

Diversity: Language, Race, Culture Among English Language Learners

Questions to Enid Lee—Mining the Gold

California Standard for the Teaching Profession Standard Three Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter For Student Learning

Teacher’s Question: What do you mean when you say “teaching beyond the standards”?

The above California Standard for the Teaching Profession requires us to make subject matter meaningful. There are two aspects to this standard: to understand and to organize. For the second to be successful, we must pay attention to the first. We have to tease out the significance of, or the big ideas in, what we are teaching and find strategies to assist students make meaning from the subject matter.

In short we must ask ourselves: “How can we organize the topic so that it becomes something worth learning about for all students?”

“How can we bring our students, their languages and their communities into our classrooms or take our classrooms out to their communities in the process of supporting them in English language development?”

To do this we must constantly examine the cultures, languages and histories in our rooms as rich resources for instruction. We will not only meet the stated standards but also exceed them as we pull together the various components that make for successful and empowering teaching and for the creation of space for everyone in our room

In writing about schools where the gaps are closing, Dr. Belinda Williams connects the components of standards, subject matter, and students in the following analysis:

What must be understood is that across all of these programs teachers have to be aware of the same knowledge, the same expectation, a way to make connections, and a way to establish relationships. These are the characteristics in schools where gaps are closing

Central to that perspective is a focus on knowing the learner and knowing what needs to be understood to make both cognitive and affective connections between what is taught, what is in the standards and what the learner knows, brings, cares about and/ or can do. (my emphasis)

Reference:

Williams, Belinda. “Closing The Achievement Gap” in California Curriculum News Report. vol 28, no 5, April 2003

