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Abstract

A multicultural text is not the all-powerful tool that will produce profound improvement and involvement in classrooms. The key to success is to teach that text to students in a way that transcends the book itself and draws upon the life experiences of the students in an atmosphere of trust and respect that must be first established by the teacher. Otherwise, the text alone is going to be another one added to a large past collection that now means nothing to the student. The text only speaks to the students under certain circumstances.

The teacher must establish a fun and caring learning environment. Students learn best when they are enjoying the curriculum. They can tell the difference between the teachers who care about the students and enjoy their job from the ones who don’t. Sometimes care is shown by believing in a higher caliber of work from students. Pushing a student to do their best can force students to realize their full potential, see that someone does believe in them, and then believe in themselves and their abilities. Dismissing any student, even the difficult ones, for whatever reason is doing them an injustice; we are failing them by not doing our job. We are not showing that we want the best for them.

Establishing and maintaining a trusting environment can help students to explore their own views when a multicultural text is presented. Students are more apt to offer their view when they know that all teachers and students are going to respect them. After this, in depth discussions, group work, projects, insightful classroom comments, and a deeper learning experience become possible. Students will be able to make a deeper connection to the multicultural text that has been brought into the classroom by being able to see themselves and other students in the text. This will allow for students to learn more about other people, cultures, economic statuses, and ethnic groups. This opens doors of opportunity to tear down certain stereotypes.

Once this trusting environment has been established, teachers are able to learn more about their students and students about other students. Knowledge and appreciation of other cultural groups expands. Students reveal their own diverse backgrounds and then the multicultural text comes alive to them and, suddenly, relevant and interesting.

Application

Although proper materials are a large portion of success in any course, they are not a magic formula for successful lessons and students. Educators have to go “beyond the book” to establish a trusting, fun relationship with students to lay the groundwork for the literature to be engaging and speak to the students. I like to think that I already try to get to know my students, have fun with them, and build that trusting relationship, but I know I could do better. When Page mentioned the dismissing of difficult students, I did have a few students whose name came to mind, not that I dismiss them altogether, but I could give a better attempt to pull them into the class and texts that we read in class.

This article could be incorporated in the framework of a workshop. I think all teachers, young and old, could stand to hear this message, especially in an economy where we can’t afford to buy new multicultural novels as freely as before; these ideas could be incorporated into a class where articles or short excerpts could then be brought in to demonstrate and teach an appreciation for multiculturalism. Teachers will notice that they even enjoy their subject more if they are continuously are searching for new materials that the students will have fun with.

Discussion Question: After we build that fun, trusting relationship with all kids in our class, what do we need to do next to ensure that the multicultural text will be successfully implemented in our classroom? Which materials should we find and use? Activating Projects? Establish expectations? Etc?