Approaching Multicultural Education Through Oral History, Children's Books and Writing Workshops

Prepared for

Multicultural Education: Policy, Planning and Sharing
Open Society Institute, May 6-8 1999, Dobogókő, Hungary

Charles Temple, Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Bird Stasz, Wells College

What is Multicultural Education? Where does it come from? What does it do?

Charles Temple and Byrd Stasz

Cultures are the linguistic, religious, artistic, and mythological ways in which groups of the species homo sapiens express their originality. Of course, cultures can seem like stronger divisions than that: Cultural differences can become the fault lines in a society that offer pretenses for mistreatment, discrimination against, and oppression of one group by another.

Multicultural education came into being where fair-minded people sought ways to respond constructively to the challenge of members of different cultural groups sharing the same society (And to the extent that people in the world are becoming interdependent, this challenge involves all of us). Although social action for justice may begin in other domains-- laws and policies, hiring practices, housing, or access to health care, for example--sooner or later, schools must be involved in the effort. That is because progress in social arrangements ultimately requires that citizens adopt new attitudes, which in turn need new knowledge and experiences. A new education is needed by people on both sides of the cultural divide. Children of groups who have been oppressed need bolstering; and children of privileged groups need to broaden their perspective to take into account the views of children from other groups. Multicultural education, then, is a movement in schools to promote awareness, mutual appreciation, and harmony among people of different cultural groups--usually with the ultimate goal of achieving social justice and social cohesion.

Multicultural Education and the Two Curricula

Those who pay serious attention to what happens in schools know that schooling has a formal and an informal side. On the formal or explicit side are the objectives of the state curriculum and the content of school books and lectures, as measured by examinations. On the informal or hidden side are power relationships and implicit expectations for behavior: For example, do we succeed by cooperating or competing? Do students share responsibility for the classroom or only take orders? Also part of the informal side are attitudes toward one sex or one cultural group as opposed to another. This aspect of the informal or hidden curriculum is often evidenced in what is *not* included in the formal curriculum: Whose pictures do not hang in the hallways, or are not seen in books? Whose stories are not told? Whose contributions to society are not chronicled?

As we shall see below, teachers who approach multicultural education often begin with the formal curriculum--with the content that is taught. Some, however, attempt to change the implicit aspects of schooling, too--to make aspects of schooling like power-sharing and interaction among students more supportive of students from all cultural groups and ultimately of the goal of social change.

A Model of Prejudice and Multicultural Education

Attitudes are not learned cognitively like facts and dates. How does multicultural education affect attitudes and outlooks toward cultures—one's own and others? The answer lies in the interaction between concepts and experience. Let us look, first, at how this interaction affects members of the dominant group.

> *In their early years, members of Group Y begin to hear disparaging remarks said about members of Group X. They may hear these remarks, and detect the attitude they convey, before those members of Group Y have any real experience with members of Group X. The prejudicial remarks predispose them to have negative experiences with members of Group X when they eventually meet one: Members of Group Y will be willing to interpret virtually anything the Group X person says or does as evidence of their ________ or their _______ (whatever negative attribute they have learned to associate with members of that group). When that happens, they are now likely assume that our negative view of members of Group X is based on direct experience! They know that members of Group X have these negative attributes, because they have seen them with their own eyes!*
> (See Figure 1)

> *Unfortunately, this phenomenon may affect members of Group X as well, if all majority of the cultural reminders they see in public either ignore Group X--or worse, portray them in a negative light--members of Group X may, at best, conclude that they are not very important, that they don't really belong in the school or in the community; and at worst, that they really do possess the negative features that members of Group Y have ascribed to them.*

These gloomy processes can be prevented from happening, however. Cognitive psychologists tell us, just as the model suggested, that we tend to notice what we know about: A person who knows her wild flowers will have an altogether different experience of a walk through a field than a person who knows nothing about wild flowers. Similarly, if in school, children from Group Y are taught many fascinating features of the culture of Group X, as well as many features that Group Y has in common with that group, then their personal experience with members of that group will no longer automatically lead them to form negative conclusions about them. Similarly, if members of Group X see people like themselves reflected in the school curriculum, and begin to see positive features and accomplishments of their group *validated in the school*, they will feel less alienated and more encouraged by their school experiences.

Both of the examples given above together have been called the *window and mirror* effects of multicultural education (Simms Bishop, 1996). Multicultural education provides a *window* into the cultures of minority children, through which children from majority groups can see them accurately. It also provides a *mirror* of their own culture,

to children from minority groups, who heretofore may have seen only negative reflections of themselves, or no reflection at all, in the school curriculum.

Admittedly, a few widely scattered exercises in cultural awareness will not go very far to combat years of prejudicial attitudes that have been absorbed at home or in the neighborhood. That is why many experts in multicultural education argue for the infusion of multicultural influences throughout the curriculum and throughout the school day, week, and year.

In fact, approaches that have been taken to multicultural education can be plotted along a continuum from occasional topic lessons to a transformation of the school.

