Editorial
Make it Real: Diversity and Literacy, Standards and Dispositions

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Dr. Anne Fairbrother, a faculty member in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, the host for this journal, authors our guest editorial for this issue. She is a former high school English and ESL teacher who taught in Salinas, California, and in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her doctoral work focused on the schooling experiences of Mexican-American students in low-track English classes. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies (ETSCS) from the University of New Mexico. Dr. Fairbrother is particularly interested in issues of multicultural education, educational equity, teaching for social justice, and in multicultural literature. Recently she has been exploring issues of student voice, and students-as-researchers. In the following editorial, Dr. Fairbrother addresses the connections between the seven articles of this issue of the Journal of Authentic Learning and current diversity and literacy concerns. Preceding introductory remarks by Co-Editor Audrey C. Rule

Our public schools are becoming increasingly diverse, ethnically and culturally. And the schools serving the lowest income and most culturally and ethnically diverse communities usually have the lowest test scores, the highest drop out rates, the fewest resources (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004; Trueba, 1999). The dropout rate across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004) is a shameful reminder that we are failing our students of color: not engaging them in our schools, culturally or academically. The Achievement Gap (Barton, 2003; Robelen, 2002; The Education Trust, 2005) is really a wound inflamed by centuries of benign neglect and malignant injustice. Most teachers are white and middle class, and Schools of Education are increasingly becoming committed to prepare teachers who are able to teach young people from diverse backgrounds in ways that do not marginalize or exclude. This is a laudatory goal, but as the inequities still persist to a horrific degree, we are right to be concerned that what we are doing is not enough. More

scholarship and research studies, and more work with teachers and students and community activists are needed, if we honestly want to know how to better prepare teachers for diversity. We see some success, but it is not enough.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and other regulatory and advisory organizations, and Schools of Education have recognized and acknowledged that it isn't enough to prepare teachers who know best pedagogical practices, who know their content areas, and who can help students do well on standardized tests (Gollnick, 2005). While we want teachers to master such abilities and skills, we also need teachers who not only desire success for all their students, but who understand why many students, primarily students of color, are not succeeding in our schools. We want all teachers to understand the hegemony that maintains the status quo that fails too many children in our schools. And we want teachers to be agents of change, listening to the students, allowing them to have

authentic learning experiences in constructivist classrooms where the students make the meaning from curriculum that is both rigorous and relevant. If we truly see ourselves as living in a democracy, then we have to, in the full imperative, help teacher candidates develop the dispositions, the internalized values and beliefs, that would prepare them to teach in diverse schools as effective advocates for all their students.

Some of the articles in this journal poignantly show the stasis with which we have to contend. Some of them pose possibilities. And some of them give us glimpses of how things could be. I would encourage all of the authors to go further and dare to question assumptions and hegemonic practices.

Three of the articles address the current emphasis on Standards and Dispositions, focusing on the latter. Howard Weiner (*Culturally Insulated Students: Assessing the Diversity Disposition Gap in a Predominantly White University with a New Instrument, the Culturally Responsive Educator Test*) developed a tool to assess how preservice and inservice teachers in a predominantly white university "represent themselves as culturally responsive teachers and how the education program influences this representation" (2005, p.7). He avers that being prepared as culturally responsive teachers should go beyond "summarizing best practices, reiterating ethical issues, and listing characteristics of culturally diverse groups" (p. 7), and that pre teachers need to develop positive dispositions towards diversity "in order to teach diverse students in a caring and engaging manner" (p.10). Weiner presents the elegant concept that many students attending his suburban university campus are *culturally insulated,* with no real-life experience of culture, race, class beyond their own. Add to that the tendency of such students to see their own experience as normative, even universal, and

the problem for a program committed to advocacy and respect for cultural diversity is clear. The purpose, then, of the study is "to examine the diversity dispositions of culturally insulated students at a predominantly white suburban university" (p. 11). The researcher also wanted to know whether "teacher preparation programs impact candidates whose life experiences are vastly different from the diverse students in today's schools?" (p. 11). The use of this tool, the Culturally Responsive Educator Test (CRET), and the development of consistent interpretations of the findings are still at a preliminary stage, but the preliminary work has already prompted important questions for further study about teaching for diversity, and about how superficial lip service can become a true disposition.

