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ABSTRACT

Students in English methods courses must be encouraged to develop a multicultural awareness and to become concerned with "language arts" as opposed to "English arts." In order to be prepared to enter into and function as teachers in a pluralistic world, English teaching majors need to study and practice multicultural teaching strategies and to become aware of behavioral learning styles which differ from culture to culture. Particular terms such as "ethnic," "sub-cultural," and "educationally deprived" fail to accurately portray the individuals they purportedly describe, and in many ways are harmful to students. Universals exist in the literatures of all peoples and the myth that multicultural literature is necessarily different from other types of literature must be exposed. Multicultural literature can be used by preservice and inservice teachers of English to develop in themselves and in their students an awareness of both the universal characteristics and the differences among peoples. (Some of the linguistic elements that differ in Spanish and English and some approaches for dealing with them are also discussed in this paper.) (TS)

CULTURAL PLURALISM: LUMPING VS. SPLITTING

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Their material rooted in some vague mystique of tradition, working with colleagues occasionally filled with zeal to improve humanity, English teachers must often feel overwhelmed by the possible consequences of the directions their subject matter takes. In preparing students to become teachers of English, methods courses must enable them to reconsider their beliefs, methods, and materials if they and their classes are to become examples of pluralism in action.

The typical teacher of English probably grew up in a monocultural environment and never had to live outside the values of his or her own culture. This teacher's public school training may have been with other students equally motivated to read and write. In such a relatively isolated gestation period, the teacher seldom had the opportunity to experiment with and to experience cultural pluralism in the raw. Then, having become a teacher, he or she may have espoused pluralism without considering the implications.

As an English methods teacher, I have observed a number of relevant characteristics of secondary English teaching majors, characteristics which I also observed among numerous English teachers with whom I worked or met. First, they share some beliefs which can not be valid in a pluralistic society. Many believe that they will be dealing with only English in the classroom. This may be the case, but if that teacher's students speak another language, or if the teacher realizes that there are other languages in the United States, then the need and opportunity to include languages other than English in the classroom become important. In addition, many believe that they will work with only American and English literature. Some teachers do teach world literature, and many find translations of literature from around the world in their anthologies, but few can relate those literatures to the heritages of their students. How many teach Shakespeare and have never read Cervantes, or touch upon Milton and ignore Dante entirely, or consider the haiku form a simple way to begin creative writing and never think of including Oriental literature in the curriculum. If English teachers truly believe that one of their objectives should be to enable students to become aware of their heritages, then they must realize that few of us can claim an ancestry which is solely British in origin. A third belief which many teachers exhibit in the classroom,

though they may argue otherwise outside the classroom, is that students should always work in some language known as "Standard English." Student and practicing teachers often state that their students must be aware of levels of usage, must realize differences in appropriateness of speech. Nevertheless, once in the classroom, these same people teach the difference between may and can or demonstrate how the double negative is logically incorrect, even though many other languages employ double negatives with complete clarity of meaning. The contradiction occurs when these teachers insist that people who confuse may and can or speak in double negatives are wrong. Such teachers have not considered what their objectives actually mean.

Pre-service and in-service teachers spread themselves along a continuum from the "elitist" to the "pseudo-humanist." A typical "elitist" is the student who explains that she wants to teach English because she has "always loved grammar," or the prescriptive pedagogue who has his students fill out right/wrong type worksheets without allowing them to consider language as it actually works. In this teacher's classroom, there is only one English, and that is "correct" English. At the other extreme is the "pseudo-humanist": that person who wants to teach English because he "loves people." His classroom, he claims, will be "open" and "humane." He believes that all standards are detrimental and that the only structure which matters is that which evolves at the

moment. Teachers who consider the implications of cultural pluralism in their classroom stand somewhere in between these extremes, but not all are at the same spot, nor should they be.

