Teaching American History to Diverse Learners in Urban Settings

Dr. Bruce VanSledright

February 11, 2004

Description of Topic
Teaching American history to diverse students turns out to be more complex and problematic than it appears. From the research studies, we know that non-white students come to the classroom with different narratives of the American past than their white counterparts. Yet the history curriculum, textbooks, standardized tests, and what many teachers do center on a story that remains surprisingly Eurocentric. This can create powerful discontinuities in the classroom for non-white students, influencing their achievement in and attitudes about American history. Such discontinuities also influence the sort of relationships teachers can and do build with their students.

“I just see children, not color”: Exploring the Problems and Possibilities of Culturally Relevant Literacy Instruction for European American Elementary Teachers

Dr. Jennifer Turner

March 3, 2004

Description of Topic
Culturally relevant instruction has become a hot topic in literacy education because it has the potential to increase the literacy achievement and academic success of culturally diverse students. While there is growing consensus around what culturally relevant instruction is and what it looks like, we still do not know how to prepare teachers, particularly those from European American backgrounds, to transform their instruction in culturally appropriate ways. As a result, many European American teachers learn “on the job,” and encounter tremendous dilemmas and conflicts as they attempt to become more responsive to culturally diverse students. Drawing upon qualitative case study research conducted with two European American third grade teachers, this presentation will describe the problems and possibilities of crafting culturally relevant literacy instruction, and will discuss implications for teacher education.

Using Language Learning Styles and Strategies to Understand Diversity

Dr. Rebecca Oxford

March 17, 2004

Description of Topic
This presentation demonstrates ways to use information about our students’ learning styles and strategies in the classroom. Styles, such as visual, auditory, and hands-on, are broad approaches to learning. Strategies, such as planning ahead for a task or breaking down a word (or a math problem) into its components, are the specific thoughts or behaviors that learners intentionally use to improve their own learning. Identifying our students’ learning styles helps us know how address the great variety of students in our classes. Knowing students’ current learning strategies enables us to determine the new strategies they might need in order to do certain tasks in the classroom. In general, an understanding of styles and strategies promotes greater instructional quality by dealing effectively with student diversity.

Balancing Learning to Read and Reading for Learning: Using Information Books in Title I Primary Classrooms

Dr. Mariam Dreher, Linda Baker, Angela Katenkamp, Lisa Beall

April 21, 2004

Description of Topic
Although children in the primary grades overwhelmingly encounter stories as they are learning to read, there is good reason to believe that enhancing young children’s experience with information books will increase their reading achievement and motivation to read. We will overview our experiences at the end of Years 1 and 2 of a 3-year longitudinal study in which we are investigating this notion. Beginning in second grade in the 2001-2002 school year and continuing through fourth grade, students in our intervention condition are being given greater access to information books in their classroom libraries, in the books teachers choose during read-alouds, and in reading instruction. Using data we collected on children’s reading achievement and motivation, as well as examples from daily life observed in second- and third-grade classrooms, we will describe children’s literacy experiences and competencies in this condition in contrast to two comparison conditions.