New Canons, New Problems: The Challenge of

Promoting a Sense of Kinship among Students of Diversity

Peter Smagorinsky

University of Oklahoma

College of Education

820 Van Vleet Oval

Norman, OK 73019-0260

(h)405-364-1171

(w)405-325-3533

fax:405-325-1498

E-mail: smagor@aardvark.ucs.uoknor.edu

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Running Head: New Canons, New Problems

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In his influential monograph on curriculum development, Ralph Tyler (1949) poses four fundamental questions that he argues are central to developing curriculum and instruction (p.1):

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Essentially, he suggests that a school needs to articulate an overall philosophy about the purpose of education, which in turn will help identify a set of goals or objectives for students to achieve. These broader issues will suggest appropriate materials and learning activities for students to experience, and also the organizing principles behind their sorting and sequencing over the course of schooling. The assessment of student achievement should be in line with the philosophy that has generated the curriculum. All of this sounds very simple and sensible. Yet implementing it has proven to be very difficult for schools from kindergarten to college.

One reason that Tyler's elegant model has been difficult to achieve is that people have a hard time agreeing on what the purpose of schooling ought to be. And as our nation's campuses become increasingly diverse through open admissions policies, minority incentive programs, the influx of foreign students, and other means, the goals of schooling become more difficult to agree upon. "Celebrating diversity" has become a slogan on many campuses, at least among students of diversity and many among the professoriate; yet the celebration of diversity often results in a Balkanization of interests, a loss of a sense of identity with good old State U., and a focus instead on the interests of different campus sub-groups. Such developments are quite distressing for members of the campus community who, with the best of intentions, want to promote harmony and common understanding throughout the university yet often see their efforts to enlighten students about one another's cultures and needs result in aggravated tensions between gays and straights, men and women, blacks and white, natives and foreigners, and other groups.

Universities are thus left with a paradox. On the one hand we are in an era of increasing pluralism with its potential for both enriching campus life with multiple perspectives and fragmenting students and faculty into competing sub-groups. At the same time, universities have a heritage of promoting a sense of citizenship among their students. Wentzel (1991) has found that "the development of social responsibility in the form of citizenship skills and moral character is often considered to be a primary function of schooling" with "the instructional process directly [promoting] the development of social responsibility" (p.1). Even in the campus protests of the 1960's and 1970's, the students believed they were acting out of a sense of citizenship; the emphasis on civil rights, women's rights, ending the Viet Nam war, and other rights issues were led by groups such as the "Students for a Democratic Society," a name that suggests reform rather than overthrow of the existing system.

If a philosophical tenet is to provide coherent direction to an educational program, then it requires some articulation. Clarifying the meaning of terms such as "citizenship" and "social responsibility" becomes critical when they have been claimed as a basis for action by such diverse Americans as Oliver North and 2 Live Crew. Sandra Stotsky (1989), rooted in the New England ideal of an active citizenry in pursuit of a national purpose, has sought to develop a working definition of what she calls a "civic identity" in order to address the dilemma we face as a democracy composed of countless sub-groups each competing for political power. A civic identity, she says, is

> the psychological foundation for participation in public life as a "citizen," as someone with a sense of the common good as well as a sense of one's own interests or a particular group's interests. Civic identity includes more than a sense of belonging to a particular political entity that can be defined by specific political principles and processes. It is also a sense of kinship with all those who live within the boundaries of that political entity, regardless of economic, intellectual, ethnic, or religious differences. Civic identity transcends individual

or group differences, permitting individuals or groups of individuals to consider the well-being of the whole political community.

She stresses that a civic identity involves "a feeling of kinship [which] undergirds a sense of responsibility for all those who share one's civic communities," so that "The common good can emerge only when all participants in a political conflict believe that they share some essential values despite individual or group interests" (1991, p.24).