To prepare teachers to enter into and function in a pluralistic world, the English methods course cannot accomplish all. English teaching majors and practicing teachers need to study and practice multicultural teaching strategies, and they must be aware of behavioral learning styles which differ from culture to culture. To develop teaching strategies rooted in cultural pluralism, certain myths need to be exposed, particular behaviors have to be changed, and techniques must be developed which work for specific cultural groups and which work with all cultural groups.

Particular terms applied to various groups in the United States are confusing, for instance, the meaning of "ethnic" or the connotations of "sub-cultural," "co-cultural," and "cultural." Consider those terms applied to individuals not in the mainstream of middle class life: "culturally deprived," "educationally deprived," "culturally disadvantaged," or "unmotivated." Because those descriptors fail to accurately portray the individuals they purportedly describe, they may predispose teachers to act in ways which are harmful to the students. Even determining what a "minority group" is can entail confusion and misdirection. In Bountiful, Utah, approximately 80 percent of the population consists of

members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Almost all of the remaining population may be described as White Anglo Saxon Middle Class. Can any person in those groups be considered a "minority group" member? In Ocate, New Mexico, the United States government census considers 98 percent of the population as "Spanish-surnamed " The remaining two percent represents one non-Spanish-surnamed family. And yet the federal government considers the "minority group" to be the 98 percent group. A number of Cabo Verdeans have immigrated to Massachusetts. Culturally, most of them consider themselves Portuguese, but physically, they resemble Blacks. Using United States government categories, if the Cabo Verdeans call themselves Portuguese, they will be classified as "white" and therefore not members of a minority group. In addition to the basic confusion inherent in the term "minority group," the reasons for various groups being here differ. One division immigrated here through choice. Although they maintain many of the beliefs and practices of their native cultures, including language, most of them have been willing to adopt Anglo-American customs to succeed in this country. But many other peoples did not come here through choice--they were brought here involuntarily as slaves, or the United States came to them, conquering their ancestors through open warfare, internal subversion, or political maneuverings. If they

refuse to accept all that the United States has to offer, teachers must be willing to understand why.

In their rush to prove that they are democratic, humane, or accepting individuals, many educators have innocently and unwittingly allowed myths to develop, myths which are misleading and poss .y detrimental to the education of students. One myth is that all minority groups have like interests and goals. At a cultural awareness program in a major southwestern university, Navahos and Chicanos spoke of their love for the land, how one must respect it and treat it properly if both the land and the people were to survive. The head of the Black Studies Division followed and maintained that enough land existed in the United States for everyone, and all the government had to do was distribute it equally. In Arizona, Hopis and Navahos have been in conflict for generations over land use.

Another myth is that multicultural literature is necessarily militant or contains words which cannot be allowed in public schools. While there is no question that such a work as Armando B. Rendon's Chicano Manifesto is militant or that Leroi Jones' plays may contain rough language, books like Rudolfo Anaya's Bless Me Ultima contain neither rough language nor overt militancy, but help the reader understand the nature of the conflict which results from the meeting of two cultures, conflict both within and

between cultures. Indeed, a vast distance exists between the earlier, angrier works of Nikki Giovani and her later, loving poetry in My House.

The myth that multicultural literature is necessarily different from "normal" literature is one which deserves immediate destruction. Universals exist in the literatures of all peoples. The environmental context may differ, but the human concerns are still the same. To illustrate this, I hand out poems to students preparing to become teachers, poems with the names of the authors removed. By selecting poetry which does not contain internal clues to the ethnic identity of the author--and many examples exist--and by having the students discuss the poems based upon what the poems say or the feelings they create, I stress the universality of the works. Then I ask the students to tell me which author is Black or Chicano or Native American. When the students realize that they cannot do so, I ask whether such biographical information matters, and they usually conclude that it does not. Such an exercise can be carried out with any age group.

Both pre-service and inservice teachers of English can employ multiethnic literature to develop awareness of both universal charecteristics and differences among peoples. But teachers must become aware that there is a difference between the literature written by a member of a cultural group and the literature written about people of another

culture. Equally distinct is the difference between the literature of an author who is sensitive to the aspects of a culture other than his, such as Frank Waters, and the mass-produced literary attempts at capturing adolescent audiences by pretending to be multiethnic in nature, attempts which sell well, but do not benefit the cultures they ostensibly portray.

