

Examining Multiple Perspectives With Creative Think-Alouds

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Although multicultural children's literature has become very popular in the past few decades, exposing children to this literature without guidance can lead to little or none of the benefits it is intended to provide (Beach & Finders, 1999). Louie (2006) offered guidelines for helping teachers facilitate meaningful student engagement with multicultural texts. Her guidelines underscore the importance of encouraging children to see the world and problem solving through the multiple perspectives of diverse characters and historical figures.

In this article, we demonstrate the instructional creative potential of using the strategy of the think-aloud in the form of role-play to help students explore multiple perspectives and to underscore how such perspectives inform problem solving. This creative approach to the use of think-alouds focuses on exploring multiple perspectives to encourage children to see the world through the eyes of diverse fictional characters, or in the case of nonfiction texts, real-world historical or contemporary figures and groups. It also encourages children to verbalize their own thinking and to question and explore the thinking that represents the alternative perspectives under study. A brief discussion of underlying theories, guidelines for selecting books, and an example that juxtaposes multiple perspectives using these creative think-alouds are included.

Critical Literacy and Multiple Perspectives

Critical literacy rests on the belief that "language and reality are dynamically interconnected" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). Therefore, an important question to ask when creating literate environments for exploring multiple perspectives is, whose reality is represented? When analyzing a text from a critical literacy stance, one objective of teaching is to guide students to develop the ability to use their personal

experiences to help them evaluate what happens in a given text. However, when the experiences of the main character are very different from that of the reader, drawing upon personal experiences to understand the perspectives of others becomes challenging. Thus, questioning and engagement with alternative perspectives is important to help students see through the lens of others. Exploring diverse frames of reference that people from different backgrounds and cultures hold enables a dynamic process that may lead students to a deeper understanding of self and others (Banks, 2009).

Growing as Learners in the Real World

To grow in understanding, students need to consider the views of the people whose stories are told and explore those views in the context of the world as seen through the eyes of those people. For example, those who experience discrimination or slavery view the event differently than those who do not. By talking, writing, and responding to the perspectives of others, students expand their ability to reason and become active thinkers (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004) and grow in their ability to empathize with others who have different experiences (Greene, 2008).

Thus, engagement with multiple perspectives under the skilled guidance of a teacher is potentially transformative. According to Banks (2009), the transformative approach to exploring multiple perspectives expands learners' thinking abilities about how they relate to the world. The goal is to become multicultural and more comfortable with those who hold different views and who come from different backgrounds. Greene (2008) suggested that when young people view the world through multiple perspectives, they may be inspired to build bridges among themselves, and this may lead to harmonious relationships.

Goals other than this can be very important but are not necessarily transformative.

Encouraging Critical Thinking and Empathy

Engaging students in creative role-play allows students “to experience the feelings of those in other places and times and learn from them” (Carter, 1999, p. 87). The objective is to help students perceive events through the lens of others and relate those experiences to what they know. Blending role-play and think-alouds as suggested here combines the benefit of two techniques: (1) the technique of role-play that Carter (1999) holds leads to empathic growth, and (2) the benefit of think-alouds that Wilhelm (1997) holds improves students’ metacognitive thinking and critical understandings of texts.

Guidelines for Exploring Multiple Perspectives Through Creative Think-Alouds

Creative think-alouds will have a greater impact on student learning if teachers follow a few guidelines. Choosing the right books, raising core questions, and juxtaposing diverse points-of-view that represent multiple perspectives are just a few ways to support new learning with creative think-alouds. The following discussion offers a few guidelines for making the creative think-aloud strategy described in this article a powerful experience.

Find a children’s book with a theme likely to guide children to develop multiple perspectives. For our example, we chose the book *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni (2005), a Caldecott Honor book and winner of the Coretta Scott King Award. Giovanni’s exceptional retelling of the Rosa Parks story and how her actions changed the course of history in the United States offers rich opportunities to explore various perspectives and to view Rosa Parks’s problem-solving decision on the bus in a fresh way. In *Soul of a Citizen: Living With Conviction in a Cynical Time*, Loeb (1999) noted that most citizens do not know that Rosa Parks drew her strength, in part, from her experiences with the NAACP and her summer stay at the Highlander School in Tennessee where she studied nonviolent protest. In her book, Giovanni (2005) included mul-

iple viewpoints from others who played important roles in these organizations.

