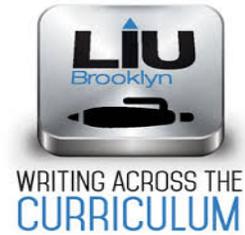


Applying Culturally Sensitive Pedagogies in the Classroom

Central to any teaching philosophy, is the need to view places of learning as democratic public spheres. Consequently, any attempt to reformulate the role of transformative teaching has to begin with the broader question of how to view the purpose of educating. The underlying curriculum in a culturally inspired classroom is one in which students are engaged in forms of critical inquiry that signify meaningful dialogue about teaching. Emphasis is on articulation about a student's own constitution. Reflection is not to be understood as abstracting away from a given context, but rather it entails a student's ability to communicate and exchange in dialogue different viewpoints. In that way, students name what drives and motivates them. As a result they are one step to naming what they mean. Following are some practical examples of culturally responsive writing exercise that I implement in my teaching.

1. Implementing the Concept of Naming

Students need to be made aware that the struggle over power relations and a struggle for meaning and interpretation must start with the individual being involved in the more rudimentary activity of naming. A related exercise I conduct in class is titled "Naming an Obstacle." Students have to articulate and name an obstacle they have been confronted with in their lives. The obstacle can be social, psychological, emotional and or physical. Students are then required to explain how they overcame that obstacle and in overcoming the obstacle, how they created a space where they embodied freedom. The emphasis in the exercise is to make the students realize the empowering effect of naming when confronted with an obstacle. Naming helps students to expose the oppression that they have been subjected to and helps them articulate methodologies to overcome the oppression.



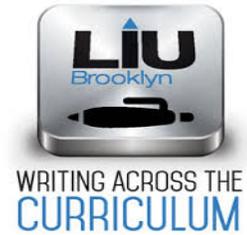
Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new meaning.

Reflection in this context is not to be understood as abstracting away from a given context, but rather an ability to communicate and exchange in dialogue different viewpoints. In that way, the students name what drives and motivates them. Encouraging students to explore ways in which the pain they feel when they discuss their oppression could help sensitize them to what oppression is going on in the lives of their students and in their institutions.

II . Connections between the private and the public

Contextualizing a classroom based on a culturally responsive pedagogy entails linking the language of the neighborhood, city and state with the languages of other traditions; as Giroux says a “postmodern curricula in which storytelling evokes memories shared and histories made through the affirmation of difference, struggle and hope. Suggesting that the curriculum be tailored to the voices that students already have so that they can extend those voices in other galaxies, is less familiar but equally important” (Giroux, 1988). Consequently if the function of democracy in education is to communicate human experiences in terms of freedom, association, and liberty, then students and teachers can use creative pedagogical strategies to educate one another. An example of such an exercise is the “Pedagogical Narrative.” I have my students write narratives based on their own autobiographical experiences. The aim of this exercise is to make students critically reflect on their individual pedagogies.

Their experiences narrated through their speaking and writing voice the fears, struggles, and biases students bring into their learning space and encourage them to continually deconstruct their own narratives, which are often at the center of their pedagogical philosophy. This exercise makes students aware that pedagogy



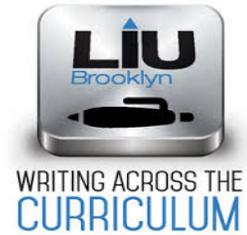
becomes not only a matter of teaching-it embodies their experiences. Students by engaging in this exercise are encouraged to continuously examine and re-examine, create and recreate themselves as teachers in relation to their students. Questioning their own subjective ideologies will make students aware also of their social and subjective positions in the power structure and further question the relationship between pedagogy and identity and the role of agency in the classroom. The goal in this exercise is that of transforming a student's consciousness to a level where they can become critical and reflective practitioners.

III. **Creating Decentered Spaces**

What spaces do our students occupy when they are present in their classrooms and what spaces do they occupy once they leave? All teachers can explore similar questions by engaging in activities that begin to deconstruct and inform public spaces in their own classrooms. An exercise I conduct in class with my students involves creating a three-part unit of a lesson, emphasis being on asking the students **why** they are implementing the methods they are advocating in their classrooms. This exercise called the “Epistemic Exercise,” asks students to engage in “deconstructing their epistemologies” by answering the following questions:

- 1) How do students construct knowledge? (Why they have the belief system they do.)
- 2) How is that belief system accessed?
- 3) What kind of students does this model produce?

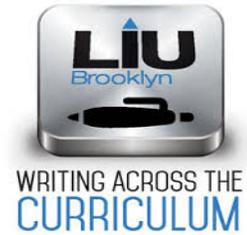
Because of the “Epistemic Exercise”, students understand why they are so resistant to thinking outside a structural paradigm. Furthermore, they comprehend



the fact that to be effective and successful educators they have to be engaged in continuously examining and re-examining their own belief system in keeping with the students they teach. As a result of this exercise, students begin to question power, examine socialized values, and understand the collaborative relationship between themselves and social change. The 'space' of a classroom becomes public when students learn from each other and respond as engaged participants as the learning environment values sharing, listening and reflection.

IV. Empowering Students and Creating a New Language

Teaching is both a public and a private activity, calling on both narrative and analytic ways of knowing. When students explore issues such as creating 'public spaces' through the construction of various perspectives and subjectivities, they begin to engage in rich classroom interactions where they express their feelings and ideas through oral and written mediums. Such engagements are grounded in encouraging students to come into consciousness of difference marked by various poetic and creative styles. My students are invited to work as a group on projects related where they are given a chance to research and inform their peers about an issue of concern to them. Students are encouraged to incorporate alternative and innovative means of conveying their ideas to the class. This work implies a commitment on the part of students to engage in alternate discourses and creative acts of reading writing and meaning, opening the classroom space to include multiple situationalities. By integrating theater, creative arts, music and literature in my courses my students are able to engage in the process of negotiation and translation around a 'third space,' in which diversity and difference offer new possibilities for producing meanings, representations and democratic roles. They come to understand that the times that they live in are complicated by sociological power structures. This suggested exercise motivates students to



embrace the challenge of self-actualization as it manifests itself in their individual pedagogies and learning. The overarching goal in these exercises is to further expand a student's pedagogical perspective consequently moving them to action by transforming their own classrooms.

Implementing Writing Intensive Courses in a Multicultural Context

Assignment #1

Goal: Writing as a spherical process.

Aim: Connection between the writing concept and the writing content involves:

- 1) Examining epistemological stereotypes.
- 2) Understanding the importance of cultural codes for comprehending a text.
- 3) Having the student see him/herself as part of the conversation.

Conclusion:

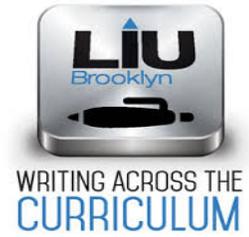
Looking at differences in writing and applying these differences effectively in adhering to writing assignments.

Strategies Used:

- 1) Autobiographical modes of writing.
- 2) Pedagogical narratives.
- 3) Journal Writing.

Assignment #2

Bridging the gap between exploratory and analytic writing.



Aim:

- 1) Identifying your audience.
- 2) Having your own voice.
- 3) Analytic synthesis.

Strategies Used:

- 1) Writing as an embodied activity.
- 2) Writings in the margins.
- 3) Rough draft strategy.
- 4) The academic vs. non-academic voice.