Culturally Responsive Teaching: Writers in Our Diverse Schools

Writing is a cornerstone for learning and this issue contains teacher contributions for peer-to-peer sharing. Teaching across content areas in math for middle and high school classes as well as elementary perspectives on writing from a diverse viewpoint. Links and resources for culturally responsive lesson

Culturally Responsive Teaching in a Math Class
By Diana Bowen

Each year brings a new facet of my teaching. This year I started a segment called “Math in the News.” Students read an article and highlight math, data, and words they are unfamiliar with. We discuss the article and answer a series of math and data questions related to the articles. This winter, my students found themselves reading about the economy and job growth, distracted driving studies, the weather, and a lot about Virginia basketball. It’s nice when you get to share your love for basketball and math!

Recently, we read several articles and watched a news segment on the Trayvon Martin case. The discussion following the reading was emotional, thought provoking, and real. Every student had an opinion and every student wanted to read more. This group of students is often hesitant to share opinions or even speak in class. We also discussed the math behind the forensic evidence including distance, rate, time, measurement, force and other quantities that could be considered. Students could see and understand how math supports different points of view. I encouraged my students to continue to follow the news.

A few days later one of my students commented that she discussed the article with her mother. She prided herself on being able to explain to her mother the on-going investigation and the different issues involved in the case. Mom was impressed with her daughter’s knowledge and interest. To see this student’s confidence and interest in school grow from such a simple assignment is a testament to the importance of real-world and relevant assignments. Since the original discussion, my students regularly fill me in on the case and the newest pieces of information. Bringing up this tragedy helped me find a new way to connect with my students and a new way to bring relevance and relationships into my curriculum.
Writing from a diverse perspective…
Multi-Cultural "Take Away Tips" from an Elementary viewpoint

1) Mini Writing Lessons: For differentiation with groups of students during writing time
   - Evaluate students' writing and then group students according to skills they need when planning your lessons
   - Within the small groups of students, hold mini-lessons to give them instruction/strategies to build specific skills such as voice, grammar, etc.
   - Re-evaluate often to assess if students are improving in skill areas and to change student groupings as necessary

2) Peer Editing
   - Have students share their writing in pairs
   - While in pairs, the students should choose 4 compliments of the writing being shared that they can give to the writer
   - Students should volunteer to share writing pieces with the whole group of students and to receive compliments on their writing

3) Visual Writing Prompts
   Students produce illustrations to use for writing prompts for a later use

Resources

- This article leads to 50 great books, plus advice from top educators, writers, on how to spot literature that transcends stereotypes. [http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/how-choose-best-multicultural-books](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/how-choose-best-multicultural-books)

- National Writing Project Writing is essential to communication, learning, and citizenship. It is the currency of the new workplace and global economy. Writing helps us convey ideas, solve problems, and understand our changing world. Writing is a bridge to the future. [http://www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org)

Culturally-Responsive Teaching Strategies for Writing
By Barbara Keys

1. Start with students’ personal experiences and strengths. Writing prompt, “What do you know A LOT about?”
2. Grammar and Conventions lessons should be self-directed, authentic to their own writing and self-motivated.
3. Value student’s experiences even if they are not like your own.
4. Have students write or draw for reflection.
5. Allow talk and interaction amongst students to exchange ideas among each other.
6. Encourage questions and questioning.
7. For ESOL students, encourage use of bilingual dictionary or bilingual technology like google translate.
8. Honor the use of home language for students to speak in their own languages to gain understanding.
9. Use and encourage non-verbal representations that could help with understanding. Draw pictures, show short films to drive the point home, use graphs.
10. While students are writing, check in with students individually and use their words or ideas for starting points in leading whole group reflections.
Susan Scofield  
Burley Middle School - Born and raised in Charlottesville

Who was the teacher who impacted you most?
I was diagnosed with hearing loss when I was six years old, and my first grade teacher was diligent in making sure I could correctly say all my vowels, consonants, and blends. Even today, when folks know how little I actually hear, they are amazed with how well I speak.

When did you decide to go into the education field?
I've been teaching Sunday school for over 25 years. After retiring from the USPS, I decided to substitute teach, and fell in love. I received my teaching certificate when I was 45, and teaching has been my most rewarding job to date.

Where did you go to elementary, middle and high school?
Fox Lake Elementary, Tampa, FL  
Baldwin Elementary Manassas, VA  
Coles Elementary Manassas, VA  
Evangel Christian School Woodbridge, VA  
Osborne Park High School, Manassas, VA

Who are your real life heroes?
Helen Keller and ANYONE with a physical disability.

