

**“Becoming Community-Engaged Educators:
Engaging Students Within and Beyond the Classroom Walls”**

Siti Mina Tamah

mina@ukwms.com

Department of English Education

Graduate School

Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University

Surabaya, Indonesia

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Abstract

The book under review is a compilation of reflective writings from seven great educators. This book is worth reading since each educator has included some reflection questions to complement the life narrative they joyfully share. It not only tells stories, but it also prompts my own contemplation. My own reflection has brought about a three-sentence plea: “When teachers teach and students learn, it is just a classroom. When teachers teach and both teachers and students learn, the classroom becomes alive. Yet, when teachers teach and communities are engaged, the classroom is truly revived”. Anita Lie focuses on poverty lessening while Joel Jablon tells how he becomes a ‘radically open’ person. Yoshi Grote highlights the quality of being an admiring teacher. The necessity for religion tolerance is highlighted in Lisa Liss’ story. Linda Ruas shares her love to a wider community of untrained volunteer teachers while Kip Cates provides a gentle reminder for environmental education. George Jacobs introduces quite a current issue on how he implements intersectionality as a life understanding method. If you are seeking for models of life to investigate professional ways to engage communities in order to renew the life you live, this book is not to be missed.

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Introduction

Published by Springer in 2022, the book under-review is entitled “Becoming Community-Engaged Educators: Engaging Students Within and Beyond the Classroom Walls.” George M. Jacobs and Graham V. Crookes are the editors of this 86-page book.

The edited book under review has compiled reflective writings from seven big people to be more specific, seven educators. The chosen educators have portrayed their own simple but wonderful life stories. I have pleasantly got the opportunity to implement what Bakhtin (1981 in Yumarnamto, 2016)

offers as a framework of understanding experience in terms of unending dialogues. My humanistic experience after reading it is then mediated by reflection which subsequently results in my thinking about a revitalized life – new prerequisite for an educator to make it come true.

As my own reflection resulting “an outcome specified regarding learning, action or clarification” (Moon, 2007, p.192), I have

since arrived with the following entreaties after relishing the book:

When teachers teach and students learn, it is just a classroom. When teachers teach and both teachers and students learn, the classroom becomes alive. Yet, when teachers teach and communities are engaged, the classroom is truly revived..

The Book Content

Ideas for what community-engaged educators can do to lessen poverty are highlighted in Anita Lie’s story. The empathy this inspiring professor forms while attending an urban primary school remains in her heart and influences her actions up to the present day. Voicing out her ideas through the national media on behalf of education reform and how to alleviate poverty for those less privileged has been a key concern for her – a genuine model of engaging community from a humble Indonesian educator who has travelled to many parts of the country to work on professional development projects for less privileged teachers. What wisdom she owns with the following success indicator: “My indicator of success in such projects is that when I leave them, they can continue the program on their own.”

Following the call out of education reform by Anita Lie, it is the racism wounds that teach Joel Jablon to be a ‘radically open’ person. He reappraises one of his favorite books *To Kill A Mockingbird*, a life-improving book teaching him to develop his career as a teacher in ceasing the severe wounds of those affected. Having been honored as a white upper-middle class person in the USA, he has imagined how he could become the defending white lawyer in his much loved book. Well, instead of doing exactly what the white lawyer does to protect a Black client from racism which dates back to enslavement, and which Bowser (2017) points out as something intergenerational and cultural, he finds a way of how he can contribute himself to positively account for the merits implied in the book. One radical openness revealed is his enthusiasm to listen to others

with different views about the book. Joel’s teaching has expanded beyond the classroom by being a good listener and tolerating a variety of opinions on challenging issues.

The quality of being an admiring teacher is what Yoshi Grote portrays. She recounts the three lessons from her former great teachers: “The best teachers are authentic. The classroom is the world. Teaching is political.” Yoshi’s resolution to leave her hiding place as a lesbian is a turning point in the chapter. She eventually ceases hiding. A bit radical openness has been revealed. Yoshi lets her students know who she is. She even lets her inquisitive students put herself as a resource of one life reality. Furthermore, she involuntarily becomes a role model for anyone who is confined in alienation, a classic exemplar for those feeling outside the norm in any way. There are many people out there who feel cornered because they lack what society sees as something that is abnormal. As a lesbian herself, she ventured openly to being a source of information.

The quotes of Paulo Freire “*I cannot be a teacher without exposing who I am.*” she asserts right in the opening section in her story seems to be drive for her leaving inauthenticity to follow the path of her former teachers to become, indirectly, a trustworthy one.