With Stotsky's definition in mind, let us assume that promoting a civic identity among students is an important objective of schooling. Any one who has followed the news knows that very few campuses across the country have been successful in establishing a civic identity within a pluralistic student body. Among the most notorious cases of student conflict--primarily in the form of race-related hostilities--have been incidents at some of the nation's most elite universities. The solutions--such as requiring students to take courses in multicultural education, imposing severe penalties against "hate speech," and requiring students to read texts by women and minority writers--have often created as many problems as they have solved. Educators are then left with a perplexing question: If we are to celebrate cultural and ethnic diversity, can we simultaneously promote a civic identity? We tend to believe that we can, but doing so is highly problematic and must grow from principled decisions based on carefully considered criteria. English departments have often been at the center of controversies in their attempts to provide enlightenment to students regarding issues of diversity through curriculum change and required readings. Many such efforts have been perceived as efforts at political indoctrination rather than the provision of a liberal arts education. In order to avoid dichotomous perceptions such as these and make principled decisions, English departments might consider a set of questions that would help justify their curricular decisions. Such questios might include:

1. In a society composed of countless sub-groups with distinct histories and identities, how can we include the voices and experiences of all or most of our various sub-cultures? If we strive for multicultural inclusion, which of the myriad groups should we single out for our students to be exposed to? Should our selection criteria be driven by race, religion, ethnicity,

continent of origin, region within the United States, political values, or some other source of determination? If we choose according to one of these criteria, on what basis do we then choose the voices from within each sub-group?

2. Should the potential offensiveness of a work be a consideration in our selection process? Is the profane and racially inflammatory language of James Baldwin' Blues for Mister Charlie a sufficient reason not to use it in the classroom? Is the persistent use of the word "nigger" and the overwhelmingly bigoted views of the characters in Huckleberry Finn good reason for our students not to read it?

3. Should the particular moral, social, or political values imparted through a text be a consideration in our selection process? For example, should the anti-business values of Charles Dickens' Hard Times or Frank Capra's It's a Wonderful Life work against their selection? Should we--can we--seek to teach texts in a "values-neutral" way in the classroom and thus avoid the issue? Should the question of values be of greater or lesser importance than the literary merit of the works?

4. Should we seek to achieve a balance of positive and negative images in the depiction of various subgroups and genders? If we have our students read Richard Wright's Native Son, for instance, which depicts the discrimination against urban blacks in the 1930's, should we attempt to balance this grim portrayal with an uplifting story of black accomplishment such as Pauli Murray's family history, Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family?

5. Should we choose texts that are often misunderstood due to the author's use of sophisticated literary techniques, such as ironic distance between the author's views and those of the speaker as found in Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?

6. Can we solve any and all of these problems by providing an appropriate instructional context for the literature we use in our classroom? In other words, can we teach any problematic text in such a way that it can be a potentially valuable experience for any student? Or are some texts prohibitively problematic, particularly in certain communities? We might assume that John Updike's Rabbit Redux, with its profanity, sex, drugs, violence and so on would create a stir in

many conservative Christian universities. But might books such as Little Women also cause a commotion on campuses with a great sensitivity to women's issues?

The six sets of questions raised here are not meant to be comprehensive, but to serve to introduce ethical problems that face teachers in the selection of literature and the experiences students have with it. The questions point to both the content and process of instruction: Which texts should we assign students to read? Does the manner in which we teach them have an effect on their impact on students? At this point I would like to take several texts frequently found in curricula and discuss problems they present in light of the goal of a civic education. The discussion will center on three types of texts that raise troublesome issues for teachers: ironic texts about social issues, "representative" texts that are intended to depict the experiences of a particular group of people, and didactic texts taught to challenge beliefs.

Ironic Texts about Social Issues

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is one of the most celebrated, widely-read, and frequently protested books in the history of American letters. It has also been among the most frequently read books in American universities. Those who believe that Huck Finn is a work of great literary merit have interpreted the text through a recognition of Twain's use of dramatic irony; that is, the distinction he has created between his own views and those of the speaker, Huck. Let us look at Huck's narration in a passage from Chapter 31, "You Can't Pray A Lie":

> Once I said to myself it would be a thousand times better for Jim to be a slave at home where his family was as long as he'd got to be a slave, and so I'd better write a letter to Tom Sawyer and tell him to tell Miss Watson where he was. But I soon give up that notion for two things: she'd be mad and disgusted at his rascality and ungratefulness for leaving her, and so she'd sell him straight down the river again; and if she didn't everybody naturally despises an ungrateful nigger, and they'd make Jim feel it all the time, and so he'd feel ornery and disgraced. And then think of me! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again

> I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a low-down thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and ain't a-going to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks I was so scared. Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame, but something inside of me kept saying, "There was the Sunday school, you could 'a' gone to it; and if you'd 'a' done it they'd 'a' learnt you there that people that acts as I'd been acting about the nigger goes to everlasting fire.

