

AUTHORS IN THE CLASSROOM
A Workshop by Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy

The content of this workshop is further developed in the book:
Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy. **Authors in the Classroom.**
A Transformative Education Process. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2004.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Transformative Education as defined here, seeks the emancipation of the individual as an instrument for social liberation and the attainment of equity, inclusion, justice, and peace. It promotes developing all aspects of intelligence and strengthening critical and reflective abilities through practices that are interactive, creative and joyful.

Transformative pedagogy supports the creation of loving and caring relationships and environments, and recognizes diversity as essential to life. It fosters respect for all forms of diversity (gender, sexual preferences, culture, ethnicity and beliefs). It recognizes the prevalence of biases and prejudice and the need to unlearn racist practices and assumptions in order to achieve a just society. In the authors' interpretation of Transformative Education, a number of fields provide ideas for a comprehensive understanding of its fundamental strengths:

- **CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY**

Human beings are beings of knowledge. To construct new knowledge is to foster the human essence.

- **FEMINIST/WOMANIST THEORY**

Human beings are beings of love and caring. All human beings have the right to attain their fullest potential regardless of gender or any other differences.

- **AESTHETICS**

Human beings are intrinsically drawn to beauty and creativity.

- **CRITICAL THEORY**

Human beings are the sole constructors of social reality and as such are responsible for improving it.

- **MULTICULTURALISM**

The nature of Earth is diversity. Human beings are as diverse as the reality of this planet. They all deserve respect in their uniqueness.

- **ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION**

Prejudice and bias have been prevalent throughout human history. Most cultures are ethnocentric and promote seeing others as less than themselves and/or dangerous. The majority of people don't see their own biases. Biases are destructive, and when they become institutionalized they bring about injustice and even crime against other human beings.

- **CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

Most forms of public education, anywhere in the world, promote the domestication and colonization of the human mind in order to maintain the status quo.

- **BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

Language is one of the strongest elements of self-definition as well as one of the most significant elements of a culture.

FRIENDS / AMIGOS / ZANMI

Mini- lesson Using the Creative Dialogue Process

Friends (in Spanish **Amigos**, in Haitian Creole **Zanmi**) by Alma Flor Ada describes the life of squares and rectangles, circles and triangles who live in the same town but keep very separate lives from each other. One day, two little circles went for a roll into town and met a small rectangle. Together they formed a wagon. Later with young squares they made a train and when little triangles joined them they could make a plane and fly. They learned that together in friendship they could do what they could not do separate.

CREATIVE DIALOGUE

These questions are samples that can prompt the dialogue for each phase. Of course, the beauty of the real dialogue is that it will incorporate real life situations and experiences of the children. The questions are only suggested as dialogue starters. They need not be asked separately, but in a normal conversation format. We separated them into phases to give an idea of the different purpose of each phase, particularly because the conversations in the class tend to remain at the *Descriptive* and *Personal* phases and not reach the very important *Critical Reflective* phase and the essential *Creative Phase* that leads to action.

Descriptive Phase

Questions to ascertain the comprehension of the story and its concepts.

- How many sides does a square have? Are all sides the same size?
- How many sides does a rectangle have? A triangle? Do circles have sides?
- What did the large figures say to the little ones? Personal Interpretive Phase

Questions to invite sharing personal experiences, feelings and emotions.

- How does it feel when other children want to play with you? When they don't?
- How does it feel when other people treat you badly? When you treat others badly?

Critical Multicultural Anti-Bias Phase

Questions to promote critical reflection and anti-bias awareness.

- Was the big squares' reason to forbid the little ones to play with others valid? Why??
- Do all people who have long hair (or live in the same street) think alike? Have the same taste? Can we tell the feelings of a person just by the way the person looks? By the person's language? The person's origin? What do you think of this?
- Why do you think the shapes had such a wonderful time playing together?
- What difficult things that can happen when people who are different play together?
- What good things can happen? How can we promote the good things?

Transformative Creative Phase

Questions to promote transformative attitudes.

- What can we do when there are children who do not want to play with us?
- What can you do if you see someone treating someone badly?
- Is there someone you have not been friends with that you can invite to play with you? Someone you can learn to know better?

CONNECTIONS WITH THE HOME

Invite parents to share with their children their own experiences with friends, now and when they were children. What were their favorite games and activities? Ask them to discuss their concept of friendship. What do they value in their friends? Can these qualities be found only in people of the same age, the same sex, the same language, the same ethnicity?

SECOND CREATIVE ACTIVITY: Where I Come From

Where I Come From

F. Isabel Campoy

I come from a street that leads to the desert.
and from a house with balconies facing the sea.

I come from clothes drying under the sun,
and the smell of soap, of Mondays, of work.

I come from María and Diego,
peasants and poets, laborers of love.

I come from jumping rope and playing marbles,
molding mud into cups and sauces, building castles in the sand.

I come from rice and fried chicken,
watermelon, tortillas y pan.

I come from poverty and hard work,
from honor and pride.

I come from a country that lost a war against itself
and suffered 36 years of crime, of silence, of shame.

I come from the certainty of taking
so that together we create new days of peace.

Full of compassion,
full or pride and pain,

I say: This is where I come from

1. CREATE YOUR OWN WHERE I COME FROM BOOK

To write your own *Where I Come From* poem you can follow these steps, but do not feel limited by them. Feel free to begin each sentences with the words: "I come from" or "Where I'm from".

1. Imagine yourself at a specific age in childhood: 7, 8, 9, 12 years old
2. List some of the most memorable items you see in your childhood home
3. Step outside. List what you see around you: in the front yard, the backyard, the street, the neighborhood.
4. State the names of relatives or caretakers, those who link you to your past.
5. Write down frequently heard words, sayings or expressions. Which sentences that you heard over and over would distinguish your family from others?
6. Name food and dishes from family gatherings, daily meals or special treats.
7. Think of social, political, cultural or educational ideas that were reinforced around you as you were growing up. How do they reflect on who you are today?
8. Name the place where your childhood memories are kept: realistically (photo album, diaries, boxes) and metaphorically (branches of a tree, shady porch).
9. Think about the beginning and ending of your poem: where you are from, who you are, where you are going.

2. SHARE YOUR BOOK WITH THE STUDENTS' PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AND INVITE THEM TO CREATE THEIRS.

3. GUIDE YOUR STUDENTS IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING THEIR BOOKS.

4. DO "AUTHORS VISITS" TO OTHER CLASSROOMS TO READ AND SHARE YOUR BOOKS.