Check books under consideration for authenticity. Some children’s books describe cultural minority groups through stereotypes (Kalisa, 1990; Nilsson, 2005; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997). Many of these books were published in years past, but some are still published today. It can be beneficial for students to explore biased perspectives, but only if these are compared with those of others to ensure a balanced view. In selecting authentic books for developing multiple perspectives or creating text sets, it is crucial that the texts chosen offer insiders’ perspectives. An excellent source for helping educators evaluate whether children’s books are stereotypical is *10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children’s Books for Racism and Sexism*. Adapted from original literature published by the Council on Interracial Books for Children, this guide is available at www.sandi.net/depts/instructional_materials/10ways.pdf.

An additional resource, *Multicultural Children’s Literature: Creating and Applying an Evaluation Tool in Response to the Needs of Urban Educators*, provides an annotated list of 35 multicultural children’s books and a comprehensive discussion designed to help teachers evaluate and choose quality books. This resource, published by New Horizons for Learning, is available at www.newhorizons.org/strategies/multicultural/higgins.htm.

Remember: The purpose is to guide students, not to indoctrinate. Engage in creative think-alouds to clarify and reveal the perspectives presented in the text or text sets. This means to focus on implicit and explicit understandings of the character or the historical figure based on explicit and implicit comprehension of the text or text set. In other words, avoid putting personal biases into the think-alouds. Authors’ biases may be explored through the lens of the character who questions the text, but the teacher’s voice and biases should not be expressed in these role-plays because the teacher is pretending to be the character and is thinking aloud from the perspective of the character, not the self.

Use juxtaposition to explore multiple perspectives. In our example, the teacher assumes the role of Rosa Parks first. Then the teacher assumes the role of James Blake, the bus driver who called the police to arrest Rosa Parks.

Pose questions and explore them from the different viewpoints of the characters or the historical figures or

Figure 1
Example Juxtaposing Multiple Perspectives Using Creative Think-Alouds

| Rosa Parks: The Citizen Leader | James Blake: The Bus Driver |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Who Am I?</p> <p>My name is Rosa Parks. Some people call me “the mother of the Civil Rights movement.”</p> <p>The author of the book, <i>Giovanni</i>, describes me as <i>committed to getting the job done</i>. As a seamstress I skipped lunch just to finish my work on time. Giovanni also describes me as <i>focused</i>. She says I used <i>concentration</i> to help me become the best seamstress possible.</p> <p>Giovanni also describes me as a person of <i>quiet strength</i>.</p> <p>What does quiet strength mean to you?</p> <p>To me it means I found the courage and inner strength to remain calm and seated on the bus and that I did not let Mr. Blake frighten me into giving up my seat.</p> <p>What you may not know is that I had helpful people in my life who modeled quiet strength.</p> <p>Yes, I showed personal strength, but I did not act alone.</p> <p>I know some people on the bus the day I was arrested called me a troublemaker, but from my point of view, the people who judged me that way did not know me very well.</p> <p>What do you think?</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Who Am I?</p> <p>My name is James Blake. I am known by most people as the bus driver who called the police on Rosa Parks and had her arrested. Giovanni does not go into much detail in describing who I was as a person. My actions in <i>Giovanni</i>’s book show me to be strict with the rules on my bus and a dutiful segregationist. Segregationists believe in “separate but equal” facilities based on race, such as separate schools, water fountains, and bathrooms for whites and blacks, like what is described in your social studies book.</p> <p>Giovanni does not quote me as having said this, but I once told the press, “I wasn’t trying to do anything to that Parks woman except do my job. She was in violation of the city codes, so what was I supposed to do?”</p> <p>I guess that is a part of who I am, a person who does his job according to the code of law. Since that day, the law has changed, but on that day I was doing my job.</p> <p>To me that makes what I did right.</p> <p>What do you think?</p> <p>Giovanni says I raised my voice or <i>bellowed</i>. Is that something people do when they are frustrated?</p> <p>Was Rosa Parks frustrated too?</p> <p>I wonder because she did not raise her voice.</p> <p>Why is that?</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">What Are My Experiences?</p> <p>I was born in Alabama and grew up on a farm just outside of Montgomery. My church and my academic and vocational schooling were part of my life experiences, so was <i>segregation</i>. As a child I grew up under Jim Crow laws where white people were segregated or separated from black people.</p> <p>School buses took white students to school while black students walked. Like it says in your social studies textbook, the schools we attended were called <i>separate but equal</i>. But to me, they were separate but not equal! We did not have the same books, nor did we receive the same education as the white students.</p> <p>It was part of the life I knew, and what I knew and experienced was different from the life the white students knew.</p> <p>Sometimes it was scary, like the times I saw my grandfather guard the door with a shotgun whenever the KKK were outside.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">What Are My Experiences?</p> <p>I grew up on the other side of the Jim Crow laws that Rosa speaks about and that the author of your textbook discusses. I did not experience having to go to the back of the bus to sit or having to give up my seat for another because of the color of my skin. I can only speak from the point of view of the one who enforced the code of law.</p> <p>Do you think this makes a difference in how I viewed the laws on the day I called the police?</p> <p>Do you think my experiences growing up in the deep South as a segregationist influenced the choice I made that day and how I reacted to Rosa Parks?</p> <p>As I said my job was to enforce seating policies on the bus. One previous experience I had with Rosa Parks ended up with me throwing her off the bus. She had to walk miles to get home.</p> <p>She writes about that incident in her autobiography.</p> |

