

Vyas, S. (2004). Exploring bicultural identities in Asian high school students through the analytic window of a literature club. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 48, 12-23.

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Summary: The study recounted the researcher's interaction with a group of seven Asian students during a weekly book club discussion over a four-and-a-half month period. The researcher chose short works by writers of Asian descent dealing with relevant issues, not containing difficult words for first-generation immigrant students.

Assumptions:

- Forming a sense of one's identity is a primary concern during adolescence.
- Literacy and identity are linked.
- Literature can provide the means to explore and discuss issues of identity that may be particularly difficult for bicultural students.

Results:

- The book discussion group provided a window into the bicultural students' interpretations, beliefs, personal choices, and decisions as they judged characters' actions.
- The book club provided a "safe space" for students to discuss areas of concern: for example, feelings of alienation, parental pressures, intergenerational differences, shifting allegiances (identification with their native culture, mainstream American culture, or some combination of both).

Conclusions:

- Labeling students as "bicultural" is simplistic and inaccurate.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Although this study focused on students of Asian background, teachers should be aware of the possibilities literature provides for all students to read, write, and discuss issues related to their emerging identities.
- Encourage students to make personal connections to literature that they read, both within and outside of formal school settings.
- Understand that just because students may come from the same or similar cultural background, they still have individual differences.
- Create classroom activities that will lay the groundwork for the advancement of literacy and the creation of "safe spaces" for students to read, write, and discuss issues related to identity.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Recognize (and help others recognize) the multiplicity of perspectives within any seemingly homogeneous group.
- Provide support for classroom teachers through obtaining literature from a wide variety of cultural perspectives.

- Offer extended support in the form of literacy forums (either within or outside of school settings) in order to better understand all students' identity experiences.