As a high school English teacher, I assigned Huck Finn to my American Literature students for many years. Yet the responses of my black students, who composed about 30% of my classes, made me increasingly uneasy about the role of the book in the civic education of my students. In the paragraph just cited the word "nigger" appears four times, and it recurs routinely throughout the book. The white characters repeatedly assert and assume that Negroes are "property" for them to use as they please, and that God supports their subjugation. A detached reader can make the intellectual argument that Twain is demonstrating that these beliefs are wrong; that the white characters who have bone-deep beliefs about the subhumanity of blacks have themselves been drawn by Twain to exhibit hypocrisy, avarice, and other negative traits, while Jim in contrast is noble, honest, and deeply sympathetic.

The question I would pose regarding the use of this text, and others like it, is: To what extent does a work of literature--regardless of its apparent literary merit--contribute to a sense of civic identity when the speaker condones the degradation of characters based on race or ethnicity? In works that appear to employ irony in such a way that the interactions of characters work against the construction of a sense of kinship among readers, how do we help students make an intellectual judgment apart from their emotional response to the story? We see an interesting modern reversal of this problem in the film Do the Right Thing, written, produced, and directed by Spike Lee, and also starring Lee in the role of a black employee who starts a riot against his generally sympathetic white employer. Does Spike Lee, in occupying all of the central roles in the creation and production of the film and then himself playing the role of lead rioter, advocate the behavior of his character? Is he endorsing this as the "right thing" to do?

Intellectually, we might argue that Lee is being ironic and cautioning against the actions of his protagonist. Similarly, we can argue that Mark Twain is setting up his characters to reveal the folly of a racist society. Teachers who use these texts with students who cannot create intellectual distance from stories are faced with difficult questions. In that we must accept the works as ironic in order to interpret them as socially constructive, on what grounds do we select them for students to read? Research by Smith (1991) has suggested that novice readers take a "submissive" stance in response to a text; that is, they accept the authority of the narrator without question. Students he studied "did not make inferences and ... focused only on literal interpretation. They never questioned the source from which they received the information in a story, and they could not control the associations engendered by texts" (p.7). Many readers--both young students and adults--do not respond to Huckleberry Finn and Do the Right Thing as ironic, but accept the surface meaning instead and respond emotionally rather than intellectually. Given this generally "submissive" approach to texts in general-- one that Smith argues requires extensive instruction in interpretive strategies to overcome--and given the strong emotional response many readers have to the language of certain texts, on what grounds do we justify teaching ironic literature in which the narrator condones socially destructive behavior?

If one can justify the selection of such texts, how then do we use them in the classroom, particularly with students who feel personally degraded or threatened by them? Is an intellectual interpretation sufficient? Ironic literature is consistently difficult for readers to interpret, particularly when the irony requires high levels of inference. What challenges do these texts present in the classroom if our goal is to promote social cohesion and mutual understanding in a pluralistic, democratic society?

Texts Selected to "Represent" a Particular Group of People

A second type of text that presents problems for teachers concerned with a civic education is one that is chosen to "represent" a particular group of people. Many curricula are now being rewritten to reflect concerns for global consciousness, racial and ethnic diversity, gender issues and other attempts to depart from reading lists heretofore restricted to works written by dead white American and British males. One problem with diversifying reading lists is that the world is indeed a diverse place. While we have relatively few genders to complicate the selection of materials, we have many, many countries, most of which are composed of members of widely varying cultures, religions, ethnicities, and so on, all of which may have had different characteristics at different points in history. Changing curricula to reflect global consciousness then becomes a prohibitively diffuse task, forcing us to select those works that will constitute our new culturally diverse curriculum. And, as Moffett (1989) has pointed out, when we make these selections we do so with a bias that undoubtedly affects our students. Which countries should our anthologies represent? In choosing writers to represent Africa, should they be from Madagascar, Ivory Coast, Egypt, South Africa, or someplace else? And after we have made these decisions, we are faced with the problem of diversity within nations. Writers are often identified as representing one country or another, even such extraordinarily diverse nations as India, China, Brazil, and others. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union illustrate the problems we create when we attempt to represent authors by nationality, which in many parts of the world is an ephemeral means of identification.

