

Rutgers Center for Literacy Development Newsletter Winter 2021 Edition

Volume XII, No.1



A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



The Center for Literacy Development Wishes You a Safe, Happy and Healthy New Year

As we enter the New Year it is a good time to reflect upon how we can become educators who foster social justice and equity in our schools. It is a current and critical topic.

My students this past fall are in our Masters program to be certified as Reading Specialists and Supervisors. These individuals are teachers in early childhood classrooms, middle and high school classrooms, literacy coaches, interventionists, ELL, and special education teachers. I asked them some questions about social justice and equity in their schools. First I asked: ***What is done in your district to make the environment more culturally responsive?*** Some responses were:

- We make posters and classroom decorations representative of student cultures.
- We celebrate Black History Month with projects about historic African American leaders.
- We have a Multicultural Day which sheds light on the different cultural backgrounds of the students.

Next I asked: ***Do you engage families in school activities to enhance the emphasis on cultural diversity in your school?*** Some responses were:

- We ask students to write their own autobiography/family history, which in our culturally diverse school brings family background into classroom conversation
- We invite parents to visit and talk about their family history and traditions.
- We send books home from school for families and students to read together and talk about. The books are selected to match family backgrounds.

I then asked: ***How do your schools deal with critical literacy within a social justice framework?*** A few responses were:

- We have students read and discuss perspectives and quotes from people of color, that are non- traditional in perspective
- We connect past historical events, such as the Reformation, with modern protests, such as the marches for George Floyd and discuss how both efforts change society for the better

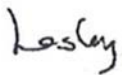
Finally I asked: ***Do you use multicultural literature in your school?*** Some responses were:

- We check to see that our school and classroom libraries represent multiple cultures.
- We display, read, and make available books with diverse elements that include different perspectives. Some of those books and authors are Kwame Alexander, Thanhha Lai, Jason Reynolds, etc. Some other books to include are *Refugee* by Alan Gratz, *Inside Out and Back Again*, by Thanhha Lai, and *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich
- Students tell us their interests. They want books with authentic voices that respect multiple beliefs/opinions/identities and we search for narrative and informational books, magazines, poetry, news articles, etc. that can provide these characteristics. ***

This issue of the Newsletter will focus on matters of social justice and equity in the classroom. The articles were written by educators who are experts in this field. The first is by Nicole Mirra, an assistant professor at the Graduate School of Education. Nicole focuses her research on urban teacher education and recently published a book entitled ***Educating for Empathy: Literacy Learning and Civic Engagement***, with Teachers College Press. The next article is by Jill Mills, a librarian in Chatham, NJ, and the current president of the NJ Association of School Librarians. Jill is an expert dealing with children's literature and diversity. Tasha Austin, a lecturer in Language Education at the Graduate School Education, is the Representative of the Special Interest Group for NJTESOL and focuses her research on critical and black feminist epistemologies to qualitatively examine language, identity and power. Finally, Lucia Lakata, an ELL Coach in Red Bank Schools, provides us with some practical classroom practices dealing with vocabulary that give ELLs access to high leverage vocabulary.

Students who contributed to the information in this article of the newsletter:

Brittani Badami, Alexandria Casares, Patricia Hamill, Stephanie Homyak, Stephanie Jennis, Amalia Kanaras, Anette Landin, Nicole Maraventano, Stephanie Miele, Kelsey Morgen, Kimberly Mueller, Sean Murphy, Lara Neary, Aditi Patel, Kari Rowe, Elizabeth Snevily, Carleigh Twillmann, Annmarie Wernlund, and Mathew Zrebiec.



Lesley Mandel Morrow, Ph.D. Distinguished Professor
Director of the Center for Literacy Development
Rutgers Graduate School of Education

Inviting Inquiry into the Literacy Classroom to Start the Journey Toward Justice

By Nicole Mirra

Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, famed scholar and current president of the National Academy of Education, names four interconnected crises that our students are navigating as they sit in our (physical and/or Zoom) classrooms – the COVID-19 pandemic, economic depression, climate catastrophe, and the effects of systemic racism. All of these represent urgent matters of justice because they disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous people and communities of color.

Dr. Ladson-Billings' groundbreaking research on culturally relevant pedagogy reminds us that teaching and learning does not occur in a vacuum; in turn, refusing to integrate who our students are – and what the society in which they live is facing – into our instruction perpetuates the crises and harms rather than helps. We all bear responsibility for encouraging our students to grapple with society's failings and supporting them to imagine more just and equitable futures.

