

# **Multiculturalism in Rural Education: A Call for Integration**

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## **Abstract**

Choosing a multicultural approach to teaching in the commonly conceived homogenous rural schools is an emerging avenue of research. Inspired by readings on the two trends of rural literacy and multiculturalism, this paper examines the relevance of adopting a multicultural approach to teaching writing in rural schools. After providing a short review of including multiculturalism in rural education, model lesson plans about developing learners' metacultural competence are detailed in addition to a sample answer from personal experience as a multicultural learner who taught students from rural areas. The results showed the significant impact the lessons had on me as an ESOL learner and a multilingual. It further suggests some recommendations for teachers aspiring to tackle this facet of inclusion and teaching composition in rural schools.

## **Keywords**

rural schools, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), composition, multiculturalism, metacultural awareness.

## Introduction

The emerging literature on rural literacy and multiculturalism offers fertile ground for research. Applying a multicultural approach to teaching in rural schools intersects with the concepts of diversity and difference appreciation. Some scholars prefer to enjoy the particularities of rural schools as a homogenous closed but rich milieu. They design culturally relevant and place-based curricula (Esckers and Alsup 15). They choreograph their experiences in different rural contexts, reconsider ‘rural,’ and provide pedagogical avenues for teachers to explore. Their treatise of the fine line between the individual and place is worth reading with a critical approach. Other researchers challenge the norms and examine the impact of emerging diversity in their pedagogy (Reed 19 and Ayalon 24). Still, some even question how multiculturalism remains silent about rural education (Ayalon 28). This paper, accordingly, seeks to examine the relevance of applying a multicultural approach to teaching in rural schools and design writing lessons for this minority student population. After exploring multiculturalism and rural literacy readings and living the experience of an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) student in the American context, I decided to flesh out my insights into a sequence of lessons on inclusion and teaching reading in rural schools. This short treatise of multiculturalism in rural schools is divided into a theoretical overview of multiculturalism, a detailed description of the lesson plans, and a sample response to the first activity. This research paper aims to:

1. Investigate the concepts of multiculturalism and rural literacy
2. Design writing lessons that can be applied in any ESOL class, including rural ones.
3. Modeling by choosing mentor texts that are thematically inspired by ethnicity.

The main research questions that I set to answer are the following:

1. How can inclusion in writing and reading instruction help ESOL learners in rural schools develop robust reading strategies?
2. What implications, if any, has rurality on multicultural pedagogy in ESOL writing courses?
3. To what extent can metacultural, ethnic, and place awareness create an inclusive learning environment?

## **Theoretical Overview and Rationale**

Defining multiculturalism has taken many directions and inspired many proponents of diversity. It crossed disciplines, cultures, and pedagogies to fit into every sphere of life. Multiculturalism originated from the thoughts, acts of resistance, and reactions against the normative mono-power-directed system. It “may be used in a descriptive fashion to reference the undeniable variety of cultures inter- and intra-nationally or about stipulating the procedural and substantive principles ordering a multicultural society” (Goldberg 7). In “Multicultural Education for Rural Schools: Creating Relevancy in Rural America,” Christina Reed examines the notion of diversity, which is becoming an inevitable part of the previously-white-dominant rural schools. She advocates for a modified multicultural curriculum that would fit the rural context. After giving a short history of multiculturalism, she proposes a pedagogical framework for raising students’ awareness of their unique cultures. Culture, for Reed, should be first defined through its diverse and dynamic nature. Teachers should be aware of the complex and various cultures within each rural school setting.

While Reed endorses a systematic change in the educational environment to account for rurality in multiculturalism and expose learners in rural schools to diversity and social justice, Aram Ayalon, in his article, “Does Multicultural Education Belong in Rural White America?” provides a framework for implementing a multicultural and social constructionist approach to rural schooling. He claims that diversity exists within

the majority-white rural schools vis-à-vis sexuality, gender, and class and those teachers, institutions, and the community should co-operatively work toward social justice and diversity appreciation. The latter can be done through reporting and sharing research among academics about the conception of the marginalized in rural schools, creating a curriculum that is based on the needs of those students and preparing them for the workplace by reporting the experiences of adults, and engaging the community in the social constructionist approach.

