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Claire Oxford Reflection 1

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Professor Román-Odio

SPAN 380 — Cultural Productions of the Borderlands

12 October 2017

Reflection

While volunteering at Columbia Elementary with our group of six fifth graders, my co-teacher Eric and I have used several teaching strategies to connect themes from the stories and poetry we've been reading to the students' own lives. Our main teaching objectives have been to introduce themes of borders, exclusion, and multiple identities through fiction that is accessible to the students at their reading level, to improve their reading comprehension and vocabulary, and to foster a welcoming learning environment. To try and meet these goals, we've tried to find a good balance between more straightforward activities, like reading the stories or poems out loud and discussing them, with creative activities, like drawing out a favorite scene from a story or a time they felt like one of the characters. For instance, making time for one drawing activity that takes up about 15 minutes has been consistently engaging, which is important especially for students like Felicity or Jordan who are more reserved and don't tend to raise their hands as often as the other children. Even though it can be a bit challenging to involve each of the six students in discussion the same amount, the routine we've established — with a mix of activities — in the first three lessons has helped to keep the students engaged with the material.

When I reflect on how reading and discussion works compared to our creative activities, there are some important differences and similarities. For instance, during discussion sometimes the participation isn't spread evenly; Grayson raises his hand eagerly for almost every question we ask (even when he may not know the answer) while Felicity has only raised her hand to

answer a question once or twice during all three lessons. Based on the cultural quilt and some of this comments from class, Grayson seems to have had a challenging home situation and I think he enjoys and needs positive attention in the classroom. Some of the other students thrive during discussion and seem to enjoy talking about the stories or poems; Cameron is especially good at recognizing patterns between the texts and drawing out important themes or messages that the narratives share, but Hayley and Jordan can be more reserved and I tend to ask them questions directly. Tyler is an interesting student during discussion activities, because he is clearly at a significantly higher reading and writing level than the other students and always knows the answer when I directly ask him, but he rarely raises his hand to volunteer an answer. Generally speaking though, some discussion questions also get more hands up, and they tend to be personal questions like: have you ever moved? Finally, creative activities like drawing out a time you felt like a main character, are some of the most engaging for all of the students. It seems like then the students actually relate how these narratives of borders and multiple identities might relate to their lives and experiences, and since we go around and all share our drawings every student has the opportunity to speak even if it is out of their comfort zone.

By comparing my in-class observations and analysis with the cultural quilt, I learned more about the students than what comes through during class. While some of the students have shared personal stories about difficult personal subjects during some of our activities, the cultural quilts reinforced the idea to me that it can be a challenge to really understand what is happening in the students' personal lives and minds. I hope to encourage an open environment during class, however, where they can continue to share at their own pace with me and Eric. Furthermore, this experience has reminded me of the significance of narrative, especially when you're in a formative time of your life, and can recognize a character who has felt like you.