

Overcoming the Challenges of Subjective Truths in the Post-Truth Age Through a Critical Ethical English Pedagogy

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Abstract : Following the 2016 US presidential election and the advancement of the Brexit referendum, the concept of “post-truth”, defined by Oxford Dictionary as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”, came into prominent use in public, political and educational circles. What this essentially entails is that in this age, individuals are increasingly confronted with subjective perpetuations of truth in their discourse spheres that are informed by beliefs and opinions as opposed to any form of coherence to the reality of those who these truth claims concern. In principle, a subjective delineation of truth is progressive and liberating – especially considering its potential in providing marginalised groups in the diverse communities of our globalised world with the voice to articulate truths that are representative of themselves and their experiences. However, any form of human flourishing that seems to be promised here collapses as the tenets of subjective truths initially in place to liberate has been distorted through post-truth to allow individuals to purport selective and individualistic truth claims that further oppress and silence certain groups within society without due accountability. The evidence of which is prevalent through the conception of terms such as “alternative facts” and “fake news” that we observe individuals declare when their problematic truth claims are questioned. Considering the pervasiveness of post-truth and the ethical issues that accompany it, educators and scholars alike have increasingly noted the need to adapt educational practices and pedagogies to account for the diminishing objectivity of truth in the twenty-first century, especially because students, as digital natives, find themselves in the firing line of post-truth; engulfed in digital societies that proliferate post-truth through the surge of truth claims allowed in various media sites. In an attempt to equip students with the vital skills to navigate the post-truth age and oppose its proliferation of social injustices, English educators find themselves having to devise instructional strategies that not only teach students the ways they can critically and ethically scrutinise truth claims but also teach them to mediate the subjectivity of truth in a manner that does not undermine the voices of diverse communities. In hopes of providing educators with the roadmap to do so, this paper will first examine the challenges that confront students as a result of post-truth. Following which, the paper will elucidate the role English education can play in helping students overcome the complex ramifications of post-truth. Scholars have consistently touted the affordances of literary texts in providing students with imagined spaces to explore societal issues through a critical discernment of language and an ethical engagement with its narrative developments. Therefore, this paper will explain and demonstrate how literary texts, when used alongside a critical-ethical post-truth pedagogy that equips students with interpretive strategies informed by literary traditions such as literary and ethical criticism, can be effective in helping students develop the pertinent skills to comprehensively examine truth claims and overcome the challenges of the post-truth age.

Keywords : post-truth, pedagogy, ethics, English, education

Conference Title : ICELT 2023 : International Conference on English Language Teaching and Linguistics

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : November 27-28, 2023