As an advocate for rurality and multiculturalism, Ayalon further explores how rural is missing from the multicultural textbooks in American education. The emerging diverse population that rural communities are witnessing requires reform in the educational materials used in rural schools. Despite their reluctance to address multicultural education, which is my main area of interest, teachers in rural schools became cognizant of the new reality and the challenges it brings to their classrooms. After conducting an in-depth analysis of the books, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* by James Banks and Chery McGee Banks and other prominent books about multiculturalism, Ayalon concludes that even if they mention the word rural, it remains related to poverty without engaging in the discussion of rural as place (26). The authors of the books he reviewed define rural against urban and depicted a superficial picture of rural that, according to Ayalon, stereotypes place. His vision for a fairer multicultural education for all calls for a reconsideration of rural in multicultural literature.

In a more recent analysis of diversity in rural schools, Derry Stufft and Rebecca Brogadir (2010) examine the transition of the diverse student body from urban to rural schools. The increasing number of immigrant families in rural areas helped create second-generation students. What Ayalon called for earlier has already been applied in educating this diverse population. The authors provide strategies to account for the challenges this group of students brings to American rural schools. The first is to educate school principals about the importance of diverse learners in education and facilitate their acculturation process. Consult-

ing web resources to learn about other cultures within the school and “tapping into the existing immigrant community” (Stufft and Brogadir 23) helps school staff get a clearer picture of diversity in their settings. The second strategy is to enhance immigrant parents’ involvement in their children’s learning environment. Communication between parents and schools should be facilitated through multilingual letters and interpreters, which helps create an inclusive learning context. Building on learners’ prior knowledge is the third strategy that helps educators of diverse learners in rural schools, Stufft and Brogadir claim. Teachers should build their curricula on the needs of learners. By supporting their first languages and enhancing their culture, they build trust and engagement in learning the target language (Stufft and Brogadir 23-24).

Within the classroom, as Stufft Brogadir and Reed suggest above, teachers should make personal connections with students, communicate high expectations with each student, and listen through dialect to grasp what the learner wants to say (Higbee et al. 23). The first two lessons are geared to this objective. The students and the teacher create an inclusive environment by creating their personality collage. They will also be engaged in a group awareness activity through a model text. I chose mentor texts written by writers who experienced diversity to show students models of how injustice can be combatted through the power of the pen. Mentor texts serve students on linguistic and communicative levels.

On the former, they develop their writing and reading skills, and on the latter, they help them develop self-efficacy (Chugani and Manasse 282). Sarina Chugani Molina and Mark Manasse describe a case study to test the effectiveness of using mentor texts on developmental students’ reading and writing skills. The teachers developed mentor texts that are culturally responsive and served as exemplars for developing learners’ reading and writing skills (281). They chose and leveled texts about themes related to their students’ experiences. The texts were chosen from a blog created by Mike Rose, who is known for equity pedagogy. They used metacognitive and cooperative learning strategies and role-designation opportunities to engage learners in their learning process and help them create a voice in academia. The results positively empowered the learners

to express their voice in academic settings (Chugani and Manasse 298). The simulated advanced ESOL students that would receive this intervention would get reinforcement through introducing the “Cycle of Socialization.” This lesson aims to raise students’ awareness of how the socialization process takes shape, its sources, how it affects their lives, and “how it perpetuates itself” (Harro 46). In this sequence of lessons, the students will also be trained to use the Think Out Aloud (TOL) technique throughout their selected text readings. According to Claire Kramsch, ESOL learners’ “lack of experience with a creative, personalized mode of reading is compounded by the linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions of a foreign- language text, for which they are the non-intended audience” (qtd. in Davis 420). Therefore, ESOL students should be oriented to dissect the meaning of text through model questions at each reading segment.

## **Assignments**

### **Lesson I Model Plan**

Unit One: Developing metacultural awareness (Who am I?)

Grade level(s): Advanced ESL/EFL (American context)

Duration: 90 mins

Lesson Title: Developing metacultural awareness (Who am I?)

Students’ Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Analyze mentor texts.
- Learn the ethical standards and the objectives of the unit.
- Become aware of the intersections of multiple identities.
- Learn the difference between personal and social identity.

Materials: Whiteboard, markers, mentor text.

Abbreviations: T= Teacher, Ss=Students

## Lesson Procedures

### Pre-tasks (10 mins):

T explains the learning objectives of the unit and the lesson.

