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ENGL 771

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Article Abstract

Tiffany J. Hunt and Bud Hunt. “Learning by Teaching Multicultural Literature.” *English Journal* 94:3 (Jan. 2005): 76-80.

Abstract:

Hunt and Hunt discuss the importance of acquiring the skills to teach multicultural literature on the job and stress that practical experience and encounters with the literature is the key to getting better at dealing with these complex texts. By using a number of personal anecdotes, the authors demonstrate their plight in gaining confidence with teaching texts that often present problems to those with little knowledge or understanding of the culture from which the writing originates.

Hunt and Hunt stress clear distinctions between peoples within the same cultural group; for instance, the numerous Native American tribes, and how they can differ greatly among themselves. This leads to many misperceptions when general assumptions are made about two different groups within these communities, and the authors point out how this can lead to difficulties and misunderstandings. Along these same lines, the authors stress teaching multicultural works from within the American canon, pointing out that much diversity exists within mixed races within the U.S.

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The next hurdle faced by the authors was constructing a thoughtful rationale for the teaching of multicultural texts. Recognizing the benefits of exposing students to representative literature from different races and cultures was only the first step in determining *why* doing this is helpful. Hunt and Hunt propose that rationale is developed through experience much as an understanding of teaching approaches. Teachers must have justifiable reasons for teaching what they teach, and not rely solely on altruistic motives in the interest of cultural equality. Ultimately, the authors decided that as a teacher’s experience grows, their personal beliefs and values will also develop, which will be reflected in the assignments and the development of rationales. Further, they point out that it is important to “[maintain] the balance between knowledge and pedagogy” (Hunt and Hunt 79). It is imperative that teachers are able to maintain student interest in order to facilitate effective learning.

In conclusion, Hunt and Hunt share that the most important factor in teaching multicultural texts does not lie in the vast knowledge of the teacher, but rather in the teacher’s ability to create a “safe place for students to learn and ask questions of the teacher, each other, the text, societal relations and constructs, and so forth” (Hunt and Hunt 79). Finally, the authors posit that in hindsight, placing more emphasis on articulating clear rationales, preparing more engaging lessons, and getting students engaged with texts would have been a more effective means of teaching multicultural literature.

Application:

I found this article to be an interesting read, but I did not pull much from it in regard to useful tools for the classroom. I try to develop a clear purpose and rationale for all texts I teach

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as part of our Understanding by Design (UBD) approach to instructional planning. I do plan to include a bit more background information on texts I teach that seem to require a deeper cultural understanding of setting and historical context.

Question:

How much does our personal values and belief systems impact the way we teach multicultural works that conflict with those beliefs?