

More on Critical Race Theory from a Teacher's Perspective

Teacher, Jack Conrad, posted the following conversation on his Facebook page and does a beautiful job addressing Critical Race Theory (CRT) in a polarized society.

Read that here:

Two days ago, I tried to explain Critical Race Theory to a friend of mine who had asked me, "So, are you going to have to teach CRT in your classroom this year?"

I swallowed hard and started to ask him questions instead of acting on my defensiveness. First, I wanted to determine what he knew about CRT. After a few minutes, I understood that it was little more than the talking points from right wing media, which by the way, all contain a tiny little kernel of truth that has been misrepresented and overblown to make it overly simplistic and scary to those who have never encountered CRT till now.

In the next few minutes, I drilled down to try to figure out what he was actually upset about. In the course of our conversation, I came to see that he is scared, actually terrified, that the world has changed, is changing and likely will change even more in the next few decades. The changes scare him because he sees people who don't look like him or share his opinions, beliefs and background demanding equality, inclusion and respect. He sees them moving into positions of power, though too slowly, and he rightly understands that as they do so, people who look like him and feel as he does will have to re-assess lots of things they have assumed were true and taken for granted.

In the next part of our conversation, I asked when he learned about the race massacres in various cities around the country in the decades following the end of Reconstruction and leading up to the passage of the Civil Rights Act. I asked him about redlining and the other racially motivated practices that have created the wealth gap, the education gap and the health gap. I asked him about a lot of historical events. To his credit, he took the questions seriously, offered his objections and then listened when I offered him ways to verify what I was telling him. He asserted that it was actually LBJ's Great Society that created the "culture of dependence" and poverty that we suffer from now. I asked him if he thought that a incomplete social overhaul that came after the Civil Rights Act and was

intended to right some of the generational inequalities and injustices could actually have been the primary cause of the struggles that still face so many people. I asked him if that program was more to blame than the century of systemic discrimination, prejudice and racism of Jim Crow. I pushed him hard. In the end, he agreed that common sense would indicate that three and a half centuries of built-in racism probably had more of an impact. I assured him that this fuller story of our history is what most of the loudest voices on the right have neatly, but erroneously, packaged as CRT.

As we wrapped it up, I returned to his initial question, but I posed it to him in a different form. I asked him if he thought I should teach all of the facts, the full story of history, in my classroom or if I should neglect to mention the facts when they reflected negatively on our past choices and policies. He is a musician, so I asked him to consider how he learned to play. Did he only play the easy passages over and over when he was learning songs or did he hunker down on the tougher bits and rehearse them over and over, slowly at first, then up to speed, till he could play them. He understood what I was saying. We ended as friends but on a deeper level. He is a good dad, a good husband and a great songwriter. I am worried about him. I love him. But I am not going to make it easy on him, nor should he make it easy on me. We are friends. The iron for each other's steel.

That's what all this about. A more perfect union. It was never supposed to be finished. When it's finished, it will no longer exist. A song is a song only when it's playing. A kiss is a kiss only when we're kissing. To quote W.H. Auden, "We will love one another or die."

So, yes, to answer his question, I will use ideas from CRT in my classroom when they are illustrative and helpful, just as I will use New Historicism, Structuralism, New Criticism, Reader Response, and any number of other critical approaches to literature and history, both "conservative" and "liberal," if they promote deeper reflection, critical thinking, discernment and learning. My job is to create better humans and to give them the tools that will allow them to be the better humans they are meant to be based on their choices and their beliefs, not mine. But none of us can be better humans if we fight straw men instead of the real enemies that threaten to destroy us all—poverty, inequality, injustice, and the lies that propagate and perpetuate them.