Models of Multicultural Education

In the most straightforward of venues, multicultural education is limited to discussions of school curriculum. From a practical standpoint, this translates into using materials such as children's books, or projects such as oral histories, to increase awareness and understanding of
the various cultural perspectives of the students in the school or classroom. The idea is that the content connects to the child and hence, each child will see himself or herself reflected in the daily curriculum and studies that take place in the classroom. Further, that the class will see itself as a collective made up of different experiences, all of which are equally important and valid, and by doing so will increase the understanding of each child of the other.

In other contexts, such as the political arena, multicultural education takes on a much broader scope and has been defined as "any set of processes by which schools work with rather than against oppressed groups." (Sleeter, 1992, p.141) The most inclusive definitions (Nieto, 1992, Banks, 1994) suggest that multicultural education is a transformational process that permeates and impacts every aspect of the operation of an educational system, including government policy, staffing, curriculum, disciplinary policy, student involvement, parent and community involvement, pedagogy, assessment, and funding. One of the underlying premises of multicultural education as transformation is "that as schools go so goes the nation," At the practical level, multicultural education then becomes a venue for social and political reform. Discussions of oppression, social inequality, power dynamics, race and ethnicity, as well as the role of the dominant culture, in the shaping of society's basic assumption about what constitutes school knowledge, appropriate social behavior, and national identity, is all part of the multicultural education discourse.

Regardless of where practice comes down on the definitional continuum, researchers, architects, and practitioners of multicultural education hold certain goals and assumptions in common.

1. Multicultural education assumes that pluralism is a good thing and that race, ethnicity, cultural and social class are all salient parts of a pluralistic society. Participation in a variety of ethnic experiences ultimately enriches one's understanding of the human experience and leads to a more fulfilling life. (Banks 1999)

2. A central goal of multicultural education is to help individuals live more productively in a pluralistic society. This is accomplished in two ways:

    A) Individuals gain a greater understanding of themselves by seeing themselves through the lens of other cultures.

    B) Individuals gain the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to
    function within their ethnic culture and within and across other ethnic cultures.

3. Multicultural education is premised on the need for accuracy. In order for individuals to get a true picture of historical and social events, which have shaped national identity, they need to listen to multiple voices and understand multiple perspectives. It is not a matter of leaving out one version of events in favor of another; rather it is about re-envisioning history using an inclusive model that more accurately portrays events as they happened.

4. Multicultural education is a commitment to helping all students master the essential academic and social skills to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in an increasingly polarized and troubled world.

Models of Multicultural Education Programs: Theory Into Practice

Regardless of how individuals view the multicultural education movement, there are some general models and specific areas of research that offer educators and policy makers a road map for program development. The two most often cited general modes are offered by Banks (1999) and by Sleeter and Grant (1993). These models differ from one another but are not mutually exclusive. (See figure 2)

Other researchers such as Nieto (1992), Delpit (199?), and Ladson-Billings (1992) focus on particular areas of multicultural program development and offer suggestions relating to pedagogy, curriculum, and structure. Ladson-Billings, for example, focuses on the specifics of successful literacy education for African American students. Delpit (1988) is concerned with power relations in a classroom that can exist when minority children are taught by teachers of the dominant culture. Nieto(1997) is focused on institutional reform and student achievement.

When discussing theoretical models, how they actually look and operate in a classroom or school is often left out of the conversation. In that regard, Burnett (ERIC clearinghouse on Urban Education 1998) suggests a third model that combines Banks, Sleeter, current research with an overview of actual programs as they are currently underway in the United States. Burnett's typology is particularly useful in that it reflects the translation of theory into practice and divides programs into three general categories according to program emphasis.

Content-Oriented Programs

Content-oriented programs are the most easily recognizable and hence the most common form of multicultural education. Content-oriented programs are committed to the inclusion of material that reflects the cultural make-up of the class or the school. The primary goal of these programs is to make students more knowledgeable about cultures within their schools or their communities. Content-oriented programs come in various levels of engagement and infusion of the curriculum. In its simplest form, " this type of program gives a multicultural patina to the standard curriculum" (Burnett 1998) by incorporating a few readings and the celebration of heroes and holidays of diverse groups. It gives only a cursory nod to multicultural education by focusing solely on "heroes and holiday." Students would read books, do projects, and learn about a variety of holidays but through the lens of the standard canon. At this stage, multicultural education is an add-on or tangential to current curriculum without changing the actual focus.

More sophisticated and complex programs, however, set out to actually transform the curriculum. These programs have three goals: (Banks 1999)

- to develop multicultural content across the disciplines
- to incorporate a variety of different viewpoints and perspectives in the curriculum
- to transform the canon, ultimately developing a new paradigm for the curriculum

These programs can come in many forms, but often the most common is a single group study, such as women's studies, ethnic studies, etc. These programs can be the focus of the whole school, as in the examples of Afrocentric and single sex schools, or only portions of the curriculum.

Student-Oriented Programs

Student-oriented programs address the academic and learning needs of carefully defined groups of students, most specifically minority students. The goal of these programs is often to raise the academic achievement of these groups. Research in learning styles, language use and development (Heath 1986), etc. often forms the basis of these programs.