T distributes a note on ethical standards, which includes: avoiding the use of offensive language, respect for each other's arguments, the use of euphemism. Use "I" instead of the offensive directive "you."

### Tasks (50 mins):

T asks students, "Have you ever felt ashamed of your family or wished you were living someone else's life? What about your heritage or family would you have changed?"

Ss answer verbally, and the teacher elaborates on how identity has become a complex concept.

T distributes text handouts.

Ss read silently.

T asks students to write for 10 mins about what they were thinking about when they read the text.

Ss read aloud their short paragraphs.

T elaborates on their answers.

T asks students to work in pairs to answer the following questions: discuss the changes Granados's mother made to their lawn. Do you think anyone cared what the lawn looked like? Why or why not? Why do you think Granados was concerned about what it looked like? Discuss your group's thoughts with the class.

T explains that writing in this session is preliminary. They should refine their papers before submission in the following week.

### Post-tasks (5 mins):

T reminds students that they should bring the mentor text to class in the next session.

## Lesson II Model Plan

Grade level(s): Advanced ESL/EFL (American context)

Duration: 90 mins

Lesson Title: Developing metacultural awareness  
(Who am I? Continued)

Text(s): *True Colors* by Christine Granados

Students' Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. Develop metacultural awareness
2. Grasp the meaning of social identities
3. Write a self-identification collage

Abbreviations: T= Teacher, Ss=Students

## Lesson Procedures

Pre-tasks (10 mins):

T asks for Ss' reflections on how each identity shapes the way they interact with the world. The T can model how it is done. The Mexican student (in the mentor text), for example, might share how being biracial allows her to be a part of two worlds.

Tasks (50 mins):

T Introduces the socialization wheel, and Ss revisit the mentor text through it.

Ss write a self-identification collage (focusing on how ethnicity and place define people from some cultures taking inspiration from the mentor text and the Socialization Wheel). (Source: Harro qtd. in Adams. et.al 107).



Post-tasks (10 mins):

Ss write introductory reflective journals on what they learned from the identity exploration unit and what they anticipate to learn from the following unit on racism and white privilege.

## Sample Response

### Lesson 1 Sample Answer

Immediate timed (15 mins) writing a response to the mentor text (*True Colors* by Christine Granados)

The generation gap is one of the most common topics that writers explore. In this text, the writer recounts her experience as an American and a Mexican. She first explains how she sees herself as American as apple pie. She then explains the juxtaposition between her mother's Mexican-inspired lifestyle and hers in El Paso. Granados recounts how she disdained the four frog statues that her mother put in the front yard, as they caused her to feel un-American. In another incident that shows the author's refusal to be openly identified as Mexican, she changed the bright yellow paint of their garage doors. However, at the end of the essay, Granados claims that the same experience she had with her mother surfaced when she discussed paint color choice with her son, but unlike her mother, she was compliant and pursued his choice. It is another indication that the generation gap eases cultural heritage and how each self-identifies in a pluralistic society. Why does the teenage author think the frog statues and the yellow paint in the front yard are embarrassing? How did she come to this conclusion? Is it a generation gap that led to the misunderstandings between Granados and her mother?

## **Conclusion and Final Reflections**

Enacting a multicultural approach requires legislative and institutional decisions, curricular reforms, reconsideration of the teaching philosophy, policy-makers' adaptability, faculty and student self-assessment; reconsideration of teaching styles, and real-world diversity awareness. For successful integration of multicultural approaches to writing and literature instruction, teachers, who are the principal part of the process, should choose appropriate texts that ensure voicing for every individual. As demonstrated above, self-recognition is a complex concept; hence, enacting a multicultural approach to our teaching requires a thorough understanding of ourselves vis-à-vis the other selves. The sequence of lessons was limited to two lesson plans, which are part of the whole design, due to the quantitative limits of the paper. In the sample response section, I played the role of a student responding to the timed-writing activity because I am not currently employed. The texts chosen for this project would increase students' self-identification skills. Though most rural communities refuse to venture into multiculturalism since they believe the community is homogenous, using multicultural texts in class is a facilitator to preparing students for a diverse college environment and the workplace. The whole project paper is set to answer questions, as stated in the introduction; however, it should be conducted inside real classrooms in the American context for more valuable and reliable data.

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