

April 2019

No More Culturally Irrelevant Teaching

Angela Harris
Dove Academy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

Recommended Citation

Harris, Angela (2019) "No More Culturally Irrelevant Teaching," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 51: Iss. 3, Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol51/iss3/13>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

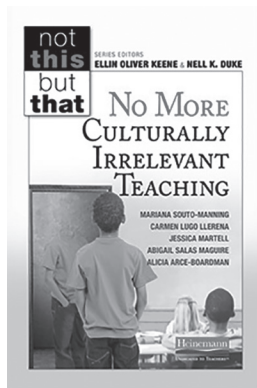
No More Culturally Irrelevant Teaching

by Angela Harris

Oliver Keene, E., & Duke, N. K. (Eds.). (2018). *No more culturally irrelevant teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN 978-0325089799

In *No More Culturally Irrelevant Teaching*, we are introduced to educators who share their experiences and commitment to ensuring that all students' identities are recognized and valued in the classroom. The authors weave together classroom experiences, research, strategies, and practices for culturally relevant teaching that would be beneficial to both novice and seasoned teachers. The book is divided into three sections: sections one and three are written by classroom teachers Lugo Llerena, Martell, Salas Maguire, and Arce-Boardman, who provide readers with classroom expertise and tools to use in a culturally-inclusive classroom. Section two is written by Souto-Manning and focuses on the research aspect of culturally relevant teaching.

In section one, entitled "Not This," the authors present two classroom vignettes—Ms. Smith's kindergarten classroom learning about kings and queens via read alouds and Ms. Garza's second-grade classroom being introduced to picture books depicting Latinx characters to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month. On the surface, the materials and lessons may seem harmless; however, each vignette is followed by a "What's the Problem?" section that highlights the subtle and overt ways that these lessons cause classrooms to be culturally irrelevant. Both lessons were met with less-than-enthusiastic students who were not engaged in what was being presented. In both classes, the students "could not see themselves, their communities, or their cultural practices in the stories being read" (Lugo Llerena, Martell, Salas Maguire, & Arce-Boardman, 2018, p. 8). The authors inform readers that, "curriculum and teaching are always cultural, but they are not always culturally relevant or responsive" (Souto-Manning, 2018, p. 18).



Angela Harris

In section two, Souto-Manning discusses the "mismatch of culture and curriculum" (2018, p. 17). The National Center for Education Statistics (2014) reported that students of color represent approximately 50 percent of school populations in the United States; however, the curriculum rarely reflects this reality (as cited in Souto-Manning, 2018). With this realization, Gay (2010) identifies six key practices of culturally responsive teaching (as cited in Souto-Manning, 2018, p. 29):

- having high expectations for all students
- engaging students' cultural knowledges, experiences, practices, and perspectives
- bridging gaps between home and school practices
- seeking to educate the whole child
- identifying and leveraging students' strengths to transform education
- critically questioning normative schooling practices, content, and assessments

Section three provides educators with tools and strategies for culturally relevant teaching. These involve actions as straightforward as learning to pronounce students' names. "When teachers mispronounce students' names, they may foster the notion that students' cultures and identities are not valued, and the students are often left feeling ridiculous and embarrassed, believing their names are troublesome and wishing they were different" (Lugo Llerena et al., 2018, p. 55). Other

worthwhile strategies that are introduced include creating an artifact museum to explore culture and using videos to develop cross-cultural understandings.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is seeking to learn more about culturally relevant teaching. This book is a powerful, yet easy-to-read text that offers practical strategies and resources to implement in the classroom.

Author Biography

Angela Harris is a speech language pathologist at Dove Academy in Detroit, Michigan. She is currently a doctoral student in the Reading, Language, and Literature program at Wayne State University. She can be reached at dx1992@wayne.edu.