Since the goal of student-oriented programs is to improve the academic success of specific groups and thereby make it possible for them to enter the mainstream, they are often seen as compensatory in nature. Further, there is no particular guarantee that student-oriented programs will be done in conjunction with content oriented programs. In fact, it is entirely possible to have one without the other. Again Banks (1999) suggests four broad program categories:

- programs that use research into culturally-based learning styles in order to match teaching styles to a specific group of students
- bi-lingual education or language/cultural immersion
- special math and science programs for groups, such as females and minorities that are seen as underachieving in these areas.
- Language programs and cultural programs specific to minority group

Socially-Oriented Programs

Socially-oriented programs are generally the most inclusive and broad-based. They are also often controversial and as a consequence less common. Programs such as these attempt to reform "both the schooling and the cultural and political contexts of schooling" (Burnett 1998). The over-arching goal of socially-oriented programs is to increase cultural and racial tolerance and reduce bias as well as rearrange the social structure to reinforce and support this new paradigm.

In order to accomplish this, socially-oriented programs have a number of distinguishing characteristics:

- They seek to revise and transform the curriculum to create a new canon that is reflective of the current society.
- They seek to use current educational research to discover new ways to engage students in the educational enterprise in order that they may be academically successful, regardless of ethnicity and class.
- They use the instruments and strategies of social activism and community organization to accomplish these goals.
- They focus on the outcome of preparing students to be socially – active citizens and agents of change.

Sleeter and Grant (1993) have described socially-oriented programs as about human relations in all its many forms. As a consequence, such programs use a variety of approaches borrowed from disciplines as diverse as philosophy, ecology, and psychology. Some programs emphasize critical thinking and critical discourse, collaborative learning and multilingualism. Other programs focus on the use of the ecological model to enhance understanding of social structures and the diffusion of change, still other programs focus on the nature of inclusion and consensus and how best to translate those concepts into practice, not only at the classroom level but at the school and community level as well.

Final Thoughts

There is a danger in multicultural education programming of letting the political rhetoric and the academic research agenda overshadow the benefits of designing and implementing interesting and lively opportunities for children to learn. In fact, the reasons to use a multicultural approach in schools are simple and compelling.

1. A multicultural approach makes learning more interesting and relevant to children's lives.

2. A multicultural approach gives all students a forum in which to share information about who they are, how they live, what is important to them and their families.

3. A multicultural approach gives students another lens through which to view history and society.

4. A multicultural approach encourages tolerance and respect and supports notions of social reform and community cohesion.

Oral Histories: school and community based opportunities for multicultural education

What is an oral history?

It is often the case that when a teacher says the word "history" to a group of youngsters there is a collective groan as eyes roll back and students brace for the worst. History can evoke images of dusty books, dimly lit libraries, and the tedious memorization of names and dates that take a long time to learn and a short time to forget. Fortunately, oral histories have none of those characteristics.

The broadest and simplest definition of an oral history is the reminiscences and recollections of living people concerning the past. These recollections can be passed down orally from generation to generation or may be the oral memories of an individual who was present at a specific time and event. The only caveat is that the story is "collected" by an interviewer and then transcribed into text with some accompanying narrative or explanation that fleshes out the background of the storyteller and the particular situation. The topic is fairly irrelevant as long as it is about an actual memory or incident. Topics can be virtually anything from surviving a flood, putting food by, building a boat, memories of school days, tales of courage and moments of sheer hilarity and electrifying suspense.

The elements of a good oral history are the same as the elements of a good story. There are vibrant and fully realized characters such as; an eccentric aunt, Uncle so and so who was captured by pirates, the strongest man in the village or the lady across the street who loved cats. Each one of these people has a role in the tale and, most importantly, exists or existed in real life. There are problems to be solved. They can range from the grave to the mundane such as; harvesting food in a year with no rain, surviving the great depression, building a dyke against a flood or how to fix a roof, make a quilt or build a house without using nails. The solutions to these problems or, in literary terms, the resolution, often illustrate everything from outstanding resourcefulness to blatant stupidity. The voice or the point of view of the oral history is that of the person telling the story. The researcher acts as the invisible narrator who only adds those things, which help enhance or illuminate the dark corners of the tale that may be opaque to the reader. Finally the language or tone that the oral history takes is, and should be, true to the "teller". It is not the job of the oral historian to change the person's syntax and make them more or less educated, sophisticated or different from who they are. An oral history is not an exercise in creative writing but an exercise in telling the truth as someone else knows it.

Oral histories can be turned into books, articles, displays, and even videos. They are also a perfect venue for developing multicultural curriculum in schools. There is a compelling quote from the poet Rilke that ultimately summarizes what oral histories actually do.. "*Who ever tells the story shapes the world" The* oral history is the story, what a teacher does with it can shape the world.

The Steps in an Oral History Project

What follows is an abbreviated outline of the steps in an oral history project. For more complete information please see *Telling stories, writing lives: a guide to using oral history folklore and folklife*

Getting started

The hardest part of an oral history is to decide on the topic. As students and teachers think about topics, perhaps the most salient question to answer is " will it make a good story". Think about events and people in a community that are pivotal. Wars, floods, and desperate times are natural starting points and usually come instantly to mind. Another avenue to explore is memorable moments in people's lives such as weddings, births, chance meetings, and significant life choices. . These projects can result in stories of humor and grace that are informative as well as interesting. Families are full of these stories and they run the gamut from the serious to the romantic. How grandparents came to live where they do is a good start for an oral history on immigration. How uncles and aunts learned their professions or met one another are opportunities for oral history around work and romance. How great aunt so and so learned to ride a horse or make a quilt or won a special prize at school are all part of the significant fabric of people's lives and are good choices for oral histories. The point to remember is that the stuff of life is the stuff of oral histories.