This responsibility can be inspiring but also intimidating. Perhaps we were never trained to incorporate real world topics into instruction. Or we are nervous to discuss controversial issues with students because we don't feel equipped with the language, the knowledge, or the support from our administrators or wider communities to do so. Maybe we don't share our students' experiences and aren't sure where to start. These are all valid concerns; however, they do not give us a pass to bury our heads in the sand of falsely "objective" or "neutral" content. Paralysis is a privilege that minoritized communities do not have, and in which we educators must not allow ourselves to stagnate.

So how to begin - and continue - on this lifelong journey to become what Bettina Love (2019) calls a "co-conspirator" for justice? A huge project or total overhaul of curriculum need not be the first step. What I suggest is crucial is a deep commitment to inquiry within ourselves and among our students. This involves the vulnerability to critically analyze how we've been socialized as individuals and educators and the solidarity to then welcome students to question and critique the practices and institutions in which we are all invested. You can learn from Dr. Love here: <https://livestream.com/schomburgcenter/events/8597267/videos/188915870>

I know that we often want to jump straight to classroom practices that we can use tomorrow, but lasting change requires us to take a step back and assess our assumptions about social justice and its relationship to our work as teachers. One suggestion for a first inquiry step is to engage in what Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz calls "archaeology of the self," which is an excavation of our preconceived notions about race, schooling, and our students that influence our daily practices as educators. You can learn from Dr. Sealey-Ruiz here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pHSfMIVfRo>

A second inquiry step involves interrogating our lesson and unit plans and identifying ways in which they explicitly or implicitly perpetuate inequity. For instance, how do we frame students' oral and written language practices and judge them in relationship to "standard" English? April Baker-Bell helps us to move beyond ideas of "appropriate" language and toward Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy, which honors the cultural and linguistic assets of Black students. You can find Dr. Baker-Bell's book here: <https://www.routledge.com/Linguistic-Justice-Black-Language-Literacy-Identity-and-Pedagogy/Baker-Bell/p/book/9781138551022>

Once you have conducted inquiry into your own practice, you will be more prepared to forge a culture of inquiry in your classroom among your students. Instead of requiring students to complete teacher-created assignments that mirror the literacies of standardized tests, you can venture into designing learning

opportunities that put students in the driver's seat and support them to use their expansive repertoires of literacy skills to investigate authentic, socially engaged topics that matter to them. Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is an approach to education that situates students as experts in their communities and encourages them to use the skills of research (all supported by NJ ELA standards) to explore and address challenges they see around them. You can access YPAR resources here:

<http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/>

No simple formula exists for us to follow to become justice-oriented educators; it is a path that we must continue to walk – and stumble upon – each day. But with dedication, humility, and a spirit of inquiry, we can guide our students to build a more equitable and compassionate society. Whether we acknowledge it or not, all teaching is political – what values do you want your teaching to communicate?



Dr. Nicole Mirra is an assistant professor of Urban Teacher Education in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. She previously taught high school English Language Arts in Brooklyn, New York, and Los Angeles, California. She is the author of Educating for Empathy: Literacy Learning and Civic Engagement (Teachers College Press, 2018) and a co-author (with Antero Garcia and Ernest Morrell) of Doing Youth Participatory Action Research: Transforming Inquiry with Researchers, Educators, and Students (Routledge, 2015).

Building Bridges Through Diverse Literature

By Jill Mills

Educators are always looking for ways to connect with their students and have students connect with each other and the world. Often we look to literature as a means to this end, working to find just the right text to bring home our objective. But sometimes the books we have needed just weren't there. Reports and infographics (that I do not have the rights to publish here, but I encourage you to investigate with a Google search of "Diversity in Children's Books Infographics"), reflecting US publications from as recent as 2018 illustrate that children's books disproportionately feature white characters or animals far more often than they do children of color or diversity. Books about LGBTQIA and children with disabilities are seen even less frequently.

As early as 1998, educator Emily Style spoke of the importance of children's books to be "windows and mirrors" for readers to see into realities unlike their own, and to be validated by seeing themselves, too. In 1990, Rudine Sims Bishop added the idea of entering a story and becoming part of its world through "sliding glass doors." The "Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors" analogy has been endorsed by professional organizations, authors, and publishers, and is now a common consideration when talking about diversity in literature. In the past few years, and especially in response to Black Lives Matter and Own Voices initiatives, calls for equal representation of all children are being heard and the numbers are improving. That is great news for authors and their readers, and it is a pivotal moment for educators to rethink and redesign the texts they bring to their lessons and their libraries.

