



# Multicultural Poetry in ELT

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# Premise

- The only way for people to embrace cultural diversity is to be exposed to realities different from their own and to realize that similarities outnumber differences

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# Reflection

- Do you read multicultural poetry?
- Do you use multicultural literary texts in your English lessons?
- Are there any multicultural texts you wouldn't dare use?

# Use of Poetry in ELT

- Assuming linguistic competence, rather than attempting to extend it through literature...is likely to be even more problematic (Hall, 2005)
- In a second language context the use of poetry actually leads to the noticing and retention of linguistic forms (Hanaeur, 2001)

# Multicultural Poetry

- Typically associated with ethnic minorities and other socioeconomically marginalized and underrepresented groups
- Their literature is as sidelined in the curriculum as it is in society
- If students cannot identify with the text their level of engagement with the reading process diminishes (Colby & Lyon, 2004)

# Challenges

- Convincing teachers to use such poems
- Overcoming student resistance
- Finding suitable multicultural poems to use with students
- Training teachers to exploit such poems in an appropriate manner

# Teachers' Practices

- Avoid using multicultural poems because of fear and misconceptions:
  - Students' language competence
  - Students' reaction to potentially disturbing or sensitive issues
  - Distract from the business of language teaching

# Teachers' Practices

- Multicultural poetry might make it easier for us to understand our students' identity
- Teachers enable students to:
  - Empathize with other people's experiences
  - Embrace pluralism
  - Value plurilingualism

# Empathy

If we want our students to think about and engage with ideas and beliefs that challenge them, that is, to teach them to listen without judgement, to share ideas without prejudice and start to empathise with people from different backgrounds who may have (and be happy with) a different set of beliefs, then we need to **help them understand that one's home culture is simply a system of learned behaviour patterns and not the only way to do or see things** (Johnson & Rinvoluceri, 2010)

# Potential Benefits

- Multicultural poetry reflects the cultural diversity within the community and the classroom
- Bridges students' real-life experiences and language learning
- Provides models of fluent writers and speakers who appreciate other cultures

# Potential Benefits

- Helps develop students' self-concept
- Enables them to understand their place in the world
- Helps undermine negative stereotypes
- Demonstrates how other cultures cope with injustice

# Potential Benefits

- Encourages students to appreciate that linguistic and cultural differences are meant to be celebrated
- Allows them to realise that like the L1, the target language can be used as a vehicle for personal and cultural expression

# Learning process

- Collaborative, intercultural and interactive (Obied, 2007)
- Facilitates the sharing, and comparing, of information and experiences of home and other cultures (Johnson & Rinvoluceri, 2010)
- Engagement with the target language via meaningful communication

# Ask yourself

- What are my students' cultural experiences and traditions?
- What are the everyday contexts in which they live and learn?
- How similar or different might these be from those explored in the poem?  
(Dymoke, 2009)

# Ask yourself

- What events or issues in the poem might students find most difficult to understand?
- What are the potential difficulties in terms of language? Of imagery?
- What bridges or links will you need to make to aid their engagement with the poem? (Dymoke, 2009)



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