Where to go, who to interview and how

Once teachers and students have settled on a topic, the next hurdle in an oral history project is gathering information. This entails finding people to talk to, convincing them that that is a good idea, and finally, figuring out what to say. Gaining access is a term that refers to identifying and locating individuals that know about the topic. The interview is made up of a series of questions that encourages the speaker to tell his or her story. The most common mistakes that students make are to a) pick topics that on the surface sound great but are in reality too difficult, b) not find the right people to interview and c) structure a weak interview. The only real way to avoid making these mistakes is to practice. It is important to practice writing and doing interviews, as well as picking topics and designing projects that have a reasonable comfort level. For example, it would be unwise for students to decide to do an oral history project that requires them to travel great distances, or only interview very famous people. The likely-hood of failure would be high. Interview guides are available and are helpful for the first time oral historian. When it comes to format and structure, there is no reason to reinvent the wheel. A good commercial interview guide can save students and teachers time and headaches as it provides useful suggestions and gives a solid structure from which to work. .

The most accessible and fertile ground for oral history projects are in students' families and communities. Family and community oral history projects are very meaningful to students as they represent a celebration of easily recognizable individual and collective

experience. Everyone loves to "know the hero" of the tale and local projects allow that to happen.

A gold mine of information exists in the elderly people in a community. What was life like fifty years ago is a wonderful place to start especially for school age children. Elderly people are usually interested in youngsters and generally enjoy their company. They are also often available for school visits and can become a real asset to any educational program but particularly one that is using oral history as part of a multicultural endeavor. Intergenerational perspectives are powerful and even more so when they include stories from diverse ethnic, racial and social groups.

Writing it up

Once students have collected stories and information the next step is to "write it up". The writing workshop is a perfect way to get lively and interesting pieces written. Important aspects of this process are talk and collaborative work. Students need time to assemble information and talk with one another about what they have and what they might do with it. Besides interviews, students can use photographs, souvenirs, news clippings and other artifacts relevant to the topic that they are researching. The most difficult part of the project comes when students must synthesize the information and "tell the story" in a voice that is true to the experience and to the person.

Finished products are only limited by the imagination and energy of the students. Oral history projects can be made into videos, displays, books for adults, books for children. They can be part of local celebrations as well as the focus for local and regional publications.

Oral History Projects as Part of Multicultural Education

Oral history projects are about visibility. When students embark on a project those pieces of lived experience that have been in the shadows of families and communities come to light. What had once been invisible suddenly takes center stage. In a multicultural program this is particularly important as the experience of marginalized groups gets the same attention as the dominant group. Hero and heroines, problems and solutions emerge in the most unlikely places. As a consequence, students and teachers have opportunities for discussions around such topics as courage, resourcefulness, fairness and opportunity but through the multicultural lens and anchored in the experience of students. This is a prime example of Simms Bishop's model of windows and mirrors. Oral histories can allow teachers and students to change the content of the curriculum as well as the way students gather information and understand each other.

Oral history projects reduce the distance between the student and the subject matter. It is one thing for students to learn about and discuss events and concepts from a theoretical perspective. It is a whole different matter to discuss the same events and concepts but anchored in the lived experiences of family and community members. From the perspective of Banks model, oral history projects offer teachers and students access to changing the structure of the curriculum by changing, in part, how some of the information is obtained and studied.

Oral history projects require a collaborative and inclusive working style. It is virtually impossible for students to carry out individual projects because there is too much involved; hence students need to work together. Furthermore oral history project are a bridge between the classroom and the community. It is essential that students go out into the community and it is equally essential the community come into the classroom. For students of minorities, this may be one of the first opportunities that their families can participate in a school-based activity as experts in a particular topic.

Oral history projects can illuminate social issues and problems and give students and teachers a forum for discussion, decision making and action. As students study their communities and listen to the stories of family members they see how those experiences highlight a need for action and social change. For example, an oral history project conducted in a small town in Connecticut focused on the plight of Portuguese fisherman, which ultimately resulted in new legislation in the fishing industry.

This is not to say that oral history projects can or should be the centerpiece of a multicultural program. However, these types of projects are a logical and interesting place to begin the discussion. They are not technically difficult to execute nor are they particularly expensive. They are worth doing if for no other reason than oral histories help us to see and to remember those pieces of the ordinary human experience that would be lost as it is in our stories that our lives have meaning.

On the Varieties of Multicultural Publishing Projects

Publishing projects to support multicultural education projects can vary in a number of ways.

The authors of multicultural publications can be the students in a classroom, selected students from a school, a group of young people recruited in the community for this purpose, teachers, or professional adult writers.

The audiences can be the other students in a classroom, a whole school, students from different regions of the country (by means of exchanges), people in the immediate community, or even a national readership, if the works are published professionally.

The forms the materials might take include a wall or hallway-mounted collage of texts, illustrations, and photographs. Or they might be a newsletter, a magazine, a handmade book, or a commercially printed book.

The genres and patterns which organize the publications can take on interesting variety, also.

