

Report: JEDI-Funded Curriculum Revisions for English 100: Children's Literature

Dr. Sarah M. Lushia, June 5, 2025

Introduction

I want to acknowledge/note that I chose to wait until the end of Spring term to write this report because the context in which we are working, learning, and teaching has changed so radically since I applied for this funding last year, especially with all of the upheaval around education and DEI work at the Federal level. I knew that this was likely to cause some shifts and adjustments in my approach to teaching this class, and I wanted to ensure those were reflected in the report.

Steps Toward Curriculum Development for ENG100

The following are steps that I took around Curriculum Development for ENG100 during JEDI funded work:

- I converted the course from a F2F modality to an online modality in order to better meet the needs of students, especially in the ECE program, and also to increase the accessibility of the course to a broader range of students. This work included:
 - Restructuring assignments to both align with the new course outcomes that were revised and approved by the Curriculum Committee just prior to the start of my JEDI work and to be more effective in building community and engagement in an online modality.
 - Working with ATC to ensure that all materials provided on Moodle, especially PDFs of journal articles, were accessible.
 - Ensuring the Moodle course shell aligned with as many principles of Universal Design as possible, including creating accurate video captions for YouTube and other videos posted to Moodle, ensuring that the weekly picture book read alouds included access to both the full illustrations and the full written text of each book, formatting documents to be easily read by screen readers and by students with vision loss, using the accessibility tools on Moodle to ensure that assignment prompts, rubrics, and other materials created directly within Moodle were accessible to all students, creating alt text for images used in materials, and ensuring that live Zoom recordings had captions enabled and a transcript available to students.

- Creating assignments that gave students the opportunity to speak to/include personal experience if they desired to do so, but also gave them other options to addressing the assignment prompts in ways that relied only on course materials for evidence if they did not want to share their experiences as they completed work for the course.
- Having students engage with texts that delivered information through multimodal methods and also allowing students to use multimodal methods to demonstrate their learning in some of the assignments in the course. (This is an area I plan to work on more before I teach the course again, as I didn't have the time to fully actualize some of the ideas I had around allowing avenues for the expression of learning in multimodal frameworks during the initial revisions to the course.)
- Collaborating with and seeking feedback/input from colleagues who were familiar with this course and my teaching style in order to craft a structure for the course that would work effectively in an online modality to keep students engaged with the course and each other throughout the term.
- I met several times with my dean to try to anticipate/troubleshoot some of the things that might arise as a result of the federal attack on DEI work and higher education in general that could impact this course. We discussed strategies I might use to structure the course in ways that would ensure the robustness of the learning experience, especially progress toward course goals, but also not put students in positions where they would be required to post about personal experiences in forums or other public spaces on Moodle that might cause trouble for them in light of the flurry of Federal actions.
- I read dozens of theoretical articles published in the last five years to ensure that the theoretical materials I was using with students in the course, as well as my approach to having students consider the concept of representation, especially authentic representation, was framed by the most current conversations being had in relevant fields of study. This was especially important given how many changes and places of both progress and regression have happened in these conversations since Covid's impact on learning/higher ed.
- I do want to note that I ended up deciding not to pursue a Cultural Literacy designation for this course at this time, which had been part of my original plan when I applied for JEDI funding last year. I based this choice on two things. First, I wanted to be able to teach the course once and ensure that my plan to integrate elements necessary for this distinction throughout the course were working effectively in helping students gain cultural literacy. Since we shifted to year-around registration this year, I would have had to go through the process of gaining the CL designation through the Curriculum Committee prior to even beginning to teach the revised version of this course for the first time in order to have that designation in place for the 25-26 academic year. Instead I chose to take a year off from teaching the course in 2025-26. This will allow me to focus early in the 25-26 academic year on making any revisions or changes I think might need to be made to the course after teaching it the first time with these new outcomes and an online modality in Spring 2025. This will give me time to prepare to present the course for the CL distinction when I feel confident that the course will allow students to gain cultural literacy based on artifacts that demonstrate student learning. On a very practical

level, I also made this decision due to the increasing attack on DEI-related work in higher ed. What we have seen in the last six months made me seriously concerned that adding a CL designation to this course might jeopardize its existence in the future, as it seems increasingly likely that there will be significant restrictions on the use of Federal funding to offer courses/programs clearly aligned a DEI/cultural literacy focus in the near future.

JEDI-Related Impacts

Having now taught the course for the first time this term, I can speak more clearly to the actual impacts that the course might have on supporting the learning needs of students from marginalized communities, as well as all students at the college, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the principles/practices of DEI and understanding systemic oppression and its impacts. Below are a list of some of the impacts I noted in these areas this term as a result of the JEDI-funded revisions to the course:

- I chose required Children's Literature texts that represented the depictions of a wide range of characters from different backgrounds and with different identities. In their reflective forum posts, many students reflected, based on Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, on how the individual books we read not only sometimes allowed them to feel represented in ways that previously had not in Children's Literature, but also helped them to gain insight and empathy into experiences that were compellingly presented in the books, but differed from their own. This resulted in the production of thoughtful, complex, and nuanced conversations in the forums, allowing students to challenge each other to deepen their learning and understanding of the importance of accurate representation for all students.
- I provided a range of theoretical texts from authors/speakers of various backgrounds that gave students a framework through which to talk about representation and related concepts in the children's books that we read. These texts allowed students to be able to name what they were observing in the children's texts using shared language/concepts that allowed their classmates to clearly understand what they were trying to communicate and engage with their ideas.
- We spent ample time considering the heavy influence that publication companies, and by extension, capitalism, have on whose stories get told, who gets to tell those narratives, and how censorship and profit-based motivations impact the authenticity of representation in U.S. Children's Lit. This really helped students to consider systemic impacts of oppression on both communities to which they belong as well as those to which they do not. It also gave them a framework through which to understand why so many aspects of Children's Lit in the U.S. are defined by publishing companies rather than authors, illustrators, children, parents, teachers, and librarians. Considering how censorship and profit-based motivations impact not only who is represented within U.S. Children's Literature and how, but also the potential for financial success for authors/illustrators whose identities/backgrounds are marginalized in the U.S. was one area where students were really astute in their observations and articulation of the impact of systemic oppression in the U.S.

- All of our theoretical texts provided students with frameworks, theoretical concepts/terms, and narrative experiences that empowered them to have language to give name to both issues related to equity and inclusion as well as aspects of systemic oppression. As noted above, Bishop's theory of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors was one that seemed to really resonate with students throughout the term and was frequently engaged in the work they produced for the class. Concepts of the "single story," intersectionality, and the disability tropes often used within U.S. Children's Lit were also ideas that students engaged with frequently in their assignments and forum posts/replies.
- Many of the students who take this course are currently working in the field of childhood education or plan to be. One of the things I really appreciated about this course is students' willingness and ability, once they had recognized systemic oppression at work in Children's Lit texts, to consider how that oppression, by extension, can and will impact the educational and learning experiences of students in U.S. schools.

Concluding Thoughts

While it was, to say the least, a challenging context in which to engage in this curriculum work—a context that came with many unexpected surprises, obstacles, and nuances, I'm grateful to have been afforded the time and bandwidth that came with the JEDI funding to do this work in order to better serve students. In the midst of so much uncertainty and very real threats to the success, and in some cases, even existence, of entire groups of people within U.S. culture and society, this work has never been more important in my opinion. And given the degree to which Children's Literature can overtly and subtly, intentionally and unconsciously, impact the way children learn to see and understand the world around them, it felt especially important to be doing this curriculum development work for Children's Literature during this tumultuous time.