Perhaps the blind militancy of certain pressure groups or even the separatist attitudes of others have created the myth that only a member of a minority can properly teach the literature of that group. Certainly a member of a particular ethnic group can bring to the study of his or her culture's literature insights which can only be acquired by growing up within that culture. But it is equally true that a good teacher of literature is a good teacher of literature, one who is able to develop student responses to the literature so that students can relate the experiences of the literature to their own lives. A Chicano who grows up in Los Angeles or Crystal City, Texas, experiences life differently from one who has always lived in Sapello, New Mexico. Because an individual is Black does not necessarily mean that he or she can teach Black Literature better than a white teacher can.

One of the fears that parents and teachers have is that, by allowing different dialects into the language arts

classroom, "Standard English" skills will suffer. But, by studying different dialects, students become aware of the differing "standards" of usage and more aware of the social, political, and historical forces which operate upon language. The successful teacher is one who uses language and dialects, but does not abuse them. If teachers state that they want to teach students about levels of appropriateness, then they should be able to work with dialects in the classroom so that students learn more about language and the people who use language. Students can also work with languages other than English which are found in the United States. By studying cognates and false cognates, for instance, students can develop a greater awareness of their linguistic heritage.

Certain teacher behaviors may have an adverse effect in the classroom. Many cultures have expressions in their language which refer to other cultural groups negatively. Each culture is by nature ethnocentric, but teachers who deal with students from many cultures must become sensitive to the inherent bias of some expressions which they have always accepted unquestioningly. For example, one teacher, anxious to settle his class down so that they could complete a project which they had been working on for several weeks, blurted out, "Stop behaving like a bunch of wild Indians!" This particular class, composed of students from several ethnic backgrounds, suddenly fell silent, and one small voice said, "Indians aren't

wild." The teacher, realizing his mistake, stammered out a frustrated, "Well, like a bunch of barbaric Caucasians!"

Another teacher, reviewing material on the history of jazz, had an outline on the board for her students to copy. One of the items was that "Negros have natural timing." Although statements of this type have been standard fare for comedians, many teachers still accept and promote them. Equally wrong is the consistent presentation of the literature and ideas which single-mindedly stress the theme that all Blacks or Chicanos or Native Americans are poor and uneducated. A student who sees his people consistently portrayed as such can hardly be expected to develop a "positive self-image." The language arts classroom is a perfect place to discuss stereotypes, differing values, propaganda techniques, logical fallacies, and semantic variations. Wise selection of the specifics for such study will enable the teacher of English to avoid examples which may antagonize his or her students.

Differing behavioral learning styles may be present in a multicultural classroom. Some Native Americans, for example, work better in groups. Why then should the teacher insist upon only individual essays or tests? Much of our lives is spent in group endeavors, so it would not be unrealistic to develop group work in the classroom. Puerto Rican students may come from a more supportive home environment than their Anglo American counterparts, so the teacher should be prepared

to accept more person-oriented than task-oriented responses from them. And some Chicano males may be insulted by being asked to read girls' parts in plays simply "because we don't have enough girls to read."

When dealing with the speech or writing of students who are bilingual, the language arts teacher should realize that errors caused by ignorance are different from errors caused by linguistic interference. For instance, a common difficulty of many native speakers of Spanish is the confusing of the English prepositions in and on. In Spanish, one preposition, en, means the same as the English in and on. On the other hand, native English speakers often confuse the prepositions en and de when they are learning Spanish. Some Spanish-speaking students write the when they mean they. By being aware of the characteristics of both languages, the teacher can avoid creating unnecessary behavior problems.

Although many teachers of English realize that Black dialects are rule-based and grammatical, they often assume that there is only one "White Standard English" dialect. Just as Black English and Chicano English dialects have their variants, so "Standard English" has many variations. Some linguists have noted that, in some Black English dialects, the form for I am going to is I mana. If the teacher presents the "Standard English" spoken form as only I am going to, the teacher will lead students to false conclusions.