Patterns and Genres of Multicultural Publications.

Readers expect patterns in the texts they read; but inexperienced writers often have difficulty finding a design and sticking to it. What are some useful patterns for works written for children?

The first set of patterns introduced below might be used by children who are writing their own books, or by adults writing for children. These ideas were collected by Sylvia Vardell (in Temple & Gillet, 1996).

Alphabet books. (Animals, names, or objects presented from A to Z).
Counting books. (Numbers from 0 to 10, 1 to 20; sets of 5 or 10; addition problems; telling time; counting money).
Predictable pattern books. (This is... AI wish.. I like... Someday...)
Rhymes, songs, and poems. (Anthologies, or one book containing a single poem)
Riddles, proverbs, jokes (old favorites, ones collected in the community, new creations)
Retellings of traditional tales or religious stories (including stories that were collected from sources in the community)
Personal narratives. (First person accounts of individual experiences; or first person accounts told to the writer by a community person)
Vocabulary to learn or rules to demonstrate. (A personal dictionary or guidebook for carrying out a procedure)
Biography or history. (Based on interviews or research)
Autobiography of journals. (Me, my family, my feelings)
Nonfiction or informational books (about a favorite topic)
Concept books. (Simple concept with examples given: colors, animals, senses).
How to do books. (Clear instructions on how to build or create or do something).
Cookbooks. (Anthologies or individual creations).
Word less picture books. (In which a story is told entirely through pictures.
Favorite book formula. (Imitate or innovate on the pattern of a favorite book).
Favorite character book. (Make up a new adventure of a favorite character).
Original imaginative stories. (Fictional characters or fantasy characters).
Art books. (Single or mixed media collections of artwork with titles, captions, or stories).
Class anthologies. (A mixture of all literary types).
Movable/pop-up books. (Three dimension; moveable parts)
Shape books. (Books in the physical shape of the topic, like letters, numbers, or shoes).
Bilingual books. (Romanian/Romani, etc.)
Words/sounds. (Featuring idioms, expressions, or initial consonants or vowel sounds, or syllables)

Longer Narrative Patterns

For more extended texts, narrative patterns are often used. There are a range of patterns around which narratives can be arranged some of them quite obvious, but a few of them less so.

1. ***Sequential patterns***. The trappings of a traditional wedding could be highlighted as follows: At the start of the wedding feast, I ate a plum tart. But the bride still had not danced. By two o'clock I had eaten a plum tart and two hot crossed buns. But the bride still had not danced. By half past three I had eaten a plum tart, two hot crossed buns, and _______and so on.

2. ***Amazing Grace***. In Carolyn Bench's book, Amazing Grace, a young girl growing up in a modern city is having a crisis of confidence over the school play. Her aunt from her native island inspires her with the confidence of her roots, and the girl eventually triumphs. Children in other cultures could use a similar message.

3. ***The tension between traditional culture and modern culture***. In Sharon Bell Mathis' The 100 Penny Box, a hundred year-old grandmother keeps a penny from every year of her life and tells a story to go with each one to her young great-grandson, with whom she lives in a cramped urban apartment. The boy's mother has no use for the old woman's tales; and the boy is caught in between. This pattern bears recycling

4. ***Plots that stem from characters and their problems***. Good stories can be developed by thinking of a character in her setting, wishing what a person would typically wish for in that place. The story is further developed as opposing forces or characters are brought into play.

Standards of Writing for Young People

As the patterns of writing grow more complex, writers must work hard to handle them well. Many professional writers say that good writing is revising. Many published authors seek out the company of writers′ groups so they may share their works and receive suggestions. At many such workshops we have conducted, the suggestions writers offer each other tend to boil down to a fairly small set of recommendations. Suggestions such as the following are useful when writing fiction for children and young people:

1. ***Write within a genre***: If the story is realistic, don′t have trees talking!
2. Make it sound natural, but ***write in patterns***.
3. **Create a *beginning*** (in which characters are introduced and a problem is posed), **a *middle*** (in which the story is developed, and attempts are made to solve the problem), **and an *end*** (in which the problem is resolved and the characters′ new circumstances are presented).
4. **Put the *Main Dramatic Question* close to the beginning.**
5. ***Use words the way poets do***: for sound, meaning, and suggestion.
6. ***Put the child in the driver′s* seat**: That is, give the child a leading role in solving the problem.
7. ***Tell the truth****:* don′t offer unrealistic solutions to real problems.
8. ***Have the work be about something, but don′t preach***. The most satisfying works seem on reflection to make some point. However, stories can teach by themselves without heavy-handed moralizing by the writer.
9. ***Show, don't tell*** (Make the reader see, hear, smell, feel).
10. ***Trust the reader***. Don′t explain everything.
11. ***Surprise your readers***.
12. However realistic or even grim the characters′ circumstances may be, ***leave a ray of hope in your works.***

Writers′ Workshops

There is a widely held belief that only certain gifted individuals can write anything worthwhile. Those who are not inherently gifted only embarrass themselves by attempting to write. Yet when one gazes on the portraits of those gifted individuals, hanging high on the walls of school classrooms, one perceives a curious pattern: They

are all well dressed! They are all men! They are all white! (And they are almost all dead!). Perhaps it is not talent for writing that is in limited supply, but the expectation that many people, even young people, might have interesting things to say, in print.