As an elementary school librarian, one of my most important tasks is to develop my school library collection. Over the past few years, I have been involved in social justice and diversity work. This work has made me more attuned to identifying resources that promote diverse literature. It has also made me seek out opportunities for personal growth in order to continue working toward the goal of understanding my students. This is work we all should be doing. At the NJEA Conference in early November, I listened to Ruby Bridges's keynote. It was powerful. She put a charge to educators that "it is our responsibility to teach the truth . . . We have to decide

that we can't just teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. We have to also try and develop character and morals, and encourage our kids that activism is also important . . . If we are to get past our racial differences, it will come from our young people, but we as educators have to do our part. . . opening up your heart to kids is the most important thing." Later in the month, the New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education (NYSCATE) 2020 featured keynote speaker Manuel Scott, one of the original Freedom Writers, author, and motivational speaker on making a difference in the lives of our students. In his speech, Manny challenged, "Can your students see themselves in your teaching?" "Study your students like an anthropologist... and integrate it into your lessons. THAT is when the magic of learning will take place!"

In this uncertain environment of teaching and learning, our students need to know we see them and hear them. Diverse literature should allow all of our students to see themselves and each other in natural settings, to recognize the protagonists, not only overcoming obstacles, but simply living lives. I encourage you to find authentic ways to replace familiar texts with something new that brings diverse characters naturally and organically into the forefront. Below is a list of publishers and tools to begin your work toward this goal.

Recommended tools to diversify your book collection:

The Brown Bookshelf - <https://thebrownbookshelf.com/>

#BuildYourStack National Council of Teacher of English - <https://bookshop.org/lists/build-your-stack>

Diverse Book Finder - <https://diversebookfinder.org/>

Lee & Low Publishers - <https://www.leeandlow.com/>

#OwnVoices

Reycraft Books - <http://www.reycraftbooks.com/>

School Library Journal Diversity and Cultural Literacy Toolkit - <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=diversity-cultural-literacy-toolkit>

We Need Diverse Books #wndb - <https://diversebooks.org/>



Jill Mills is an elementary librarian in Chatham, NJ. In addition, Jill is now the Immediate Past President of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians (NJASL). She received her Master's degree in Teaching/Educational Media from Seton Hall University and a Certificate in Literacy Instruction from Rutgers University.

Literacy to What End

By Tasha Austin

Dr. Jonathan Rosa in his weteachlang.com podcast episode asks language educators to question, "Multilingualism in service of what?" As teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) who perform within a context of dominant white narratives, it is particularly challenging to support our students' literacy goals in service of *their* desires rather than our own. This is even more difficult for those of us who are products of instruction that also centered white western norms and expectations regardless of our own racial designations. In the era of remote learning, it would seem that curating resources and tailoring our instruction to engage ELLs on a culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) level is overwhelming as we also focus on English proficiency and technological access along with the impacts of the human toll and trauma of COVID-19, particularly on Black communities and those who are linguistically marginalized (Austin, 2020). Still, attention to our students becoming literate in ways that prioritize *their* identities and futures may be the missing link that draws them, along with their communities, into our virtual space meaningfully and with greater success.

Historical Literacy (Muhammad, 2020)

Oftentimes we promote linguistic goals for ELLs based on where we would like to see them go in the short- or long-term future. Do we ask, however, where it is that *they* would like to go? It is difficult to determine the end needs of a group of people without familiarity with their communal past and how they conceive of themselves. From where are our ELLs coming geographically, racially, culturally, socio-politically and circumstantially? How does that impact how a U.S. education is framed and for what that education might be used? Students should see themselves depicted contextually in our classes by the broader scope of what it means to both be American and to speak English by situating it in a context that shows what it means to be Haitian, Vietnamese, Guatemalan or any other ethnolinguistic identity globally, historically, and currently. Attend to this by the selection of graphics, music, art, literature and artifacts that center the students and help them develop a sense of self as they envision who *they* want to be as they progress linguistically.

Beware the Technocrat (Hammond, 2014)

With testing, and so much paperwork to complete, along with attending to our ELLs' often precarious access to fair housing and healthful food, we may find ourselves working around the clock simply to 'get the job done.' Our schedules are already full ensuring our ELLs have what they are legally, academically and morally entitled to during remote learning. As we juggle these responsibilities, we may notice our typical community-building efforts take a backseat as we work through our never-ending checklists. We must take a beat to both humanize and extend grace to *ourselves* in order to do the same for our students in a way that may be simpler than we realize. Sharing with students about ourselves and our lives encourages them to feel that they can also bring their whole selves to the learning environment. Consider sharing a family photo, your own favorite pastime or song and then leaving the floor open for a multimodal show and tell display led by your ELL students. Initially, this may feel like time you do not have to spare, but no level of technical expertise will gain you the social emotional investment of ELLs which in turn paves the way for rigor and academic excellence quite like creating true community.