What about engaging community for the issue of religion intolerance? It is Lisa Liss’ life story highlighting this issue. Growing up in a small town in rural Texas, USA, a place where everyone practices the same religion,

Lisa Liss has been surrounded by intolerance issues. Even worse, Lisa's dad adopts a tough form of intolerance. Her journey begins to alter direction when Lisa's family move to a big city for her primary school. It is here where she meets people from many backgrounds. Her eyes are opened after communicating with people of various religions and cultures. She finds people with different religions and cultures in numerous books she reads in the school library. One particular coveted book, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, has an extraordinary impression on her. It takes about 15 years for her wish to be one of Anne's followers to come true. "I knew somehow, some way, I had to help people respect others no matter how different their beliefs might be." Together with her students, Lisa goes beyond the classroom walls. They show the world their tireless endeavors by performing many pro-tolerance activities. The most stunning success is when their dream to commemorate the killing of 1.5 million children of various religions in the Holocaust comes true. An 11 year-long Bandage Project to collect 1.5 million bandages is realized on, supposed to be, Anne's 90th birthday. Another example of a community-engaged educator taking her students beyond the classroom life to the revitalized life.

An academic-oriented community service is the side activity of Linda Ruas. It is where Linda puts her life story as she volunteers to be a member of a prominent association of language teachers, i.e. International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). She is engaged with students from privileged community who prepare their children for academic achievement well, and – yes, her luck – her students can learn English by themselves. The turning point during her teaching career starts when she gets assigned to educate refugees in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately these students have much less privileged backgrounds and unlike her earlier students, these students are much weaker academically. Besides, these students are dealing with visa issues affected by their uncertain visa status. Linda's teaching in Greece's and France's

refugee camps is even more difficult. The teaching experience with less privileged students has made her realize not only to accomplish so much in classrooms but also to go beyond ... to the wider community of teachers to look towards making changes more on the instructional system. This is where Linda's IATEFL work comes into play heading for more stirring activities for a wider community of mostly untrained volunteer teachers.

Environmental issues beyond the classroom wall. Is it accountable? This is the focus of Kip Cates' story. Teacher organization, a similar one as in the story of Linda's, is another driving force for Kip who has been engaged both in international and local teacher organizations: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and the Japan Association for Language Teaching. Influenced by his childhood and his family background with a forestry area in western Canada, Kip's has included environmental education in his language teaching. In a more academic setting, he is influenced by his physics teacher who conscientiously shows support for the environment by his works in newspapers and elsewhere in the media. Conformity has been around him since his early teaching career. This restriction does not, by chance, last long as he spends the majority of his teaching career at a very different institution that appraises teacher autonomy treating teachers as professionals and providing them freedom to design their own teaching. Kip has plentifully taken use of this substantial freedom by incorporating environmental problems and other global challenges into his lectures through content-based language teaching. Making use of the benefits of e-newsletters, Kip also generously offers resources with other instructors and with his graduate students attending his course.

Eventually, George Jacobs, one of the book editors, takes the privilege to recount how he goes from being a vegetarian to being a lovely educator advocating farmed animals. He is quiet as he does not bring up his diet unless people ask him. He is an educator who uses his teaching skills in and out of the

classroom to make farmed animals, such as chickens, fishes, and cows, equally important as human beings. As a farmed animal lover, he avoids repeating the idiom *kill two birds with a stone*. “Instead, I sometimes make up new idioms, such as *feed two birds with one bowl*.” What cannot be missed in George’s story is the quite new issue of intersectionality. He introduces the issue on how he implements intersectionality as a method to, among others,

link issues, e.g., connecting farmed animal issues to LGBTQ issues, environmental issues, women’s issues, and the treatment of poor people. This connecting various progressive issues via intersectionality might probably have something in common with how student-centered language teachers associate various student-centered methods, for instance, bonding extensive reading and cooperative learning.

Conclusion

As each educator has inserted some reflective questions to accompany the life story they happily share, this book is remarkably valuable. Not only does it present stories, it also invites ‘future responses’ as Bakhtin (1981 in Yumarnamto, 2016) puts it.

The edited book has the phrase ‘within and beyond the classroom’ in the title. The stories from the chosen educators can actually be sequenced to approach what the title implies. The first four stories can then be rearranged to start with those stories revealing ‘within the classroom’ to ‘beyond the classroom’. Despite this tiny flaw, the book is worth reading.

If you are one of those people searching or looking for models of life you desire to follow and if you want to explore professional practices to engage community to revitalize the life you live, you must not miss this book.

As **Michael Jackson** sang “Heal the world. Make it a better place, for you and for me, and the entire human race,” **George M. Jacobs & Graham V. Crookes**, the book’s editors, hoped to do similarly via the educators’ words in “Becoming Community-Engaged Educators: Engaging Students Within and Beyond the Classroom Walls.”

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