Indeed, the multicultural writers' workshop movement has found and nurtured many fine writers who would not otherwise have been published. One of the most pleasing realizations that followed this effort in the United States was that these writers really had quite a lot to say: and, once published, they have stayed in print through their own popularity.

Even in schools, writers' workshop movements have encouraged personal authorship among students, and have had very positive results: (1) They nurture the students' self-expression and develop their self-esteem, and (2) they open other students' eyes to the experiences and ideas of their classmates from every neighborhood and from every ethnicity. (The mirror and window phenomenon again). Teachers also like the fact that personal authorship leads students to identify more closely with professional authors, and look more seriously at the author's craft.

Without denying that some people have more gifts for writing than others, we can say confidently that virtually any student can be helped to unleash what he or she wants to say on paper. What is needed are *permission to write about things that matter to the writer, real audiences who will receive the writing for what it says, frequent opportunities to write,* and *models and demonstrations of the process of writing.* The process of writing referred to in the last sentence has come to be understood to be something like the following:

The Writing Process

Is there one process that all writers go through to produce a finished piece? Surely not. But there is one description of the writing process that seems to come the closest to what most writers do when they compose. This is the writing process model put forward by Donald Murray (1985) and Donald Graves (1982). This model has proved useful for organizing writing instruction, too.

The writing process provides a means by which a student begins with an idea, and gradually shapes that idea on the page to the point that it successfully communicates to the readers, and builds connections between the readers and the writer around the theme developed by the author out of the original idea. It is a step-by-step process through which students become credible authors, and writing becomes a vehicle for clarifying and expressing ideas.

According to the model of the writing process we will use here, most thoughtful pieces of writing go through three steps: rehearsing, drafting, and revising. Those that are to be published go through two more: editing and publishing. Does every piece of writing go through these steps, in this order? Again, of course not. It's very likely that young people will move back and forth through these steps, though they will most commonly use that order. In the pages that follow, we will explain each of these steps, and pause to show activities that help young people learn at each one. Again, it should be said that the writing process described here may be used in all subject areas, although special applications to the disciplines will be shared later in this guide.

Rehearsing. Rehearsing is the act of gathering information and collecting our thoughts. We survey the ideas we have available to us on a topic, and begin to plan a way into writing about it.

Drafting. Drafting is the act of setting ideas out on paper. Drafting is tentative, experimental. We write down our ideas so we can see what we have to say about out topic. Once they are there, we can make them clearer, even elegant.

When we are drafting, it is no time to be critical with our ideas, their form, or their spelling and handwriting: the time for all that will come later.

Most young writers (indeed, most writers) don't have the habit of writing more than one version of a paper. Proficient writers do. "Writing is rewriting," they say. We'll need to encourage students to think of writing as drafting.

Revising. After our paper is written in draft form, we can start to make it better. We'll improve the paper in two careful stages. At the revising stage, we want to see what we had to say, and decide how it can be said better. We are concerned that our ideas be clear, and that they be presented in the right form. We are still not worrying about spelling, handwriting, or grammatical correctness at this stage, although of course they are important: These issues will be dealt with in the next stage: the proof-reading or editing stage.

Editing. Once a paper has been drafted and revised, it is ready for editing. Editing is the final polishing a undergoes before it goes public. Editing is held off for last, because paragraphs or even pages may have been cut or added in the revising stage. After the piece is in final form, but before it is widely shared, is the time for editing.

The habit of editing must be taught. The habit consists of three things:

- Caring that the paper be correct;
- Being aware of errors;
- Knowing how to set them straight.

Publishing Publishing is the final stage of the writing process, and in important ways publishing drives the whole enterprise. The prospect of sharing what they have to say with an audience makes many students want to write, and rewrite, and smooth out and refine--especially if they've seen other students' work received with appreciation and

delight. Publishing also lets students see what each other is doing. A good idea is contagious; and anything from an interesting topic, to a plot structure, to a way to use dialogue, to the habit of taking risks with spelling may be shared through the process of publishing.

A Demonstration Writing Workshop

Tied to the above description of the writing process, of what effective writers do in order to produce a viable work, is a strategy for teaching the process: The *writing workshop*. Writing workshops can be done in classroom, even primary grade classrooms; or they may be offered for adult groups. Perhaps the best way to visualize what a writing workshop looks like is to consider this Ascript@ for a very first writing workshop, as it is introduced in the Reading & Writing for Critical Thinking Project. The instructions are written for the person directing the workshop.

PREPARE FIVE TOPICS. You will need to have prepared in advance four or five topics about subjects that are lively and important to you just now. Take care that these are topics from "the human carnival," describing events and feelings that you are likely to have in common with the people in your workshop.

DISPLAY THE TOPICS. Begin by writing those topics on a sheet of newsprint, or overhead transparency. Explain that you (and they) will be writing short papers in this session about things that matter to you. You have thought of these topics as possibilities, and would like their help in choosing one of them to write about.

