Mirrors Matter: Using Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Literature to Support Language and Literacy Development

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Overview of the Session

I. Why it matters: What the research says about the impact of culturally relevant texts

II. Building multigenre text sets with “mirrors” and “windows”

III. Collaborative book browsing and discussion

IV. Examples from preK-3rd grade classrooms

V. Collaborative Action Planning & Review of Resources

Dedicated to the literacy learning of children in city schools

Research • Professional Development • Advocacy

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The KIDS LIKE US Collection

High Quality Multicultural and Urban Children’s Literature

- Multicultural communities
- Language and dialect variation
- Urban ecology and architecture
- Familiar contexts and experiences for children in the city

Books as “mirrors” and “windows”  
(Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990)

What’s the balance of mirrors and windows like in your collection, curriculum, or classroom library?

Recent momentum

‘Where are the people of color in children’s books?’ Walter Dean Myers (March 2014)
‘The Apartheid of Children’s Literature’ Christopher Myers (March 2014)
For young Latino readers, an image Is missing‘ (Dec 2012)

'Where is the Latino children's literature?' ‘ (Dec 2012)

'Urban children's literature in short supply' (Feb 2012)

Cultural relevance
Think broadly.

INCLUDES - Race, ethnicity, SES, language, gender, religion

BUT ALSO . . .
- Where children live
- What their neighborhoods are like
- Who they spend time with
- What their families are like
- Where they go to school
- What contemporary kids are up to

Artwork by E.B. Lewis.

Multicultural ≠ Culturally Relevant

vs.

The Cat Who Came Indoors in Nelson Mandela’s Favorite Folk Tales (2007)

Artwork by E.B. Lewis.
“culturally relevant” means more “mirrors”

Artwork by Chris Soentpiet in Amazing Faces (2010)
What’s the big deal?

Context and experience matter.

The Austin Neighborhood, Chicago

North Omaha
South Omaha

Douglas County –
DC West

The Austin Neighborhood, Chicago
Imagine that you are a 4-year old, just starting school in Austin...
Hot City

illustrated by
B A R B A R A  J O O S S E
R. G R E G O R Y  C H R I S T I E

Why might “mirrors” matter for language and literacy development?

Culturally relevant literature matters in

Emergent literacy

Oral language ↔ Literacy

Listening → oral retellings → relating speech to print

“Out on the street, the buses are huffin’ out dragon-hot smoke.” (Joosse, 2004)
Culturally relevant literature matters for Interest and Engagement (Wigfield, Guthrie, Eccles; Rueda 2011)

interest → motivation → frequency

Culturally relevant literature matters for Family engagement

(Larrota & Gainer, 2008; Ortiz & Ordonex-Jasis, 2005)
Culturally relevant literature matters for

Academic self-concept ➔ achievement

Brown and Chu 2012; Cummins 2001; García Coll and Marks 2009;
Hawley and Nieto, 2010

Culturally relevant literature matters for Reading comprehension
(Rueda, 2011)

Activation of prior knowledge, using schema to support accuracy, fluency, comprehension

CRTs can help reduce cognitive overload

For novice readers, struggling readers, and dual language learners, demands on working memory are even greater

Importance of teaching within the ZPD

Beyond reach at this point in time

Child’s current understandings

ZPD

Cognitive development

“Much of the material presented in school strikes students as alien, if not pointless.”
~ Howard Gardner
“Bat is waking, upside down as usual, hanging by her toenails. Her beady eyes open. Her pixie ears twitch. She shakes her thistledown fur...Gliding and fluttering back and forth, she shouts her torch of sound among the trees, listening for her supper.”

Black cat, black cat, cousin to the concrete, creeping down our city streets
Where do you live?
Where will we meet?
Sauntering like rain water down storm drains
Between Cadillac tires and the curb
Sipping water from fire hydrants
Dancing to the banging beats of passing jeeps”
(Myers 1999).
Calkins – Small Moments

[Images of children playing in snow and children in an interior scene]

Calkins – Small Moments

Developing Text Sets with Mirror and Windows

Creative Curriculum - Clothes Study
Why are clothes important? Why do people have “favorite” clothes?

Developing Text Sets with Mirror and Windows

Creative Curriculum - Clothes Study

Why are clothes important? Why do people have “favorite” clothes?

Developing Text Sets with Mirror and Windows

Creative Curriculum - Clothes Study
Why are clothes important? Why do people have “favorite” clothes?

Think about cultural relevance in your setting

- What cultural communities are represented?
- What languages and dialects are spoken in your community?
- What is the landscape like?
- What is the ecology and architecture like?
- What kinds of day-to-day experiences would be familiar to children in your setting?
Book Browsing

Which books might be good “mirrors” or “windows” for the children with whom you work?

Share books and discuss with colleagues

What did you notice about the collection?

What questions do you have?
1. What takeaways can you act on right away in your setting?

2. What next steps would you recommend for KIDS LIKE US?
The impact of culturally relevant texts on children and teachers
(Clark & Fleming, 2015)
Something Beautiful
Kindergarten

“You could have heard a pin drop”

“Kids who sometimes would tune out seemed more focused. Even some of my squirmier ones would stay still and be listening. The kids were super-engaged in the discussion. It was really cool for them to see their neighborhood in a book. Growing up in the Austin neighborhood, you don’t see that represented, so it was, like, very real to them, which was very cool for me.”
“Even five year olds can make pretty profound connections”

“The connections that they were able to make, and how they responded to what was happening in that story, was just like, baffling to me...It was really cool for me to see how even these five year olds can make pretty profound connections with a text like that.”
“They really rise to the challenge”

“I try not to, but I think that sometimes I put some kinds of limitations on the kids. It’s easy to say, oh they’re five, they can’t do that. It made me realize that when given the opportunity, they really rise to the challenge.”