Praxis Paper:

Chinese Zodiac- “The Great Animal Race”

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Our group multiliteracies project incorporates the use of a bilingual text (English and Mandarin) titled “The Great Animal Race” into a lesson plan that teaches students about the Chinese Zodiac. The lesson plan is aimed to teach social studies at the second-grade level. For students in the classroom who are learning English as a second language, “most reading and writing skills learned in the native language will transfer to a second language and therefore need not be redeveloped in English. Likewise, many students have experiences with environmental print in both the native language and English” (Herrera & Murray, 2016, p.71). By drawing on students’ literacy-related experiences within their native language, these skills can be applied with developing English language skills.

This lesson plan connects theory to practice by both connecting students to the cultural material, thus validating their cultural background and experiences, and introducing other students to new cultural practices and customs. Providing opportunities for students to make these connections to the material helps classrooms “engage with students’ own experiences and discourses, which are increasingly defined by cultural and subcultural diversity and the different language backgrounds and practices that come with this diversity” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 36). The lesson plan includes students re-enacting aspects of the text to increase understanding. By doing this, they are able to make more personal connections and associate their understanding of the text with their experiences.

The use of a bilingual text in classrooms lessons across any subject-area can be beneficial to student language learning as they “validate students’ home languages and allow them to use their L1 knowledge and understanding of the texts. Valuing students’ native language supports them in developing positive attitudes towards schooling and learning (Herrell & Jordan, 2020, p. 114). By recognizing their native language in a text, then having the opportunity to apply this familiarity when re-reading the text in English, students are able to grasp a better understanding of the story plot, characters, and overall themes presented. The bilingual text created by our group gives students an insight into Chinese culture, the different animals within the Chinese Zodiac, and the structure and written format of the Mandarin language. Also, if students bring texts home to read in their native language, parents may be encouraged to read the book with their children and discuss the content (Herrell & Jordan, 2020), thus providing opportunities for more parental engagement with schooling.

Our lesson plan provides students with a multimodal experience in that they read the bilingual text provided and re-enact aspects of the story which can be through different methods that can include physical movement or writing and illustrating. Students can gain further knowledge into the different animals within the Chinese Zodiac and discover the history and meanings associated with each one. This lesson allows students of Chinese background to associate their learning with their cultural experiences and allow other students to gain insight into other cultures which can contribute to developing a more diverse learning environment.

References

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