OTHERS INTERVIEW YOU. Request that they interview you about each topic, asking questions such as, "What interests you most about this topic?' "Tell us more about _______." "Why did you choose this topic?" Answer their questions, and as you do, make it clear why one particular topic stands out to you from the others--perhaps for its freshness, vividness, or poignancy; perhaps for its manageable scope. (Take time to point out that topics that are too abstract, too ambitious, or that you don't have enough information about are better left for another day).

OTHERS LIST TOPICS. Now ask them to do the same: make a list of four or five possible topics that matter to them, that they might like to write a short piece about.

OTHERS INTERVIEW EACH OTHER ABOUT THEIR TOPICS. After everyone has had four or five minutes to make a list, ask people to pair up and share their lists. Partners should then interview each other about their topics, just as they interviewed you, so that each person can be helped to identify the one topic that seems most interesting to other people, and to herself.

MAKE A CLUSTER. Now make a cluster of details about your topic. Write your topic in a circle in the center of the page, then write subtopics as "satellites" around your main topic, and add subtopics to each of those.

OTHERS INTERVIEW YOU ABOUT YOUR CLUSTER. Invite the participants to ask you about the details you listed, and the ways they go together. In short, have them help you "find your story." Mark prominently on your cluster the part you will write about.

OTHERS MAKE CLUSTERS AND INTERVIEW EACH OTHER. Now invite the participants to think through the topics they chose in the previous step, and make a cluster for the ideas they associate with it. After they have had seven or eight minutes to do so, ask them to stop and interview each other about their clusters, in order to "find their stories." They may have listed more details than they can work into a short paper; so after discussing the details with a partner, they should now mark the most interesting and relevant parts of their clusters.

EVERYONE WRITE FOR AN INTERVAL. Explain that you will all be writing drafts that can be changed before they are shared. The important thing is for people to get their ideas out on paper. They should write without stopping or going back for the allotted period of time (allow about 20 minutes for this). **Be sure to tell them to write on every other line.** You write, too, either on an overhead or on chart paper.

SHOW A PAPER THAT COMMUNICATES, BUT THAT CAN BE IMPROVED IN SOME RESPECT. You may need to prepare this ahead of time, but you should have a paper that conveys real ideas, but that also has something about it that could use revision-- such as flat, colorless language that "tells" rather than "shows." Display the paper (either on newsprint or on an overhead) and ask the participants to say first what they find pleasing about it, and then to help you make it communicate better. Presumably they will call attention to the flat language, and you can then ask volunteers for suggestions for more vivid wording for each dull spot.

Take a moment now to talk about the difference between positive, constructive comments that help us make our writing better, and negative comments that discourage us. Positive comments include naming specific parts we liked--those that are most aptly described, most vivid, most surprising, most enjoyable--and saying what we liked about them. They also include asking about parts that are confusing to us or ambiguous, or where we would like more information.

Also, make a point about ownership: the idea that the ultimate responsibility for the paper rests with the writer. Others can tell us their reactions, and those are valuable to writers, but the decision of whether to change something change it always rests with the writer.

OTHERS READ PAPERS TO PARTNERS, FOR COMMENTS AND CRITIQUES. They should now take turns sharing their papers, and first comment on the meaning of the paper, and name what they liked about the paper. Later they can see if there are parts that could be made clearer or more vivid--just as they helped you do with your own. Writers should put in any additions or clarifications on their papers in the lines they left for that purpose.

WRITE REFINED DRAFTS OF YOUR PAPERS. Now everyone writes again for fifteen minutes or so, creating a new draft that improves on the previous one--we hope with the benefits of the conferring that just occurred.

READ TO THE WALL. Before the participants take the last step of sharing their papers with the larger group, ask each person to read his or her paper aloud to the wall, and listen for words that can be changed, unclear parts that can be improved, and unnecessary words or phases that can be omitted.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ FROM THE "AUTHOR'S CHAIR." Designate a chair at "center stage" in the room, from which a volunteer will read his or her paper to the whole group. Remind the others ahead of time that after the reading, they will be asked to find one thing that they liked about the paper, and also ask the writer one question. Share four or five papers with the whole group in this way.

IN RETROSPECT, NOTE THESE GENERAL POINTS:

- The teacher served as a model, treating writing as a "studio craft," analogous to the ways he or she might teach a class in pottery making, or painting.

- The topics came from everyone's own interests and experiences, rather than from assignments.

- The thrust of the whole exercise was to communicate to a real audience something that interested the writer

- Peers helped each other communicate their messages more elegantly, instead of teachers receiving the papers for purposes of grading.

THE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF A WRITING CLASSROOM: TIME, OWNERSHIP, AND DEMONSTRATION.

<u>Time</u>: Writing workshops should be scheduled at regular intervals so that students know when they will have opportunities to write, get help with, and share their ideas.

<u>Ownership</u>: Students should have opportunities to choose their own topics, or at least their own approach to topics. When conferences are conducted to help students improve writing, their "ownership" of the work must still be respected, with freedom left for them to choose which advice to follow.

<u>Demonstration</u>: Teaching writing, as we said, is a "studio craft," with attention to the <u>process</u> of creating well written works. The teacher should demonstrate every phase of the process so students will know how effective writing is done.

The Dynamics of Illustrating Books for Children.