What is your idea of greatest happiness?
Knowing you did your best with everything you were handed in life, and challenging others to do their best.

You may be surprised to know ..
I was a power lifter in 1996-2000, and competed in the Paralympics in Sydney, Australia in 2000.

Why did you join the DRT committee?
I am chock-full of diversity!

Artist in Residence - AIR
April is National Poetry Month! Celebrate poetry and the diversity of voices in your classroom by inviting AIR Julia Kudravetz into your classroom for a poetry workshop. Along with 5th grade English teacher and DRT Christine Chapman at Stone-Robinson Elementary, Julia has developed workshops that will bring out the diverse perspectives of your students.

In the first workshop, each student will be given a household object (for example an old glass Coca-Cola) and will write about it using descriptive language, eventually connecting the object to a personal memory. The class will discuss how memory and experience changes how a person “sees” new objects. This exercise covers SOL descriptive and figurative language.

The second workshop covers the Language Arts SOL for pattern, rhyme, meter. Your students will find the rhythm in their names and in familiar song lyrics. You will talk about how people in different parts of America or with different family backgrounds may pronounce or “stress” words differently. Julia will share several patterned poems, then the class will write a patterned poem together.

Don’t know how to fit this into your curriculum? Every age and subject can provide an opportunity to connect with students’ cultural backgrounds through language and poetry.

Email Julia Kudravetz jkudravetz@k12albemarle.org to schedule.

DRT Contacts
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Baker-Butler –Katherine Shifflett  
Broadus Wood– Kathy Childress  
Brownsville–Nicole Maclay  
Burley–Susan Scofield  
Cale–Karen Garland  
CATEC – Adam Hastings  
Community Charter–Don Vale  
Crozet–Maggie Morris  
Greer –Alicia Hines  
Henley–Heather Walker

Hollymead–Kelly Davenport  
Jouett–Mary Nash  
Meriwether Lewis–Cheryl Wetmore–Simpson  
Monticello–David Grubbs, Gail Epps  
Murray– ES-David Crouch  
Murray HS–Joan Gilrain  
Red Hill–Tracey Sellers  
Scottsville–Tracy Armstrong  
Stone Robinson–Christina Chapman  
Stony Point –Latisha Wilson  
Sutherland–Kara Menfi  
Walton–Susan Rigby, Rajanesha Iae-Iyama  
Western Albemarle–Diana Bowen  
Woodbrook –Leslie Wills  
Yancey–TBD
What is Culture?
Author, Bonnie Davis (2005), defines culture as the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, activities, and knowledge of a group of individuals who share historical, geographical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, or social traditions, and who transmit, reinforce and modify those traditions. Using these characteristics to improve culturally responsive teaching would involve considerations to the classroom environment. (Gay, 2000)

Lesson Plan Ideas

Resources and links

☐ Creative ideas to include cultures and countries in your lesson plans
Http://www.lessonplanspag e.com/sslaoicountriesandculturesideas18-hmt/

☐ Comparing Cultures
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/10/g68/tgdigital.html

☐ Sheltered Instruction for ELL learners, great lesson plans
http://www.cal.org/siop/resources/lessonplans.html

☐ RAFT Strategy / Read, think and Write
http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-raft-writing-strategy-30625.html

Writers in Our Diverse Schools
By Jane Hansen, PhD and Maggie Morris DRT Crozet

Who is a writer? And what is a diverse school? A writer is someone, large or small, who comes to the paper confident about what s/he will write on that page. A diverse school could simply be any school, as students in all classrooms are different from each other. Today, we have students from many countries, cultures, and subcultures.

The challenge is for us to create writing environments in which all the students know we see them as knowledgeable, which is a prerequisite to being a writer. Writers/Authors are authorities. They know they possess knowledge that no one else in the room knows, and that’s not all. They also know: the teacher and classmates want to know what they know. Curiosity and honor permeate a classroom of writers.

Plus, their teachers, as readers, know: if we put a book aside for too long, we need to reread in order to figure out where we are. Writing works in a similar manner. Students need to stay with it daily, so when they pick up a draft, they know where they were and can write those next words easily.

And, just as we can read more than one book/item on any given day, students can work on more than one piece of writing. The necessity of preserving time in school for students, Every Day, to work on drafts of their own choosing is uppermost, paramount, and necessary.

Teachers in our workshops talk about ways to reconsider their writing instruction. The two major take-always: As teachers we see ourselves amidst our students while they write, and the strength and confidence of the writer carries more importance than the strength of the writing.

Next writing workshop is Thursday, April 26, 2012
Email: mmorris3@k12albmarle.org to register.