Lowery, R.M., Sabis-Burns, D. (2007). “From Borders to Bridges: Making Cross-Cultural Connections through Multicultural Literature”. *Multicultural Education*, 50-54.

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Abstract

Lowry and Sabis-Burns discuss the need for teaching multi-cultural literature, particularly in light of the growing population of multi-cultural students. Minority groups are growing at an increasing rate, whereas the ethnicity of the average educator is still white, female, and middle class. Teaching multi-cultural literature will help students breach their understanding of other cultures, and their own. Learning to appreciate the uniqueness of other cultures will help foster a more world conscious environment in the class room. The authors point out that while many teachers acknowledge the value of teaching multi-cultural literature, the resources available are limited and outdated. A significant problem exists in children’s books where images of various ethnicities are not represented in a true or positive light. Books need to be updated to reflect the truth.

The authors cite the term, “ethnic encapsulate” (Barnes, 1994), which refers to one that has been deprived of knowledge of cultures other than his or her own. In view of this, and the fact that much of the traditional literature available does not represent diverse cultures, students’ frustration levels increase because of not feeling included. To help bridge this gap in learning, pre-service teachers are being taught how to teach multi-cultural literature. The article includes several reflections from teachers who completed an assignment that required them to teach a multi-cultural unit. Pre-service teachers acknowledged they learned a great deal about their culture, other cultures, and had an increased desire to gather resources for future teaching opportunities.

Application

There is significant value in teaching a multi-cultural literature unit. It would be beneficial for teachers like myself to attend a pre-service, or to receive some instruction on how to approach this before attempting it. If not, I would just learn by trial and error. It would be interesting to begin looking at children’s books that reflect various cultures and see how far they are from teaching the truth. This could be a mini-research assignment to hook students into the unit and raise their initial awareness about a specific culture. I could also give an assignment that requires students to watch television for a specified amount of time, and take note of how often a non-European individual is depicted in a negative light. I’m sure the follow-up discussion would be engaging. I have not attempted a multi-cultural literature study yet, but I would begin with building my background knowledge on the topic, relating it to the current theme, and finding appropriate materials.

Question

How can I be pro-active in addressing the concerns of my non-white students whose cultures may or may not be included in traditional literature? How do I explain why they were not included, or why they were depicted in a false light?