(continued)

TEACHING TIPS

Figure 1 (continued)
Example Juxtaposing Multiple Perspectives Using Creative Think-Alouds

| Rosa Parks: The Citizen Leader | James Blake: The Bus Driver |
|---|---|
| How Did I Choose to Solve the Problem? | How Did I Choose to Solve the Problem? |
| In the book, Giovanni says I drew on the strength of many people when I refused to stand up and give up my seat. | The way I see it I had no choice. I followed what was the custom for solving such problems. I even tried to warn Rosa Parks. Giovanni points out that I warned Rosa and said: "You better make it easy on yourself!" |
| She means I had the help of other people to make me strong that day. My grandfather, my grandmother, my mother, and others I knew in organizations like the NAACP, where I was a secretary, helped me learn the value of working to change unjust laws. | She chose to make it hard. Therefore, it is her fault that she was arrested. |
| At the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, I studied nonviolent protest. This is where I learned to act bravely and to try to solve problems through <i>quiet resistance</i> . | Isn't it? |
| Do you know what <i>nonviolent protest</i> means? | I just accepted what was the custom and did my duty. The bus was full. Rosa Parks should have moved back when I said, "Give me those seats." She wouldn't move back though. She did not listen, so I called the police. |
| Do you think quiet strength or resistance helped me solve my problem? | The way I chose to solve this problem was to warn Rosa Parks, call the police, and go down and sign a warrant for her arrest. |
| Have you ever used <i>quiet strength</i> to solve a problem? | What do you think of my way of solving the problem? |

groups on the same event. Our example focuses on three core questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What are my experiences in life?
3. How did I choose to solve the problem in the story?

Create text sets to explore different viewpoints. Supplementary texts may be used to inform creative think-alouds. The teacher can mediate during the think-aloud across the different texts, both narrative and expository, through the eyes of the character or historical figure. The primary focus of our example presented in Figure 1 is the anchor text, *Rosa* by Giovanni (2005), with a few intertextual connections, one to a newspaper article and a couple of references to a social studies textbook used in the classroom.

Final Thoughts

We believe that exposing children to multicultural literature is important, but exposure without teacher guidance is not likely to lead to a deeper

understanding of the world and the people in it. It is not easy to really walk in the shoes of others. Students need repeated practice over time exploring multiple perspectives with varied and multiple texts, both fiction and nonfiction. We described the strategy of the think-aloud in the form of role-play as one way to help students explore multiple perspectives.

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