

2-2013

# Raise Awareness--Raise Confidence: Culturally Responsive Instruction for School Library Candidates


Bridget Kratt

*University of Nebraska at Omaha*, [bkkratt@unomaha.edu](mailto:bkkratt@unomaha.edu)

Courtney Pentland

*Omaha Public Schools*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/tedfacpub>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Kratt, Bridget and Pentland, Courtney, "Raise Awareness--Raise Confidence: Culturally Responsive Instruction for School Library Candidates" (2013). *Teacher Education Faculty Publications*. 29.

<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/tedfacpub/29>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Teacher Education at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teacher Education Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).





"Courses in the UNO Library Science Education Programs are taught in a blended format, with face-to-face instruction occurring once per month."

# Raise Awareness— Raise Confidence: Culturally Responsive Instruction for School Library Candidates

BRIDGET KRATT AND COURTNEY PENTLAND

"With knowledge comes understanding of self and others, and greater appreciation of differences." ~ National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems

As the number of diverse and underserved student populations in our schools increases, it is imperative that school librarians create an environment where all students, regardless of cultural and linguistic background, are welcomed, feel supported, and are afforded authentic opportunities for learning.

In the library science education programs at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, we recognize the need to include a formal culturally responsive teaching component in our coursework, and have made a concerted effort to raise our candidates' confidence levels as culturally responsive educators by raising their awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices. In the UNO library science education programs, we have discussions in all courses about the importance of including materials and resources in the school library that are representative of all learners and their cultural communities. However, as our Special Methods: School Library course focuses on *teaching practices* in the school library, we felt including the important component of culturally responsive teaching to be a natural fit in the course.

Courses in the UNO library science education programs are taught in a blended format, with face-to-face instruction occurring once per month. Therefore, the content we present outside of class provides the framework for activities and discussions that occur during our face-to-face sessions. We introduced the culturally responsive teaching component at the end of our Special Methods: School Library course during our September 2012 class session with concepts from L. Summers' (2010) article, *Culturally Responsive Leadership in School Libraries*. This included four levels that school librarians can use to evaluate if

their "research curriculum and information literacy skills are culturally responsive." These include: Level One: The Contribution Stage; Level Two: The Additive Stage; Level Three: The Transformational Stage; and Level Four: The Social Action Stage. The stages are intended for school librarians to use as a measure of their cultural responsiveness within the curriculum. Although it would be another three weeks before we saw our school library candidates again, we were encouraged by their thoughtful questions, comments, and interest in those four levels.

Prior to leaving class in September, candidates were presented with an anonymous survey that would provide us with a baseline of their confidence level in culturally responsive teaching. At the end of our focus on culturally responsive teaching, we intended to again present candidates with the survey to measure any possible growth. The survey was composed of the following five statements:

1. I can create a trusting and caring environment in which all students feel they can take risks when learning new content.
2. I can identify and capitalize on the learning profiles of each student – including cultural preferences.
3. I can personalize learning so that each student enjoys learning and feels successful.