On a more local level we have an attempt to represent the various peoples of the United States through the inclusion of multicultural voices in our new curricula. Once again we have the same problem of selection: Which writers represent which groups of people? Should we attempt to represent all racial and ethnic groups who occupy our nation? Which voices represent "Latinos," who originate from such distinct nations as Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Panama, Venezuela, and many others? The group known as "Native Americans" is considerably more diverse, with the state of Oklahoma alone including close to seventy different tribes, many of which originate from different parts of the continent, speak different languages, have developed different cultures, and were continually at war with one another for centuries. Which tribes should speak for such a diverse race of people?

More relevant to the issue of a civic education is the problem of selecting works that negatively depict the lives of a racial or ethnic group. We can see this problem through the example of Richard Wright's frequently taught autobiography Black Boy. Without question, this book has great historical and literary significance and should be read by all Americans who seek an understanding of American society. Wright is one of the century's most important writers, and his story teaches us much about the oppressive racism in Mississippi in the early part of the century, as related in the following passage:

.... One afternoon I was wheeling my barrow toward the pond when something sharp sank into my thigh. I whirled; the dog crouched a few feet away, snarling. I had been bitten. I drove the dog away and opened my trousers; teeth marks showed deep and red.

> I did not mind the stinging hurt, but I was afraid of an infection. When I went to the office to report that the boss's dog had bitten me, I was met by a tall blonde white girl.
>
> "What do you want?" she asked.
>
> "I want to see the boss, ma'am."
>
> "For what?"
>
> "His dog bit me, ma'am, and I'm afraid I might get an infection."

"Where did he bite you?"

"On my leg," I lied, shying from telling her where the bite was.

"Let's see," she said.

"No ma'am. Can't I see the boss?"

"He isn't here now," she said, and went back to her typing.

I returned to work, stopping occasionally to examine the teeth marks; they were swelling. Later in the afternoon a tall white man wearing a cool white suit, a Panama hat, and white shoes came toward me.

"Is this the nigger?" he asked a black boy as he pointed at me.

"Yes, sir," the black boy answered.

"Come here, nigger," he called me.

I went to him.

"They tell me my dog bit you," he said.

"Yes, sir."

I pulled down my trousers and he looked.

"Humnnn," he grunted, then laughed. "A dog bite can't hurt a nigger."

"It's swelling and it hurts," I said.

"If it bothers you, let me know," he said. "But I never saw a dog yet that could really hurt a nigger."

He turned and walked away and the black boys gathered to watch his tall form disappear down the aisles of wet bricks.

Wright experienced this humiliation in 1924, and without question young black boys and girls are going through similar degradations in various parts of the United States in the 1990's. The inclusion of Black Boy in a curriculum becomes problematic through the context in which it is typically taught. In a survey of secondary school teachers (Stotsky & Anderson, 1990), Black Boy was named as one of the forty-five most frequently recommended books. Only three other authors identified in the survey were black, the others being Maya Angelou, Lorraine Hansberry,

and Zora Neale Hurston, all of whose books concern pre-Civil Rights movement experiences. We might conclude, therefore, that "the black experience" in America is often represented in secondary school curricula by books that focus on events taking place prior to 1955, and often long before then, in settings notorious for their oppressive treatment towards blacks.

I know of no similar studies conducted at the college level. If one example may serve, however, the General Education Literature reading list at the University of Iowa includes Wright, Angelou, Hurston, and Alice Walker's The Color Purple, as well as works by Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall. The perspective as a whole is weighted toward the pre-Civil Rights conditions of black America, making students' literary exposure to "the black experience" one in which both the legal system and the attitudes of whites combine to provide a life of unrelenting harshness. The "canon" of African-American literature offered to students, therefore, would appear to work against the construction of productive relationships between races and the generation of solutions to modern race problems, which I think are quite different from those of the early part of the century given the massive changes in the legal system since the 1950's.

