Lowery, R. M. & D. Sabis-Burns (2007). “From borders to bridges: Making cross-cultural connections through multicultural literature ”.*Promising Practices*, ProQuest, 50-54.

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Abstract

Current English educators must examine their bookshelves and bookrooms and ask themselves the tough question: Who is not being represented, and why? This question is one that many schools and counties across the country are avoiding for a variety of reasons illustrated briefly by Lowery and Sabis-Burns. Financial implications, limited spending allotments, fear of parental backlash, and educator fear of misrepresenting a culture that is unfamiliar to them are just a few. It is absolutely imperative, argue the two authors, that teachers have the conversation and ultimately decide to incorporate multicultural literature into the English classroom because nearly 40% of students are from minority backgrounds.

Not every student is alike or can easily be lumped into their racial or ethnic background. Some students do not acknowledge that part of themselves. Some students do not know about themselves and where they come from. Often teachers misunderstand that if there are African Americans in the classroom, those students will certainly enjoy reading about African Americans.

Multicultural literature and multicultural awareness in education is not simply pre-pulling multicultural texts to use. It is about bringing global awareness to the entire classroom about a race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. that may or may not be represented in the classroom, but most certainly is represented in the world. America is one of the most diverse locations in the world, and yet teachers often do a disservice to their classrooms by avoiding the multicultural issue. They use “borders” when they create English curriculum that excludes multicultural awareness. English teachers are supposed to “bridge” this gap with the discussions of text that go beyond the same one-sided lens.

Application

Even though this article was aimed at pre-service teachers seeking understanding of how to better incorporate multicultural texts in the classroom and its worth, I found the background bits and pieces, especially those of Sabis-Burns personal frustrations, particularly enlightening. I often ask my students to think of their history books and how might the story have changed if we started earlier. They get confused. “What? The history books start at the beginning.” No, they don’t. They usually start with an invasion or war, where there is supposedly some meat to begin with. What about starting with more information about the Native Americans before the white folks get around to them in American history? How might the story change? How might our understanding change?

Question to ask: How are pre-service teacher currently being trained or taught as how to bring in more multicultural awareness?