EJ

#DISRUPTTEXTS

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In their inaugural column, the editors call for ELA curricula to be intentionally inclusive of BIPoC voices as a way to disrupt White supremacy in our classrooms.

#DisruptTexts: An Introduction

In May 2018, we—four women educators of color—founded the #DisruptTexts social media hashtag. Our goal was to advocate for a more inclusive and restorative curriculum and pedagogical approach in English language arts (ELA). By intentionally practicing anti-oppressive and culturally relevant and sustaining literacies, we want to address historic violence and the erasure of marginalized communities, resulting in a pathway toward healing for all students. In this column, we describe the core principles of the work.

CORE PRINCIPLE 1: SELF-EXAMINATION OF BIASES

Our first call to action is to *continuously examine our own biases to understand how they inform our teaching.* No educational space is free from bias or inequity, so to explore ourselves and the world, it is imperative to interrogate the forces that shape our thinking. As educator Minjung Pai argues,

> All teachers should do their own personal identity work . . . which is [a] best teaching practice. Equity work is not about being an expert, a good or bad person, some magical skills, or an innate ability. It is concrete, explicit and intentional work and needs to be done consistently.

When teachers plan lessons, units, and curricula, we often look to outside experts and select materials we feel passionate about. Too often these choices are rooted in nostalgia and tradition, rather than in our knowledge of the students in our classrooms.

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The canon of literature taught to young people in schools is a product of time, space, and individual and collective consciousness. The canon is socially constructed. Therefore, the same biases that exist within individuals are reflected in the literature individuals create. Educator Christina Torres cautions us against teaching a canon that holds the storylines and archetypal characters of one culture as though they were "universal." When we prioritize some cultural capital above others, we send the message that marginalization is acceptable.

The work of examining biases, deconstructing, and reconstructing the canon is ongoing. When we commit to education as a practice of freedom, we realize that, in the words of bell hooks, "our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (8). To hear and see one another, we must be bold, unwavering, and honest in examining the biases and beliefs we hold about one another—and support our students as they learn to do the same.

CORE PRINCIPLE 2: CENTERING BIPOC VOICES

To disrupt texts effectively, we must *center the voices of BIPoC in literature.* BIPoC is an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, people of color. While BIPoC can serve as a useful shorthand, we urge educators to recognize the rich

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diversity that exists within racial and ethnic groups. We call for ELA curricula to be intentionally inclusive of these voices by pairing texts, creating counternarratives, and replacing texts. We can center these voices by arguing for their use as core texts and including additional texts featuring characters of color, written by people of color, to show the rich diversity in communities of color. We can also put texts into conversation with each other based on their perspectives of a shared theme, on characters that mirror each other, or on the ability to create an interesting conversation when compared and contrasted.

Creating counternarratives allows us to address harmful and problematic narratives and stereotypes that exist in society and offer students the knowledge and information to dismantle those ideas. We do this by creating a text set (it could be a core text and other supplementary texts) that addresses the stereotype or narrative and guiding students to make observations throughout the readings. This practice of counterstorytelling is not only one of the tenets of critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic), but it also addresses the stereotypes that support oppression. Counternarratives change our thought patterns so that we can see each other in healthy and unbiased ways. We must begin to help students—and ourselves—address our racialized imaginations by dismantling racist patterns of thought (Morrison; Thomas). Centering the voices of BIPoC is central to disruption.

CORE PRINCIPLE 3: APPLYING A CRITICAL LENS

Teaching a text that is written by a person of color is different from teaching that text through a critical lens. In fact, in many cases, teaching a book like Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* without a critical lens can do more harm than good. Because we bring all of our identities and experiences into our reading experiences, we bring all of our biases, too. Thus, *we must not only consider* what *we teach but also* how, *applying a critical lens to how we teach and engage with texts.*

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Developing a critical lens means not only identifying new knowledge but also being conscious of the social, cultural, and political contexts in which that knowledge exists (Sensoy and DiAngelo). Although we might not choose the texts we teach, we can apply a critical lens so that students practice intentional perspective-taking stances. The antithesis to critical literacy is universalism. Too often, students may read a text only through a dominant narrative, a single interpretive lens. Instead, students can ask questions of texts such as *Who is centered? Who is marginalized? Who is missing? And what does this mean and why does this matter?*

CORE PRINCIPLE 4: WORK IN COMMUNITY

The work of disruption cannot be done alone. The fourth pillar of #DisruptTexts calls us to *work in community with other antiracist educators, especially Black, Indigenous, and others of color.* We are guided by Audre Lorde, who explains: "Without community, there is no liberation . . . but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (111).

We are moved by the work educators do in their classrooms to take necessary steps to change their beliefs, leading them to change their curriculum. We continue to organize and create spaces for those educators to be connected to others who are doing similar work and to lessen the isolation that often accompanies those seeking to challenge structures of White supremacy.

As women of color, we also understand the need to ground our work in intersectionality (Crenshaw) to understand multiple forms of oppression, while also recognizing the particular damage of racism experienced by women of color, especially Black women. Thus, we work to center intentional acts of liberation that address those most harmed by White supremacy with the goal of that work spreading outward to impact others. This work cannot be done alone if we want to change systems and influence young people, however.

We hope that this column will amplify the ways in which teachers

embody and personalize a #DisruptTexts pedagogy in a variety of contexts. We invite authors to share how they confront and unpack their beliefs about community and power; how they actively work to address anti-Blackness; how they work with other educators of color; and how they decenter Whiteness in their work. We anticipate future columns that offer insight into how the work of #DisruptTexts can be implemented. We look forward to sharing both theory and practice as educators engage in disrupting the curriculum and canon currently taught in schools. Our students deserve it. EJ

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