I wish to emphasize again that the texts by Wright, Angelou, and others in and of themselves are exceptional works of literature and are essential reading for concerned citizens. But when they are among the few texts selected to depict the lives of African-American citizens they offer a very narrow, negative, and potentially destructive view of the experiences of black Americans. In the 1990's we unquestionably have far too many black citizens whose lives are adversely affected by discrimination. But we also have a strong, growing black middle class and prominent, successful black leaders such as Colin Powell and Carol Mosely Braun. Should American students be exposed to a view of black Americans that focuses on vitriolic, dead-end encounters with whites? Are black and white people encouraged to develop a sense of kinship with one another through exclusive exposure to such texts?

A related problem in these texts is the lumping together of "white people" as a monolithic, generally evil group. In Black Boy, Wright repeatedly makes statements such as "White people looked upon Negroes as a variety of children." Perhaps to Wright the "white

people" of his community were quite homogeneous and could be regarded as a single culture. But many "white people" have very little in common with one another other than the fact that their skins come in various shades of a generally light hue. An Israili-American Hasidic Jewish delivery truck driver from New York City, an Italian-American Catholic ACLU lawyer from Tampa, an Orthodox Greek-American hairstylist from Chicago, a Norwegian-American chimney sweep from rural Minnesota, a Lithuanian-American Buddhist racehorse trainer from Louisville and a mixed-nationality atheist real estate developer from the suburbs of Sacramento are all "white people," but do they represent "white America" any more than young Richard Wright represents "black America"? Should we also begin singling out white sub-groups for representation in curricula? And if so, how are we to define these sub-groups? By nationality? Religion? Region? Political affiliation? How does such an approach to selection contribute to a sense of social cohesion among students? By selecting according to sub-group characteristics, are we also helping to foster a sub-group orientation? What happens to a sense of personal uniqueness when works are selected because they represent the experiences of particular groups? Teachers need to consider these problems when selecting materials, and consider how the experiences of the literary characters in the texts contribute to a sense of civic identity among students.

Didactic Texts Taught to Challenge Beliefs

One of the reasons that I have always valued education is that it has brought me in contact with ideas that I never would have otherwise considered. Through my education I have read The Communist Manifesto, The Analects of Confucius, The Koran, and countless other texts that have challenged the ways in which I had grown up to think about the world. Like many who take up education as a profession, I have often assumed that we all not only benefit from exposure to a variety of ideas, but want to see the world from as many perspectives as possible in order to get the clearest sense of our own personal beliefs.

It takes little more than a week's reading of the campus paper's editorial page, however, to learn that not everyone seeks a broader view of the world. Yet faculty often feel that we have a

duty to provide enlightenment for our students whether they want it or not. We feel that this need is especially strong when we see hatred and discrimination played out on our campuses. A racial slur scrawled on the lavatory wall, gay bashing at a campus tavern, cases of rape and sexual harassment--these and other incidents are frighteningly common across American campuses, and as part of the university community we feel the need to do something to change students' attitudes. And because books have always been our medium of passing along great ideas, we often attempt to adress issues of bigotry and discrimination through changes in curriculum.

In doing so we have found out a few things. One is that not everyone wants to be exposed to new ideas; many people are quite content with the ones they have. Indeed, people are often fiercely loyal to the ideas they have grown up with and would feel that they are betraying their homes and communities if they were to change. As a result they often adamantly resist what they feel are attempts to indoctrinate them into new ways of thinking and end up becoming more entrenched in their beliefs than ever.

This resistance has led to a second realization, that books don't have the same transforming effect on many people than they do on people who end up being college professors for a living. Most current research in reading stresses the constructive nature of the reading process, with the text providing a set of signs--a blueprint of sorts--from which readers construct meaning based on their personal histories, their cultural backgrounds, and the orientations they've learned toward reading. Messages are not transmitted intact from authors to texts to readers, but are reconstructed by individual readers according to the knowledge and attitudes they bring to the transaction. Student readers, then, do not all approach reading in the open-minded way that most college professors do. As a result our efforts to address what we perceive as attitude problems through curricular change often backfire when the students resist the ideas altogether, reconstruct them to justify their pre-conceived beliefs, or reject them through the frameworks they read them through.