Our approach to learning, virtual or otherwise, will always be reflective of our deeper beliefs about ourselves and our students. There is no firmer foundation for learning than deep human connections and an ability to see ourselves and our students historically contextualized and fully humanized as our past, present and ideal future selves.

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<https://voices.njtesol-njbe.org/2020-summer-features/su20-features-solidarity-statement/>

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Tasha Austin is a lecturer in Language Education at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education and the Teacher Education Special Interest Group Representative for NJTESOL-NJBE. As founder of Premise LLC, she supports schools with innovative and humanizing pedagogies. Her research uses critical race theory and Black feminist epistemologies to qualitatively examine language, identity and power, and the ways in which anti-Blackness emerges in language education and language teacher preparation.



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Those matriculated in our literacy programs will have memberships to the Center for Literacy Development while students. Refer to the Center for Literacy Development's website <http://rutgersliteracycenter.org/> for our events and about flyer for spring programs.

Giving English Language Learners Access to High Leverage Vocabulary

By Lucia Lakata

Teachers in today's schools are confronted with ongoing changes to their practice and student diversity within their classrooms. English Language Learners (ELs) are a growing population across our districts and we must be prepared to provide them with access to quality instruction in order to ensure they have equal access to the mainstream curriculum as their native speaking peers. If we are to provide our ELs with equitable access to our curriculum we must begin with providing them with the tools they need to be successful readers. Vocabulary is an essential component of reading instruction and reading achievement. Research states that the comprehension of complex texts is dependent, in part, on the size of the reader's vocabulary (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986). If we are to support our ELs in their reading achievement, then we must provide them access to high leverage vocabulary.

Many EL programs focus too heavily on teaching tier 1 vocabulary to support students' language acquisition. Tier 1 words consist of the most basic words, rarely requiring instruction in school for native-speakers. Newcomers and ELs will still need explicit teaching of these words, but this can often be done quickly with visuals, realia, or translation. Instead, our focus should be on teaching tier 2 words, which are words of strong general utility, found often in text, which contribute directly to academic language development and reading comprehension. We want to teach students high mileage words that they are going to encounter across a variety of subjects. Often, this can be more than just a synonym for a familiar word, and this instruction can instead add to a student's vocabulary repertoire by providing another shade of meaning or a more specialized and less ordinary way of saying something.

The first step to providing ELs with high leverage vocabulary instruction is by selecting which words to teach. Teachers should select words from read alouds they already include in their instruction. Selecting words from rich read alouds creates a meaningful context for learning new words. After selecting the words to teach, teachers plan rich word instructions followed by different word meaning activities to allow students to interact with word meanings on a deeper level across language domains: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Below are some outlined steps to help teachers bring this work into their practice.

Criteria for Identifying Tier Two Words:

- Consider the importance and utility of the word. How generally useful is the word? Is it a word that students are likely to meet often in other texts?
- Consider students' conceptual understanding. How does the word relate to other words, to ideas that students know or have been learning? Do students understand the general concept of the word? Will the word provide students with precision and specificity in describing the known concept?
- Consider the instructional potential of the word. Does the word offer a variety of contexts and uses to explore? What does the word bring to a text or situation? What role does the word play in communicating the meaning of the context in which it is used?

An Outline for Word Introductions:

- Following a read aloud, the story context for the word is reviewed.
- The meaning of the word is explained in a student-friendly way.
- The students are asked to repeat the word because pronouncing a word helps build memory for the sound and meaning of the word.
- Examples are provided in contexts other than the one used in the story.
- Students interact with examples or provide their own examples.
- Children say the word again.

Following word introductions, teachers must continue to use word meaning activities to support depth of understanding and usage of the words across reading, writing, speaking and listening. For more examples of word meaning activities see “Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction” by Beck, McKeown and Kucan. Providing our ELs with robust tier 2 vocabulary instruction will help ensure we are giving them equitable access to mainstream curricula and support their language acquisition.



Dr. Lucia Lakata is currently an ELL Instructional Coach for the Red Bank Borough Public Schools. Prior to being an instructional coach, she taught kindergarten to bilingual and ESL students. Dr. Lakata has also taught at Rutgers University as a part-time lecturer, and earned her Ed.D. with a concentration in Teacher Leadership from Rutgers. Her doctoral dissertation consisted of a systematic qualitative research investigation to pilot a vertically aligned professional learning community to improve teacher collaboration across grade levels and to inform effective vocabulary instruction.

