

Guiding questions:

Can we, as educators, powerfully affect the quality of people's lives?

How might I spark meaningful conversations about race, identity, and social justice in my classroom using read-alouds as an entry point?

After researching teaching methods and theories throughout my Masters degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, I knew that sociocultural consciousness is a major orientation of a linguistically responsive teacher. The first aspect is “understanding that language, culture, and identity are deeply interconnected.” (Lucas & Villegas, 2011, p. 57). The other two of the three fundamental orientations of linguistically responsive teachers are the Value of Linguistic Diversity and an Inclination to Advocate for ELL Students (2011). Being well informed helps me advocate for my ELL students and provide them resources to have agency over their education. Through this program, I used everything I learned from my previous program to develop linguistically and culturally conscious materials to use in my classroom and to embody as an educator.

I would consider my drive to advocate for students as one of my “teaching superpowers.”

One of my strengths this year was including language scaffolds to support students from all linguistic backgrounds to engage fully. Two scaffolds I implemented in my classroom this year were an international book library and including wordless picture books. Students learn new words and about different cultures, but also can feel a sense of pride from reading a book in their own language. It is also helpful to have bilingual

books so students can read and share the texts side by side.

Using wordless picture books is a good tool to connect and assess EML students. They can interpret pictures almost instantly and then use their own knowledge to tell the story. When we use wordless picture books with students, we are able to communicate with them at many levels. We can talk about one character at a time or students can make connections to their own life in as many words based on their own linguistic level.

Another “teaching superpower” I fine-tuned was how to uphold a constructivist classroom culture. I paid close attention to reflecting deep knowledge of and respect for students’ identities, interests, and funds of knowledge. I learned this through my studies at the HTH GSE and in practice within my classroom. Windschitl writes, “Learning about a student’s background knowledge profoundly affects if they interpret subject matter and that students learn best when they solve authentic problems...” (“The Challenges of Sustaining a Constructivist Classroom Culture.”) Teachers must be “prepared for the variety of ways the principles can be explored.” This calls for intellectual vulnerability and creativity. I think it is so important that teachers be constantly challenged to reflect on their own ways of knowing, and this relates to the importance of amplifying our students’ voices and creating joyful and purposeful learning. It is very important to me that my students feel safe and that I identify behaviors starting from day one. Creating this kind of classroom makes me feel like it is the best way to help our children flourish and learn. I think a large element of creating joyful and purposeful learning is to teach students how to “frame and ask meaningful questions” and to do this we can facilitate comfortable learning environments through

communication; in turn, we create active independent and interdependent, or "self-sustaining," life long learners. "If you learn something deeply, the synaptic activity will create lasting connections in your brain, forming structured pathways, but if you visit an idea only once or in a superficial way, the synaptic connections can 'wash away' like pathways made in the sand" (Jo Boler, ch. 1).

While I was reading Student Autonomy, Compliance and Intrinsic Motivation, the part that stood out to me the most was the idea of how to have order in the community while still supporting student autonomy. Teaching children the skills they need to be good humans is so important to our work as teachers and learning how to change the structure from misbehavior-punishment to misbehavior-growth is part of our journey. Furthermore, as mentioned in Teaching Children to Care: Using Logical Consequences When Rules Are Broken, I feel like it is important to "stop" the behavior, then help the child reflect and grow from their actions. As a linguist, I know "the power of our words" and supporting this concept with positive discipline has been another strength of mine throughout the year. The process should be constructive and help the child grow their mindfulness and Social Thinking skills.

In linguistics, the Input Hypothesis reflects the $i+1$ model of learning. All learners must be challenged in order to learn. The book Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain identifies that we, as learners, must engage in a "...productive struggle that actually grows our brainpower (Means & Knapp, 1991; Ritchhart, 2002)." One area of growth for my practice is to continue to learn how to create extension options to offer levels of challenge within my lessons. I would like to explore how to offer multiple means of expression and how to create a challenge option, especially for kinder.

Additionally, I will continue to work on my facilitation skills for lesson debriefs, especially in “math talks.” In chapter 3 of Five Practices of Orchestrating Productive Mathematics Discussions, I connected with the idea that we can learn so much from our students. Putting that initial work into our lessons provides space to learn what our students need to tell us during the lesson. I look forward to making that space and helping students have a growth mindset in all subjects, including math.

I think that we, as educators at HTH, and our students of HTH schools have the privilege to be in a place where growing our minds doesn't just mean academically. We demand more. We, and schools like ours, are setting a distinctive standard for the kind of people we need in our communities. Students face the unique and unfair challenges of race, identity, and cultural erasure. As an antiracist educator, I am determined to spark meaningful conversations about race, identity, and social justice in my classroom.