We can find many examples of the ways in which this process works. Perhaps the most infamous took place at the University of Texas at Austin in the early 1990's, where many people in the English department were disturbed by the increasing outbreaks of hostility over civil rights issues in the Austin community. The coordinators of the freshman composition program decided that one way to get students to be more sensitive to one another was to involve them in the analysis of Supreme Court cases that concerned civil rights issues.

The course covered the same type of writing instruction that students would ordinarily get in a freshman composition course, with a special emphasis on learning how to construct and critique legal arguments. The course also gave great attention to the process of writing arguments, with students producing several drafts of each assignment, working together in writing groups, doing collaborative research in the library, participating in peer critiques, and otherwise sharing their developing essays with other students and the teacher. Judged on the basis of its method of teaching writing, few would doubt that the course was exemplary in its potential for teaching students to critique and write arguments with expertise.

The idea of using court cases as the basis of study was also inspired. Almost everyone loves a good court case. The courtroom drama is a staple of television and film and has served as the basis of classroom simulation games (i.e., Smagorinsky, in press). The trouble with the course came through its selection of which court cases to study. The cases all concerned civil rights issues of some sort, including racial prejudice, gay rights, and women's issues. Some members of the UT faculty opposed the content of the course and took their case to the local papers, who were very willing to report to the public the "political correctness" of the radical UT English department. The uproar got national press attention and even was the subject of a panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in which disputatious members of the UT English department aired their differences in public. The issue was equally inflammatory among students who defended both sides of the case with passion yet little persuasion. In the end a number of prominent faculty left the university and the curriculum was modified to mollify those who were left.

The University of Texas case is but one of many I could have cited. Many campuses have attempted a similar sort of enlightenment plan using literature or courses in multiculturalism to help change attitudes, only to run into resistance. As a profession we are stuck in the middle of a problem that seems to have no clear solution: We are too idealistic to sit back and allow bigotry to go on unchecked, yet when we attempt to address it through academic measures we seem to exacerbate the problem. Perhaps we are too impatient; perhaps the initial hostility is something we must go through in order to achieve long-term change. Yet that is what we thought in the sixties, and many of the same problems that plagued us then are still with us today. And perhaps we are wrong in thinking that it is our duty to change people's deeply ingrained beliefs about society, in spite of how destructive we find them. After all, from their perspective, we are the ones who are being destructive.

I hope that I am wrong with this last possibility, for I cannot imagine myself being any the better for never having changed. As educators, though, we need to search for a better process than simply to assume that assigning the right books will address the attitudinal problems we perceive among our students. The UT program, I think, was admirable in the way in which it attempted to involve students in the process of discussing real and compelling court cases, examining the arguments made by both sides, and coming to conclusions about which argument had the most merit; yet even it met with tremendous resistance, inflamed greatly by members of the press who in most cases had never read the syllabus or talked with any of the professors who had developed it.

Perhaps the problem in Texas had a particular regional flavor where many students come from conservative Christian communities and are resistant to attacks on their values. In such communities the pejorative label of "political correctness" gets applied to almost any action that challenges the status quo; here in Oklahoma, Native Americans who protest sports team mascots such as "Savages" and "Chiefs" have been labeled as "politically correct" by the local press. I'm not quite sure how we could ever go about changing such attitudes, or whether it's even worth the bother.

Yet on campuses we expect more. Most of our efforts to change attitudes through assigned readings have had, at best, mixed success. As a profession we need to give a great deal of thought to why this is so, and continue to work at developing possible ways to help our students think of themselves as diverse members of a larger, mutually enriching community.

Discussion

The issues I have discussed all help to pose the question: On what basis do teachers make decisions about the experiences they encourage students to have with literature? Through much of this essay I have tried to outline difficulties in teaching texts frequently read by college students. At this point I'd like to discuss some possible solutions to the issues I've raised.

For me the most troublesome problem of those I've examined is whether or not to teach novels such as Huckleberry Finn. Many teachers have an immense loyalty to this book and regard it as essential reading; only an unsophisticated reader, they say, could fail to see the ironic distance between Twain's own views on bigotry and those expressed by the speaker, Huck. My own experiences in teaching Huck Finn to multiracial classes, however, have suggested to me that "understanding" the novel on an intellectual level is only one of many responses people may have to it. Many black students I have taught have acknowledged the differences in belief between author and speaker and have recognized the novel's literary merit, yet still have been deeply hurt by the attitudes expressed by Huck and requested that we please not read any more stories that used the work "nigger." I have heard this sort of student response patronizingly referred to as the "hurt feelings" of a small group of readers, a consideration that should not impair our vision of what benefits most students in the long run. I would argue that these students have experienced a much deeper pain, one that we (and I suppose that by "we" I mean white, middle class English teachers) need to try to understand and help to heal.