When we have conducted workshops with the intention of producing professionally published materials, we have often given an orientation to potential illustrators of the books, too. Picture books create unique challenges and opportunities to illustrators, since they sustain the same narrative over 16, 32, or 64 pages, and require many illustrations that reflect both the continuity of the text and the changing dramatic contours. The following (taken from Temple et. al., 1998) are some points we often make with illustrators.

Characterization (How does the illustrator makes us know each character by appearance? How are parts of a character used to denote him or her?)

Perspective and positioning (Where is the central character positioned? From what perspective do we view the action? In what direction are things moving? It is said that a character seen on the left hand side of the page may appear to be more in control of things than a character seen on the right. The same is true of a character seen higher on the page, and larger).

Lay-out (Double-page spreads can suggest expansiveness or serenity; whereas single page spreads move the story along more quickly. If the character is seen in several pictures on the same page, this often suggests that things are moving too quickly for him, and he might soon lose control).

Borders (Borders contain the action. When actions spread out across the borders, it appears too large or powerful to contain).

Page turns (There is a drama of the turning page, which creates suspense on the right-hand page before the turn, and resolves it on the left hand page after the turn).

The last page (The last page often serves as a visual commentary, denouement, or punch line.)

The interaction of picture and text (Good artists create a complementarity: What is stated in the text need not be illustrated, and vice versa).

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Figure 1

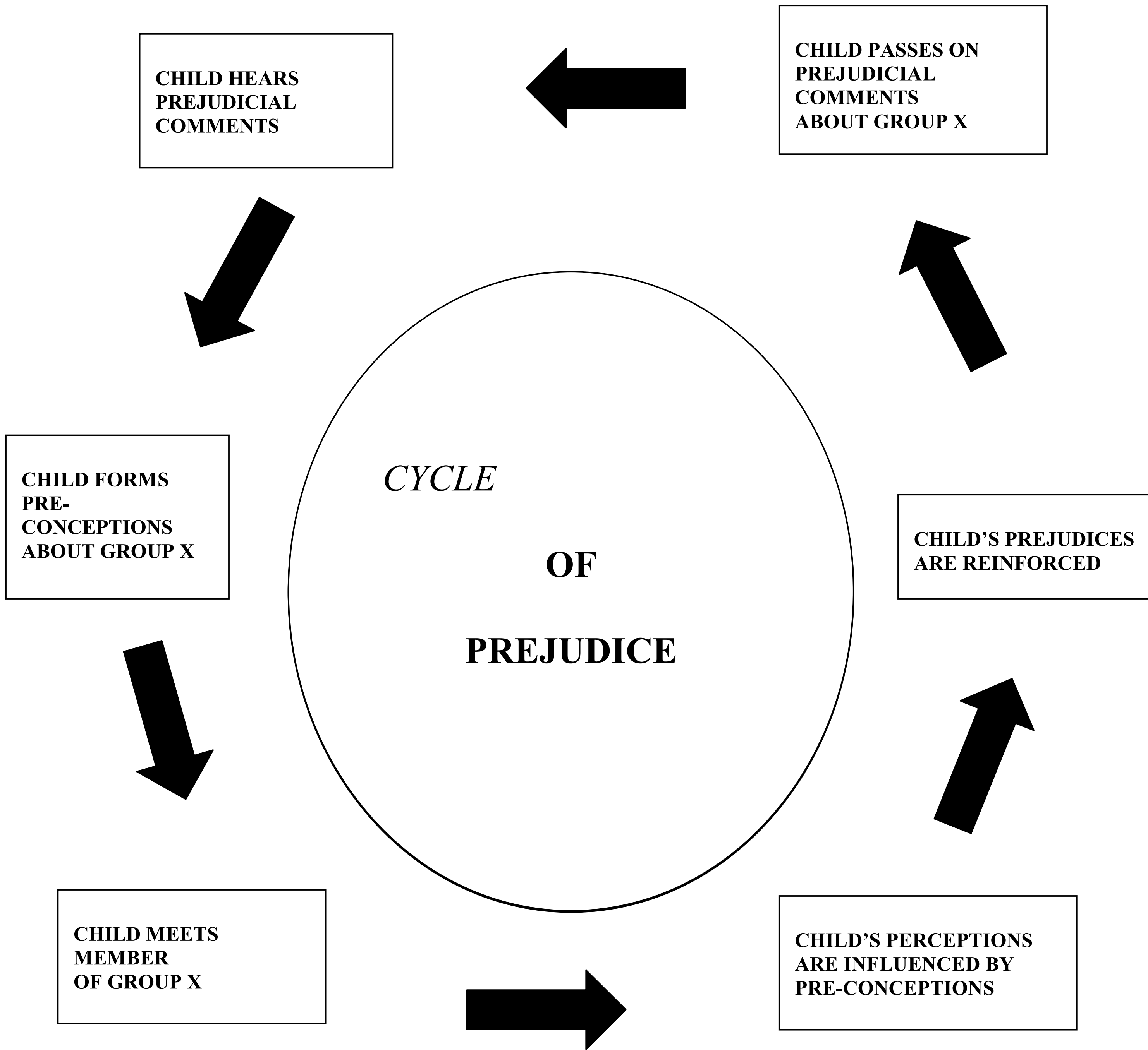

Figure 2

APPROACHES TO MULTICULTURAL CURRICULUM REFORM