

13. CANONICAL TEXTS AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE WITH ENGLISH LEARNERS

While our professional organizations have charted new policies and practices responsive to the changing dynamics of the 21st century, some of the texts valued by English teachers have remained stable and durable, reflecting what is commonly referred to as the literary canon of British and American literatures. While no longer the exclusive province of dead white males, canonical texts have stood the test of time and are frequently anthologized in literature textbooks and curriculum (Applebee, 1993). Unfortunately, too often high school English teachers are mandated to teach reified canonical texts that often represent what most teens might perceive to be a distant past, remote and ostensibly disconnected from youth culture, digital media, and contemporary American life. For teachers in this situation, the question then becomes this: How might English teachers engage 21st century multilingual students in exploring ostensibly ancient and obscure texts and cultures?

If engaging students with canonical texts is a challenge for most English teachers of native speakers of English, then those who teach non-native speakers of English, such as co-author and veteran teacher Erin, face additional challenges. In this chapter, we argue that Erin was successful in engaging her English learners by mobilizing three key 21st century concepts: cosmopolitan literacies, empathetic fusion, and epistemic privilege. In addition, we argue that the corollary concepts of transnationalism and translanguaging (Evans & Hornberger, 2005) were necessary, not only for understanding the dynamics of the multilingual classroom, but also for creating community in the classroom. In the next section, we explore the theoretical underpinnings of Erin's pedagogy before turning to her enactment with two canonical texts, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597/2009) and Dickens' *Great Expectations* (2009). Additionally, we explain these terms, and then we will show how Erin enacted these in her classroom.

CULTIVATING LOCAL AND GLOBAL CARE WITH COSMOPOLITAN LITERACIES

Because this is a chapter about teaching English learners, concepts of transnationalism and translanguaging are salient to understanding Erin's context. Transnationalism refers to the flow of information and bodies across permeable borders of language and culture. Translingual practices consist of learners using all of their language resources to produce knowledge (Canagarajah, 2013; Skerrett, 2015). Encouraging

translingual practices and transnational perspectives, Erin fosters cosmopolitan literacies, that is, the linguistic and cultural practices demonstrating local and global cultural sensitivities to virtual and actual others, situated within larger systems of power, history, and economics (Hawkins, 2014; Bean & Drunkenly-Bean, 2015). Erin's students produce knowledge as they create and interpret texts (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2014), responding to local and global inequities in virtual and actual worlds (Hawkins, 2014; Vasudevan, 2014).

Part of the mission of cosmopolitanism is to widen students' understandings of the world and to nurture a deep and abiding responsiveness to others' cultural norms and values, demonstrating a respect born of cultural sensitivity, what Silverman refers to as "proper distance" (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2014, p. 15). As a corollary, Erin hoped to ignite "empathetic fusion" (Sepulveda, 2011, p. 559) that is, a deep sense of relating to a person as a whole human being without judgment (Sepulveda, 2011). Empathetic fusion fosters a form of unconditional acceptance and awareness, a form of solidarity with another. Erin hoped that her students would not only experience empathetic fusion in the classroom space but that this could transcend the classroom and lead students to become more empathetic overall, materializing in social action.

Erin placed a premium on utilizing students' first-hand knowledge of inequities, their vantage points as marginalized people whose lived experiences have taught them first-hand about oppression, power, and social justice struggles. Moya and Hames-Garcia (2000) refer to that experiential wisdom of those in struggle as their *epistemic privilege*. Erin's students possessed rich and varied backgrounds as English learners, transnationals, refugees, and/or immigrants, and she wanted them to bring that knowledge to bear on issues of social justice. Hansen (2010, p. 20) suggests the affordances of Erin's conceptual framework:

In concrete terms, students deserve the opportunity to study local traditions and inheritances, both for their own sake and as a platform to engage larger world horizons of experience, knowledge, and point of view. They also deserve like opportunities to study new traditions and inheritances, both for their own educational sake and as a platform to more fully grasp the beauties, the distinctiveness, and the limitations in local horizons.

Hansen's words encapsulate the mission of Erin's pedagogy, that is, to widen the lens on the local and the global, the self and those marked as other. Erin used the notion of empathetic fusion to foster sensitivity to textual, virtual and actual others; she also tapped into the epistemic privilege of students. The next sections demonstrate how Erin turned these theoretical principles into pedagogical practice in her English as a new language class.

ADAPTING CANONICAL TEXTS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

While mainstream English classes in Erin's school read the standard versions of texts, English learners relied on graphic novels traversing various lexile levels,