So am I suggesting that we stop teaching Huckleberry Finn? Not really, although I became increasingly troubled by the novel each year I taught it. I would suggest a greater sensitivity in our teaching that reflects our recognition that the experiences of some of our students may not enable a dispassionate reading. In this light we would need to be very open-

minded in listening to student repsonses and try to work constructively with them. If Huck Finn is truly a great book then students should have great experiences with it. I don't think this is possible unless we treat the book emotionally as well as intellectually.

I find the problems addressed in the section on "representative" texts to be quite troubling in that the manner in which these stories are taught seems to reinforce many of the attitudes that teachers purport to be combating through their inclusion in the curriculum. I believe as earnestly as anyone that the experiences of our various minority groups need to be shared and empathized with. I think, however, that the goal of hearing multicultural voices in a truly representative way is impossible, and that we are then left with the problem of making decisions about which "black" books to read, which "Latino" books, and so on. We need, however, to represent people as complex and balanced so that when students read Black Boy or Native Son their exposure to African-American experiences also includes family dramas such as the film To Sleep with Anger.

If I had a solution to the problem of changing attitudes through didactic texts then I would likely be President of the United Nations rather than an assistant professor of education. My review of the problems in Texas should not be taken as a criticism of their approach but an account of what can happen with even the most nobly-intended, well-designed program. I see the challenge of ending discrimination on campus as being one of our most important goals, and am not prepared to abandon the quest. If changes in curriculum are to be part of the solution, however, we need to monitor student response to the programs to see just what their effects are. We cannot simply assume that reading the "right" books will result in the "right" attitudes.

Most of the attention in efforts to "reform" the canon has fallen on which texts to read. And indeed in my review I have given substantial attention to problems involved in selecting the materials that make up a curriculum. Yet selecting books is only one part of the problem; and focusing solely on the content of the curriculum ignores much about the educational process. We cannot separate the content of the curriculum from the ways in which teachers use the texts in their classes. The question of whether to teach Huck Finn, for instance, is tied to the question

of how to teach Huck Finn. Making a decision to teach the text involves a responsibility to address both the emotional effect of the work upon students and the strategic problem of how to identify and interpret irony. Even if the strategic problem of interpretation is successfully managed, many students still are unable to overcome their emotional resistance to the text. In discussing "the new canon," therefore, we must broaden our vision beyond the idea that the books themselves constitute some sort of prescription for new values and look more carefully at the constructive nature of the reading process and the ways in which classroom process and the instructional context influence readers' construction of texts.

Slogans such as "celebrate diversity" are appealing and have become ubiquitous on conference programs and campus headlines. Uttering the phrase, however, is much easier than agreeing on what it means. Any attempts to celebrate diversity on campus should surely be a part of a greater effort to establish a sense of kinship among members of the college community. That sense of kinship needn't be, and most likely won't be, idyllic. Diverse people often disagree about what is best for the group as a whole. What is important is that the interests of sub-groups do not take precedence over the good of the community. The curriculum--including the content and process of educational experiences--is often thought to be a central means of providing a core of ideas through which students discuss their purpose as an educational community. As I have discussed throughout this essay, faculty need to consider many issues other than the apparent value of particular texts in deciding which selections students should read and which pedagogical strategies are appropriate for particular teaching situations. The texts themselves, as most modern critics acknowledge, do not have a message that they transmit directly to students, but are reconstructed differently by readers of different experiences and orientations. If books are to be an important part of our student's development, then the manner in which we teach them contributes greatly to the ways in which our students grow.

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Author Notes

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Author Bio

Peter Smagorinsky is an assistant professor in the program in English Education at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. He received his Ph. D. from the University of Chicago in 1989. His research looks at the ways in which classrooms define literacy and the ways in which those definitions affect students' opportunities for learning.