CENTER FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT 2021 SPRING WEBINAR SERIES



JANET WONG

2020 NCTE's English Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children
January 28, 2021

Sharing Social Justice Poetry: You Can Do It Right Now

How can we raise issues of social justice while ensuring that all students and their families feel comfortable with our discussions? Is there a way to combine social justice learning with other areas of the curriculum in just a few minutes a day? Poet and anthologist Janet Wong will share “21st-century poems” that speak to students of any age and invite reflection on the topics of everyday activism, exercising our voices, standing up for our beliefs, expressing our worries and fears, and showing that we care. For K-12 teachers, librarians, and administrators, with resources provided.



TIMOTHY RASINSKI & P. DAVID PEARSON

March 18, 2021

The Science of Reading Combined with the Art of Teaching Reading: What it Means for Classroom Practice

The great debate concerning how best to teach reading began decades ago and continues. In this session the Panelists, Dr. David Pearson (Berkeley), and Dr. Tim Rasinski (Kent State University) will present issues related to the Science of Reading and how it can be put into practice with the Art of Teaching Reading. Some questions to be answered are:

What do we need to follow in the Science of Reading?

How do we define the art of reading instruction and why is it important?

What does the science and art of reading instruction look like in the classroom?

We must teach with the science but also our heads and our hearts. The individual differences in children must include an artful manner of presentation of instruction.

Webinar registration may be found at <https://cvent.me/IV4v3a> and the cost of each webinar is \$30.00 or \$100.00 if you register for all five (5) webinars. All of the webinars will begin at 4 PM (EST).

Registration is **complimentary** for Rutgers students taking courses in the spring. Please email the Center for Literacy Development at center-for-literacy-development@gse.rutgers.edu to register.



LUCY CALKINS

February 18, 2021

Never Has Conferring About Writing Been So Important

In today's world, it is all-important that teachers have opportunities to listen to kids' writing, to rally them to work with dedication, to give them feedback that matters. This practical session will help you find efficient, powerful ways to confer with writers, and in so doing, to accelerate their skills and their commitment to literacy and to social justice.



KATE ROBERTS

April 29, 2021

Supporting Writing About Reading Practices that Provide Access to All

We all know that it is important to have our students write down what they are thinking about as they read. And yet all too often, the writing we ask our kids to do becomes busywork, and does not show us what we want it to. Our students don't find it meaningful and often dislike writing about reading intensely. Honestly, we often feel the same way. In this session, learn how we can create systems that support meaningful, sustainable work for our students to engage in while reading that can hold them accountable, show growth, and possibly even help our students love their books - and reading - even more.



JOHN SCHUMACHER

June 3, 2021

The Reading Life: Connecting Classrooms, Libraries, and Communities Through Story

John Schumacher (AKA Mr. Schu) is known for his expertise in children's literature and for igniting a passion to read. He will share his experiences in promoting a culture of reading among students, staff, and parents. Participants will walk away inspired to implement heart-growing literacy practices that will make the world better and brighter for their students and colleagues.



The Center for Literacy Development

Rutgers Reading Club

An After and Before School Literacy Program For Struggling Readers

Center for Literacy Development Rutgers Reading Club

Instruction focuses on the child's needs however the basic teaching plan includes the integration of the language arts with developing: word work, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and writing.

Along with enhancing literacy development, motivation is a major goal in each teaching session. For example the child can choose a book for the teacher to read to them that is too difficult for the child to read themselves. Literacy games are also played.

Each child is taught twice a week for 12 weeks for 45 minutes to an hour by a teacher who is certified. In addition to literacy development, teachers work on building a relationship with the child.



Rutgers Reading Club Cheer

Rutgers Reading!
Rutgers Writing!
Hoo-Rah!
Hoo-Rah!
Rutgers Reading
Reading Red team!
Writing Red team!
Rah! Rah!

Research based practices that make the Reading Club successful:

- Motivating and Engaging children
- Building Self-esteem
- Creating time for socializing and snacking
- Building relationships between teacher and student
- Allowing for success
- Differentiating instruction
- Providing additional literacy instruction
- Allowing for practice

For more information
Lesley Mandel Morrow, Ph.D.

Treatment Group

DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR
Sight Words	Sight Words	Sight Words	Running Record	Running Record	Running Record	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory
128	171	255	E	H	J	42/74	63/74	68/74

Control Group

DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR
Sight Words	Sight Words	Sight Words	Running Record	Running Record	Running Record	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory
134	144	170	E	E	F	42/74	44/74	50/74



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AND MORE

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SAVE THE DATE!
National Writing Project Webinar at Rutgers
featuring
Lucy Calkins
February 18, 2021