

Bean, T., & Rigoni, N. (2001). The impact of a multicultural young adult novel on intergenerational dialogue journal discussion. In J. Hoffman, D. Schallert, C. Fairbanks, J. Worthy, & B. Maloch (Eds.), *Fiftieth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 127-137). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

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Summary: Three pairs of students (“at-risk” 10th graders and graduate students in a content literacy course) exchanged dialogue journals as they read and reacted to Gary Soto’s young adult novel, *Buried Onions*, over a 10-week period. The high school students were Hispanic, and the graduate students were European. Same-gender pairs were established. Multiple case study design and constant-comparative method were used to explore the contents of journal entries.

Assumptions:

- When diverse groups of students discuss novels, reciprocal influences emerge.
- Literature deserves close reading and interpretive discussion that focuses on personal, social, and cultural dimensions.
- Dialogue journals show promise, particularly for “at risk” students, as a response mode.

Results: Journal entries consisted of 12 reader-response categories:

- societal conditions (“Those bad neighborhoods are like that”)*
- academic mode (personally detached question-answer dialogue)+
- ethical considerations*#+
- institutional racism (“The police would assume...”)
- characters alive (talking about characters as if they were real people)*#
- individual resistance (“If I were [character]...”)
- literary evaluation (“I didn’t like the ending”)+
- character empathy (“I know how ____ feels”)
- interpretive disagreement with partner
- artistic interpretation
- mutual and peer support#

Notes: * top three categories for case 1; # for case 2; + for case 3.

Conclusions:

Mutual support provided a “comfort zone” for the exploration of connections between the text and each individual readers life.

Use of the academic mode limited interpretive discussions.

Each of the journal pairs “formed their own social context, and the nature of its parameters influenced the resulting discourse patterns” (p. 135).

Suggestions for teachers:

- Encourage dialogue journals as a response mode.
- Avoid “teacher talk” in dialogue journals (what these researchers called “academic mode”). Encourage mutual support between responders.
- Consider scaffolding dialogue journal writing with examples of a) the variety of possible responses and b) mutually supportive responses.
- Understand that close reading and interpretive discussion takes time.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Encourage writing in response to reading. Help teachers see that “teacher talk” might stifle response rather than encourage it.
- Be prepared to deal with the issue of time and allow for flexibility.