to decode a text but to critically think about what they read, this approach is still rarely used in early childhood classrooms (Kuby, 2013; Vásquez, 2014).

This workshop will guide participants to reflect about their beliefs related to social justice and critical literacy and how those beliefs influence their current practice as early childhood educators and leaders who promote young children's development. The second part of the workshop will support participants in the creation of a plan to use critical literacy within an early childhood context in their community. The workshop will follow the BSCS 5E Instructional Model (Bybee, 2009). The five phases in this model include: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate. Within those phases, we will use Thinking Routines ("Think, Puzzle,

Explore”, “I used to think..., now I think” and “Compass Points” found in Rithchart, Church & Morrison, 2011) to engage the audience.

References

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