

Egan-Robertson, A. (1998). Learning about culture, language, and power: Understanding relationships among personhood, literacy practices, and intertextuality. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 30, 449-487.

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Summary: This article presents 12 microanalyses of videotaped segments of an urban writing club in which a small group of eighth-grade female students explored issues of culture, language, and power that had importance to them. The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship among personhood and literacy practices, using the construct of intertextuality. Findings revealed that the writing club was a site for students to take up opportunities to shape and reshape discourse practices about their personhood through intertextuality. That is, the students built on other works of local artists and activists to explore culture, language, and power issues embedded in the wider society.

Assumptions:

- Personhood is not a static concept. Rather, it is a dynamic cultural construct that is constructed and reconstructed as people interact within social and institutional settings, although certain fixatives can constrain and delimit identities for oneself and others (e.g., academic tracks). Thus, personhood manifests part of people's social realities.
- The notion of intertextuality involves not only the juxtaposition of texts but also social recognition, acknowledgement, and the social significance assigned to juxtaposed texts as meaning is constructed in classroom settings.

Findings:

- In the writing club, the teacher and the students constructed and reconstructed discourses about personhood related to issues of race and racism. In this sense, the writing club served as a site in which a critical awareness about culture, language, and power occurred.
- Across time and events in the writing club, literacy practices and personhood were closely related, which provided students with opportunities to explore new positions as readers and writers.
- As the students shared the texts of their lives and communities to examine personhood, they adapted and contested literacy practices of local artists and activities. This process led the students to learn history from a community perspective. Thus, intertextuality

was used as a tool to explore relationships of literacy practices and personhood.

- The intimate relationship of personhood and literacy practices in the particular setting was embedded within the wider society.

Conclusions:

Literacy practices do not simply mean that students interact with print. Rather, how students develop literacy skills is associated with the students' interactions with others about texts and personhood.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Encourage students to draw upon a wide range of topics for their writing.
- Find ways to value issues and topics that represent students' outside-the-classroom lives.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Help teachers understand the value of inviting writing and discussion about broader societal issues.
- Help teachers find ways to acknowledge, value, and use students' outside-the-classroom lives as texts for writing and discussion.