

Video Transcript of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Using Primary Sources: Tenet 1 in an Elementary Classroom

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Female narrator: As an elementary teacher, you really want your students to be engaged in their learning. So, how can you make this happen when it comes to social studies? By using culturally relevant pedagogy with primary sources. Primary sources are first-hand evidence of the past. They highlight authentic voices and reflect multiple perspectives and cultures. They also facilitate students' own cultural competence, which is a key element of culturally relevant pedagogy, or CRP. CRP is a teaching framework established by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings. There are three tenets to CRP. All students must experience academic success, develop cultural competence, and have opportunities to examine and critique the status quo. This video focuses on Tenet 1: All students experience academic success.

Andrea Bell-Myers: My favorite part about being a teacher is creating and really, truly collaborating with the students. My name is Andrea Bell-Myers. I'm a fifth grade teacher here at Brass Community School.

David O'Connor: The reason why I began practicing culturally relevant pedagogy is that I wanted to have an opportunity for folks to understand different narratives. My name is David O'Connor. I'm the American Indian Studies Consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Andrea Bell-Myers: When I was in fifth grade, often times the narrative... written in history books... would say that... my history started in chattel slavery... you know as a kid that just makes you feel not very proud and not very good about yourself. So I wanted to introduce the kings because... we had a history like way before then. And that's never really discussed in a school setting... in the curriculum.

Narrator: Throughout the year, Andrea's class studied African kings and leaders who ruled over kingdoms in Mali and Benin centuries ago. Students used primary sources to learn about these often absent narratives.

Student 1: We should like remember what the African did back then 'cause they're important.

Narrator: In today's lesson Andrea shared about King Kobena, ruler of a kingdom in Ghana in the late 19th century.

Andrea Bell-Myers: This is like the scepter.

Narrator: King Kobena was asked to sign an oath to the British in 1873. He refused, saying “I’m not afraid of your power. You may hang me if you like. I will not sign any paper.” He was exiled from his own kingdom for 21 years.

David O'Connor: The photo that Andrea had students look at, that's of his return to his nation in 1894.

Andrea Bell-Myers: Isn't that crazy? I have this photograph and it's of King Kobena and his tribe. I cut it up in five sections so that each group could analyze just that piece of the puzzle. And I did that purposely because looking at the entire photo, it could be a bit overwhelming.

Student 1: We've got write what we see, what we think, what we know, and what we wonder.

Student 2: We had to think on what was the picture gonna be about before we put all the pictures together.

Narrator: The lesson concluded with students comparing King Kobena to African leaders they had already studied.

Andrea Bell-Myers: The African princess, you know, King Ghezo and talking about Mansa Musa and his brother Abubakari.

Andrea Bell-Myers: So then they learned about kings that were good kings and kings that were bad kings.

Narrator: Primary source analysis challenges students because it requires them to think critically.

Andrea Bell-Myers: Oh! So you think this man was dressed differently from the other people. That's interesting. So you guys believe this is the king?

David O'Connor: Students are not just looking at what is in the photo, they're also thinking about why it was taken and who took it as well.

Andrea Bell-Myers: Primary sources actually opens up that door that motivates them to choose academic success.

David O'Connor: Tenet 1 is having high expectations for your students while... encouraging students to push for academic success.

Andrea Bell-Myers: That's awesome. So I'm going to make it difficult for you, but I am so confident that you guys are going to master this no problem.

David O'Connor: The teacher serves as a warm demander for their students, while pushing them to go beyond their ability.

Andrea Bell-Myers: I told them, I'm never going to have a lower expectation of you than I would for my own biological children. And so therefore, you saying "I can't" or the shrugs, that doesn't cut it. That doesn't cut it. I need you to rise to the occasion because I know you can. Pass out the I think, I wonder, and the I know. Because I know you guys know a lot of stuff. They would get one little piece of evidence here, and then one little piece of evidence there. That's great.

Now I want you to take that piece of evidence and dig a little deeper and stretch it. Give me more details.

David O'Connor: It's critical for teachers to take advantage of those resources especially from Library of Congress. That's where folks can delve a little deeper and have additional content for students to form their own ideas about whatever they're learning. It brings history alive, making it relevant to student's learning, making it relevant to who they are, making it tied to aspects of their own community.

Student 2: Mansa Musa shared his money to the poor and everything. That relates to me. I want to be like a help person, like helping elderlies and everything. That actually reminds me of myself.

Andrea Bell-Myers: It's so important for them to have something that they can relate to, and then see that they can own and embrace all that who they are.

Student 1: The book, it doesn't say what happened.

Andrea Bell-Myers: You didn't see it? You're right Chy'Ara, it's not there. Why isn't it there guys?

Student 1: Go back to primary source.

Andrea Bell-Myers: Then they start moving into actually how to solve it because now the question has come up: who started this whole division with people when it really doesn't matter when we're all connected?

Student 1: I want to know. We'll do our research.

Andrea Bell-Myers: They're like, "Yeah, yeah. We can do it."

Narrator: Andrea understands her students. She deeply believes in their abilities, both as students and as future leaders. Her expectations are high, and she supports them as they choose to develop their academic skills and knowledge. She teaches about the past and the present using primary sources that students connect with.

Andrea Bell-Myers: I really try to empower kids, and I know it's vital and important. One of the students here, he actually, really, he was a kid that really didn't talk that much, but once he started looking at these primary sources of people that look like him, of people who have this greatness inside of them, I saw that child's self esteem go up, right.? He's going, "Wait a minute. This is a part of me. I'm connected to this and I'm great. I'm great, too."

Narrator: Lessons and supporting materials are available on the Inquiry in the Upper Midwest Project website. Be sure to check out our other videos about CRP and primary sources.