Susan Thomson, Mary Ransdell and Celia Rousseau (2005) also raise troubling and urgent questions about teacher dispositions and what it means to be an effective teacher (*Effective Teachers in Urban School Settings: Linking Teacher Disposition and Student Performance on Standardized Tests*). This study came from the desire to redesign the elementary education program to produce effective teachers. A team of principals, classroom teachers, school district administrators, and elementary education faculty met to discuss this and, "after lengthy discussion, the group reached a consensus of the knowledge and pedagogical skills teachers should possess, but kept returning to the dispositions of effective teachers. What dispositions did effective teachers possess that enabled their students to be academically successful?"(p. 23). The researchers decided to observe effective teachers to see and identify the dispositions, using a pilot instrument, the Teacher Quality Measure (TQM). It is in the unquestioned assumptions that the status quo passes for truth, and in this study the

contradictions emerged when the principals defined as "effective" teachers whose students scored high on standardized test scores. Some anguished questions for all of us are honestly posed. I would urge the researchers to continue this crucial work, critically examining the criteria for effective teaching, problematizing the term itself, and observing teachers in constructivist classrooms that are culturally and ethnically diverse.

Paula Stewart and Susan Davis address the important and aggravating point that although many teacher education programs emphasize the academic and pedagogical abilities and skills they want preteachers to acquire, and although they can then ascertain if that learning occurs, dispositions - the attitudes and internalized beliefs - are "elusive to assess and teach" (p.37) (*Developing Dispositions of Pre-Service Teachers through Membership in Professional Organizations)*. Their university was held to the Standards and Dispositions developed by NCATE (2005), and it was deemed that the areas lacking in opportunities for enhancing dispositions were those of professionalism and diversity. The study focuses on strategies that exposed preservice teachers to professional communities, and preliminary evidence shows the efficacy of those plans. Programmatic strategies to enhance dispositions associated with issues of diversity are mentioned, and further research could examine the reported limited success of those strategies, perhaps comparing the effect of "add-on" diversity experiences with teacher preparation programs where the issues and concepts and experiences are infused throughout.

A major measure of school success is a student's assessed level of literacy. All content areas through 12th grade increasingly require reading and writing skills, and specific analytical strategies. That students

of color are disproportionately placed in lower tracks is well documented, and assessment of reading ability, engagement, and performance are often the rationales for such placements. The problems are the institutional and individual cultural biases and the mismatches with school culture that often negatively color assessment of a student's ability when he or she is not from the dominant culture. (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gay, 2004; Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004). Literacy matters, but literacy that is diverse in its expression and authentic in its assessment (Gay, 2000; Kane, 2003; McCormick, 1994).

Literacy is more than the ability to read and write, it means to read between the lines and think analytically about what has been read. Literacy is socioculturally situated, as are all texts, thus requiring attention to relevance. And literacy should be critical, where we read what is unsaid as well as said, observe how people are represented in written, visual, spoken, multimedia and performance texts, and question the submerged and hidden hegemonic subtexts. How well canned and scripted literacy programs can meet these needs is still being debated, and in the current "Reading First" (United States Department of Education, 2005) climate it is a debate that must continue.

Christine Woodcock (2005) confronts how the measure of literacy success as defined by school, marginalizes some students, especially students of color. In her article, *The Silenced Voice in Literacy: Listening Beyond Words to a "struggling" Adolescent Girl*, Woodcock's stance is that when we apply literacy programs to students we miss the opportunity to "hear and heed the actual voices of adolescents to glean deeper insights regarding how to most effectively educate adolescents in English language arts

classrooms" (p. 47). Her data collection was extensive, and she uses the "Listening Guide, a qualitative, feminist, relational, voice-centered method of analysis," in order to understand "adolescents and their literacies" (p. 47). She finally focuses on one student, whom she calls Tara, a 7th grader of African American and Puerto Rican descent, who had been in trouble at school, and was identified as a "struggling" student. But it was hard for Woodcock to reconcile the "bright, passionate thirteen-year-old girl" with the label of struggling reader and writer, which led the researcher to ask the critical question: "Was Tara in fact struggling, or was she a prime example of the countless adolescents who simply do not match the criteria of what it means to be successful in today's American schools?" (p. 51). Woodcock answers her question, pushing us to consider what literacies should be valued in the classroom. Her feminist methodology is exciting, and with all the data that Woodcock gathered, it would be interesting to look at an area only tangentially addressed in the article: how much did Tara's sense of alienation have to do with her situated ethnic identity?

