Bridges to Academic Text: Culturally Relevant Readings

By
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Merced and Madera Community Colleges

Vote and let me know:
Karen Thatcher

My Background

M.S. Education: Literacy and Reading, Cal State Fullerton
B.A. English, Gordon College, Massachusetts

Originally from Los Angeles area but…

The Need: Demographics of a Community College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Credit Class Success Rate (non-Basic Skills)</th>
<th>Merced College</th>
<th>California State Comm. Colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57.82%</td>
<td>69.40%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Skill Learners (in all Basic Skills courses, ELA and Math):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success count or courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Class Success Rate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Skills Sections total</th>
<th>180 (44.4% of all courses offered)</th>
<th>15,940 (10% of all courses offered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Course sections</td>
<td>35 (35% of Basic Skills)</td>
<td>1383 (8.5% of basic skills)</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remedial English Scorecard Metric</th>
<th>Merced College</th>
<th>California State Comm. Colleges</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developmental Reading Course Demographics

2012 General Population at MC

- Hispanic

Ethnicity: Developmental Reading Courses Demographics

Students have greater comprehension when:

- …they have prior knowledge of a subject
- …they are engaged with the subject matter
- …they do not engage in self-defeating behavior and attitudes
  (e.g. “I'm warning you Mrs. Thatcher…”)

Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Olsen, 2010; Dennis, 2010; Hakuta, 2011
Using Students’ Cultural Capital as an Asset

Our diverse student body have substantial differences in their life experiences, prior knowledge, their communication practices, cultural assumptions, and even “ways of knowing” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994).

(e.g. Hmong—teaching is embedded in story for them, not linear).

However, these “differences” may be the linchpin to success!

Reaching ELLs and Culturally Diverse Students

Since students are more engaged when a topic relates to their culture…

Since students have greater comprehension when readings can be connected to prior knowledge…

Use their culture as a starting point…and fully integrate that culture into your reading selections, not merely as an “additive approach” or nod to their culture, but carefully chosen readings used extensively throughout the course, paired with academic texts. (Rasinski & Padak, 1990)
The “Theory”

Instead of diverting cognitive energy to understanding new topics and ideas, foundational skills and useful strategies will be taught and applied to culturally relevant readings to preserve the focus on learning how to skillfully read and think about texts with optimum engagement. These relevant texts will be followed by a more academic reading regarding a similar topic, building on the previous text and practicing the same set of skills and strategies. In essence, the culturally relevant literature will be a springboard or bridge to higher level academic readings.

(Benefits: authentic readings, inherently more prior knowledge, more challenging level, but greater success)

Steps to Choosing Readings & Pairing with Academic Text

1) Determine Class demographics
2) Map your Community
3) Search for readings relevant to the predominant cultures
4) Read & Generate Ideas for Text Sets that connect to the culturally relevant texts.
5) Peruse general education book titles used by your campus
6) Try to connect readings thematically or topically

Analyze Demographics & Map your Community

1. Use course rosters, self-reporting surveys, etc. to crunch the numbers and see the percentages of each diverse group in your course.
   (e.g. Merced’s Reading courses are 70% Hispanic/10% Hmong Madera’s are ~85%-90% Hispanic, remainder various cultures)

Mapping your Community

You think you know your community, but do you really…
Community Mapping can show your **needs** as well as potential **resources**…

This sculpture was dedicated to the Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps; one relocation center was at the Merced Fairground. (Resource for thematic unit)

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**Integrated Cultural Relevancy**

- Not simply a few readings but fully integrated from the beginning of the course.
- Integrated into my introduction to reading actively,
- In the articles and books we read—to develop strategy use—all our culturally relevant.

Eg. Reading like an investigator/detective
Search for texts tied to your cultures to embed throughout the course, even in the initial “vision” for reading actively… (e.g. Ceja crime--notorious crime)

### How to Think Like an Investigator and Read Actively!

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<tr>
<th>Investigator</th>
<th>Active Reader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When you arrive at the crime scene, look over the scene carefully, survey for potential clues.</td>
<td>1. When you start your reading, look it over carefully, survey reading for potential clues as to topic and author’s “direction.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hunches begin forming in the back of the detective’s mind, but he keeps an open mind and more carefully examines evidence at the scene to see where it leads.</td>
<td>2. Based on clues (titles, headings, pictures) make a prediction and begin taking a closer look at evidence in the reading to see where it leads. Does the evidence confirm or contradict your prediction?</td>
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After you find a variety of relevant texts, **pair** them with texts they will actually encounter at your college…

- “Lessons of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” speech by Cesar Chavez
- Environmental Science excerpt
“Lessons of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”
...part of the article addresses the issue of pesticides and the problems for farmworkers...

Connect to an environmental science excerpt that they will encounter in that general ed. text discussing pesticides...

“Modern Synthetic Pesticides: The Good News and the Bad News”

Building efficacy... Chavez helps prepare them...(strategies & affectively)

Economics and Immigration
Focus on specific skills, embedded in the assignment...annotation, main ideas...
Critical Thinking: pairing doesn’t only help with basic comprehension but with the higher level critical thinking skills, and handling debatable issues.

Hmong story paired with science/sociology article students would come across in research.

Water and Sanitation: The Silent Emergency; U.N. Report, Barbara Frost
Works Well with Thematic Units and IRW

Culmination and synthesis of readings:

What idea, theme, and/or emotion kept recurring in the four texts? Discuss the root causes of prejudice, as viewed through the eyes of the authors, using evidence from the texts.

Embedded Peer Mentors…A boon

- Based on your course demographics, hire mentors to facilitate discussions of texts and work through texts with students.
- Ideally, the mentors speak the “home language” of your students.
- Also, it is often helpful if they have completed your courses previously.
Efficacy…

Significant increase in average Lexile scores over the course of the semester with the implementation of culturally relevant readings.

Using culturally relevant readings **along with** embedded mentors showed even greater effect on student improvement in reading comprehension.

To receive sample paired reading assignments if I ran out…

Email Karen Thatcher at

_Thatcher.k23@gmail.com_