Two typical future forms in spoken "Standard English" are I'm gonna and I'ngna. In fact, when an individual says I am going to, he or she usually does so for emphasis or affect. In Texas, educated speakers of English often say might could instead of might, and, in much of Utah, one is more likely to hear you bet instead of yes. By having students study language as it is actually spoken, teachers can do much to promote linguistic pluralism.

Likewise, if the teacher of English has speakers of other languages in the classroom, much might be gained by incorporating their knowledge of their language into the study of English. One could, for example, present the Spanish vender or vendido as a comparison to the English vend or vendor. Through such comparitive exercises or by tracing the words to a common origin, students grow in awareness of their common heritage.

Other linguistic elements which may cause trouble for the teacher are the suprasegmental phonemes. For example, English has four pitch levels, while Spanish has only three. As a result, a native English-speaking teacher may sound harsh and angry to a Spanish-speaking student, causing that student to react defensively; and that student may sound bored and disinterested to the teacher. But if each becomes aware of such differences, the chances for unnecessary conflict diminish.

By using the linguistic competence of those students whose native languages may not be English or who speak a variant dialect of English, the teacher of English may discover a vast source of material to promote language development. Some of the typical classroom exercises which have been successful with students who speak some variant of "Standard English" will work exceptionally well with speakers of "non-standard" dialects and other languages in addition to English. For instance, by having students develop slang dictionaries or dictionaries of cognates, the teacher is enabling the process of inquiry and discovery to occur, a process which can result in the students' realizing that they do have something worthwhile to contribute in the classroom. For those students who are able to function well in more than one language, translation exercises provide the means for sentence modeling which in turn may lead to increased syntactic and semantic flexibility. Furthermore, if the teacher cannot function in a language other than English, and if the teacher is secure enough to admit that to the students, then the students themselves become resource people, individuals who realize that they are contributing to the class and who begin to view themselves more and more as having self-worth and esteem. The Foxfire books of Eliot Wigginton and his Appalachian students serve as admirable models for English teachers across the country, models of how students can use

the community as a resource and can develop language skills as they report on the folk life around them. By asking students to investigate, record, and publish material about such topics as architecture, food, dress, entertainment, and the life rituals of birth, marriage, and death, the teacher allows the student to employ his knowledge of the entities of his culture and gives those entities worth in the eyes of the class.

Regardless of what cultural groups may be represented in the English classroom, certain techniques may work for all. Most English teachers employed values clarification techniques long before the term was coined. Those techniques still work, for they provide a means for divergent values to be revealed and considered. Through studying multiethnic literature, students learn that minorities exist throughout the United States. Minorities are not only to be found isolated in the ghettos or small rural villages. Students can prepare geneologies, collect oral family history, and research the origins of family and place names, thereby discovering the forces of language change in specific contexts. Consider the full name of Santa Fe, New Mexico, "La Villa Real de San Francisco de Santa Fe," or of Los Angeles, "Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Los Angeles." What do names such as Colorado or Nevada or Montana mean? Why do people in San Bernardino, California, call their city "San Berdino"? Why did the Lenni Lenape word alamatunk become Lamington, New Jersey? Which people pronounce Pueblo, Colorado,

as something resembling Pee-eh-blo? What is the linguistic difference between San Jose, California, San Jose, New Mexico, and St. Joseph, Missouri, as names and pronunciations both? Students can conduct usage surveys. Is there a difference between Chicano, Mexican American, Hispano, Latino, or Spanish American? Which people employ terms such as "greaser," "Meskin," and "chili belly"? When? Where? Why? Not only will there emerge from these studies a greater awareness of language variety, but also an increased appreciation for the plural nature of mankind.

Finally, for the student in the English methods course or the teacher in the classroom who questions the incorporation of another language in the class, one response must be made: we must be concerned with "language arts," not "English arts." The opportunities for developing multicultural awarenesses are many, and the teacher of English is a key person to do so.

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