Audrey C. Rule's article (*An Analysis of Dollhouse Story Themes and Related Authentic Learning Activities*) shows the applicability of a particular genre of literature to the English, social studies, mathematics and science – preschool through middle school - classroom. The stories lend themselves to authentic learning experiences through the common themes of imagination and creativity. Social relations can be experienced and, through envisioning past or future times, or distant places, the diversity of human habitation and cultural practices could, with a sensitive and knowledgeable teacher, be explored. Rule (2005) raises crucial issues around gender, addressing the representation and roles of girls and boys in the books, and suggesting

how that might fuel classroom discussions. The author provides an extensive annotated bibliography for other teachers who could add literacy strategies to create a complete and exemplary curriculum guide.

Audrey C. Rule, Roger A. Stewart, and Jill L. Haunold (2005) report on "the components of a unique and successful tutoring program that began with the America Reads program at a year-round elementary school" (p.80) (*Object Boxes for Tutoring in a Literacy Lab at a Year Round Elementary School).* A classroom teacher coordinated the Literacy Lab for first and second grade students, and college sophomore student-tutors enrolled in a field experience course staffed the lab. There were varied structured literacy activities during the day but the central component was the use of the object boxes described and illustrated in the article: "All the object boxes used in the Literacy Lab were grounded in five basic principles upon which all learning and memory are based: attention, visualization, meaningfulness, organization, and association" (p.85). One measure of the success of this Lab, offered during "off-track" time in the year-round school, was through the pretest and posttest Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA-2) (Reid, Hresko and Hammill, 2001) assessment. The authors leave the room for further research as they query what part of the program contributed to the students' increased achievement. The curricular content is intriguing too. The boxes seem versatile, and it would be interesting to see more of the authors' work discussing the application of these ideas in a more diverse classroom.

Corey H. Brouse (2005) brings literature into a Health and Wellness class (*Authentic Learning in a Health and Wellness Class through the Writings of Thoreau).* The students were being prepared to plan and implement health education

programs, but, the author felt, had never had the opportunity to formally reflect on their own health. Thoreau's writing had enriched Brouse's life and she uses some of his essays with the themes of spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing, and the relationship to nature, to prompt students' specific health and wellness connections to ideas in the texts. Such an approach opens the door to considerations of even more open-ended responses, allowing for the kind of learner-constructed meaning making that Brouse eloquently extols at the start of the article. It would be intriguing too to use such texts, situated in the Anglo-European tradition, with a more diverse class, to allow for the very connection between the creative process and one's culture that the author cites. This interdisciplinary approach, using texts in stimulating ways, is a refreshing strategy, allowing for authentic learning experiences as students make connections to their own health and wellness.

All of these articles raise more questions than they answer, which is how it should be. We hope that they might elicit or even incite responses, and we welcome that. Particularly exciting would be more work that connects issues of diversity and the preparation of teachers to teach in diverse communities, with the discussion of literacy and literacies. Critical responses that read what is left out here would further that discussion. Issues of class, gender, sexualities, disabilities, have not really been addressed in this issue. Our public school classrooms are places of much diversity, so even if our teacher candidates are predominantly white and middle class, teaching in classrooms where all the students are white, we know we still want them to teach from a stance that promotes multiple perspectives, honors the diversity that is in the classroom and that respects and tells the truth about the diverse world outside the classroom walls, bringing that

world, in all its color and ambiguity, into the classroom. We invite such submissions because in the spirit of the authentic learning experience, it is in honest discourse that we grapple with current urgent issues in Education, and it is from such discussion that agency is developed. And we need to be the agents of change we want our students to be.

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