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#NCTECHAT
Rethinking the “Adolescent” in Adolescent Literacy

Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides, Robert Petrone, and Mark A. Lewis

At the heart of Rethinking the “Adolescent” in Adolescent Literacy is a call to English language arts teachers to examine the very assumptions of adolescence they may be operating from in order to reimagine new possibilities for engaging students with the English curriculum. Relying on a sociocultural view of adolescence established by scholars in critical youth studies, the book focuses on classrooms from diverse contexts to explain adolescence as a construct and how this perspective of youth can encourage educators to reenvision literacy instruction and learning.

Working from and looking beyond Adolescent Literacy: An NCTE Policy Research Brief, the authors explore the “myth” of adolescence and the possibility of a curriculum that positions youth as experts and knowledgeable advocates fully engaged in their own learning.

The Importance of Urban Literacies

TONYA PERRY ■ JAMAL COOKS, guest editors

You don’t need to struggle to find out who you are
They don’t know nothing about you, they don’t know who you are
Just look in the mirror, ’cause this is who you are
You’re the one and only you, just be who you really are.

Be who you are, every night and every day
Girl you’re a star, you could never be replaced
You’re beautiful, you’re wonderful, you stand out from the crowd
Don’t be someone that you’re not, just be who you are.

—“Be Who You Are”
— Kiersten, Age 14

Kiersten is a female middle school student who attended summer songwriting camp. Her lyrics remind us about the importance of student voice and the powerful literacies that students bring with them to the classroom, ready to be unleashed and fostered. Urban literacies are the literacy practices of reading, writing, and beyond that uplift, connect, and illuminate what students bring to school or use out of school that may go unnoticed unless teachers purposefully and intentionally search, appreciate, and incorporate them into educative and community spaces. Urban middle school students enter school understanding the world through their own literacies. In Milner and Lomotey’s *Handbook of Urban Education*, David Kirkland reminds us that there is an “urgent need to better understand [urban] literacy practices from their [students’] perspectives so that educators can begin to rethink classroom literacy curriculum and instruction with them in mind” (p. 395). We believe that appreciating—not rejecting—the richness of urban middle school students, their families, and their communities is imperative to the learning of our urban youth.

This guest-edited issue of *Voices from the Middle* highlights the value, brilliance, and genius of urban literacies. In our featured article for LEADING THE CALL, Marcelle Haddix talks about her powerful writing experience with her urban out-of-school writing project, Writing Our Lives. Students find a safe space to express their thoughts and share with peers, even voluntarily, on Saturdays! Marcelle discovered that urban students do want to write, but it is up to the teacher and community to listen to the students as they guide us through the process to engage their voices and create radical, aware citizens.

The other articles highlight students’ families, neighborhoods, schools, and communities, where students can take ownership of their circumstances and actively involve themselves in urban literacies to make a difference. Andrea Vaughan uses spatial and social justice work to examine the culturally rich environment that students occupy and how they use their own literacy practices to impact food justice in their local environment. Examining home literacy practices, Tisha Ellison observes two African American boys and their father enacting home project-based learning and apprenticeship strategies while putting up Christmas bells, a family practice that easily translates into valuable collaborative, ongoing, organizational projects for home spaces. At the same time, Jim Johnston challenges us to think deeply about creating academic literacies that are relevant to
students’ lives and experiences. Ayanna Brown expounds on the idea of igniting passion for literature in students through careful selection and planning, which allows students to appreciate themselves and the beauty in words and their worlds.

Urban literacies are an important aspect in curriculum and instruction of adolescents. This issue explores different perspectives of building language and literacy skills in varying learning environments. The information will help middle school educators to improve the teaching and learning of all students.

Reference


Call for Voices from the Middle Cover Photos

Have you got an eye for a great photograph?

Voices from the Middle editors are looking for compelling digital images to feature on our four journal covers during each of our volume years. We are looking for color photos that highlight our classrooms, our students, and the unique and important work that we do as middle level teachers.

Images should align with the themes for each issue and deadlines are the same.

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