

Provoking Change: A Case of John Henry Changing the World

The demographics in classrooms are shifting with an influx of more and more culturally and linguistically diverse students. With this shift of demographics, teachers must consider the implications of their practices more than they ever did before. A trend towards assets-based pedagogies beginning in the 20th century has brought us to a theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy, articulated by Django Paris and Samy Alim (2014) as an extension of Gloria Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster--to sustain" students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and abilities (Paris, 2012, p. 93). This session explores the enactment of this culturally sustaining writing pedagogy heavily based on a piece of children's literature serving as mentor text, with a particular emphasis on the activism this text invokes and sustenance/empowerment students of color gained. In this qualitative case study, I explored a third grade teacher's literacy unit leveraging the character John Henry as a social activist in urban communities . I specifically examined the ways in which student envision justice through their alternative ending stories using John Henry as a changemaker solving community problems that impact them. This presentation makes suggestions about ways children's literature mentor text serve as springboards to activism, windows into reimagining the world and means sustain students of color in classroom spaces.