## YA FICTION

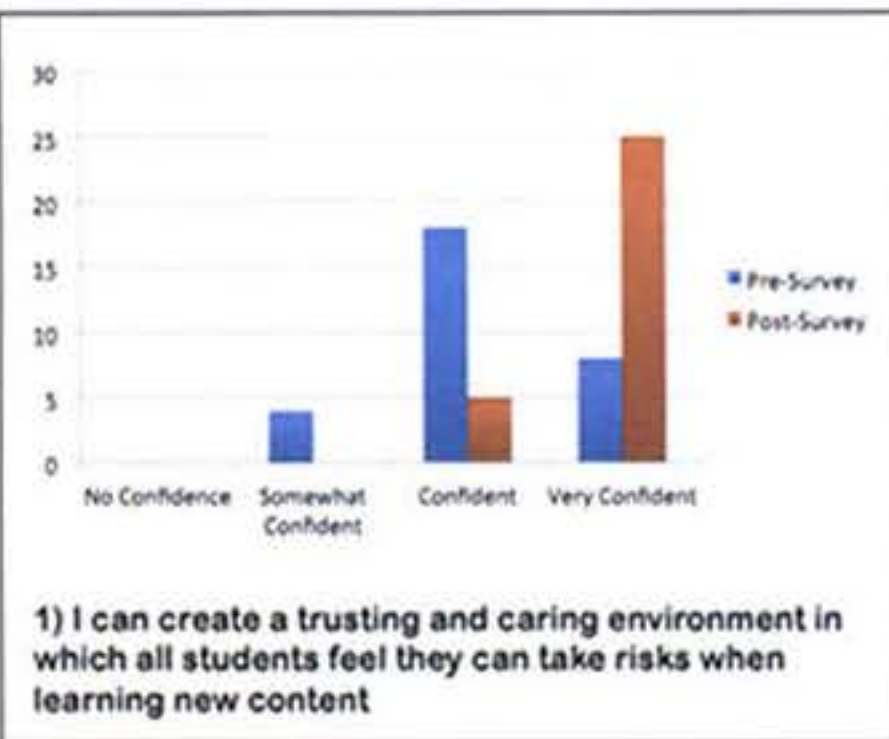
### IF YOU LOVE TO LAUGH

Johnson, Peter. **The Amazing Adventures of John Smith, Jr., AKA Houdini**. Harper, 2012. 176p. \$15.99. 978-0-06-198890-5. Grades 5-8. When an author visits John "Houdini" Smith's class, the thirteen year old decides he can write a better book than the author's. Boys especially will laugh out loud at John's narrative about his friends and family. The dialogue and emotions are authentic as John worries about his parents' precarious jobs and his brother serving in Iraq, and deals with a bully. Heartwarming and hilarious.

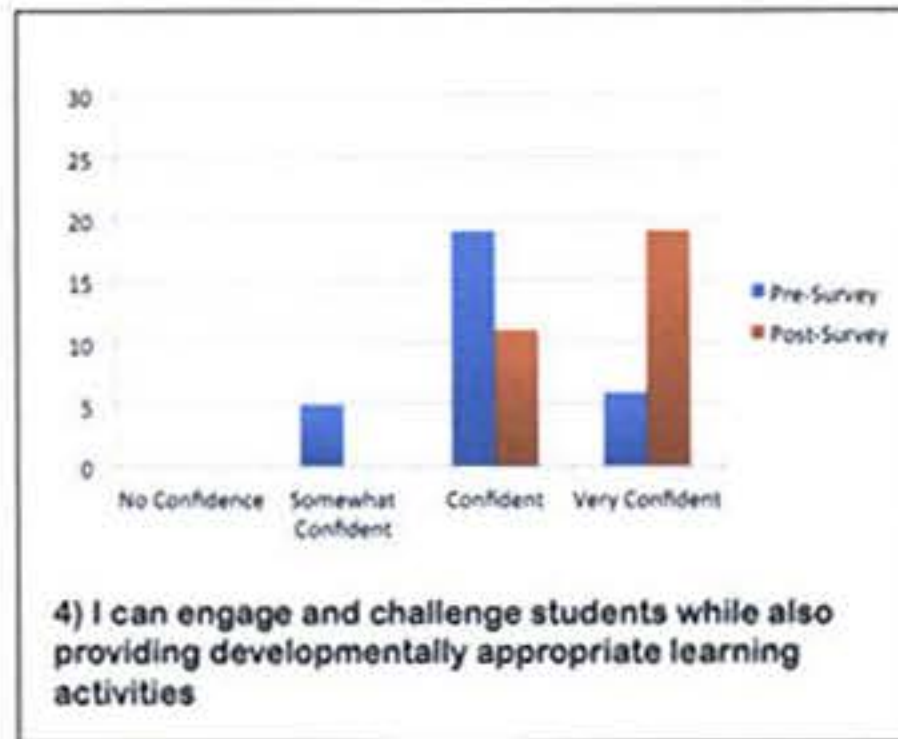
Schumacher, Julie. **The Unbearable Book Club for Unsinkable Girls**. Delacorte, 2012. 240p. \$16.99. 978-0-385-73773-9. Grades 8-11. Despite their good relationship, narrator Adrienne, fifteen, feels ambushed when her mother announces they'll be part of an AP English mother-daughter summer book club. The four girls, who have little in common, forge tentative friendships, described in a laugh-out-loud narrative. Great fun for book lovers.

Sonnenblick, Jordan. **Curveball: The Year I Lost My Grip**. Scholastic, 2012. 304p. \$17.99. 978-0-545-32069-6. Grades 6-9. When freshman Pete throws out his elbow and can't pitch any more, he turns to photography and meets a vivacious girl in class. His awkward attempts to show his interest in her, and his best friend's over-the-top macho advice, lead to funny scenes. Meanwhile, Pete's sad about his grandfather, a photographer whose memory is fading, in this great combination of sweetness and humor.

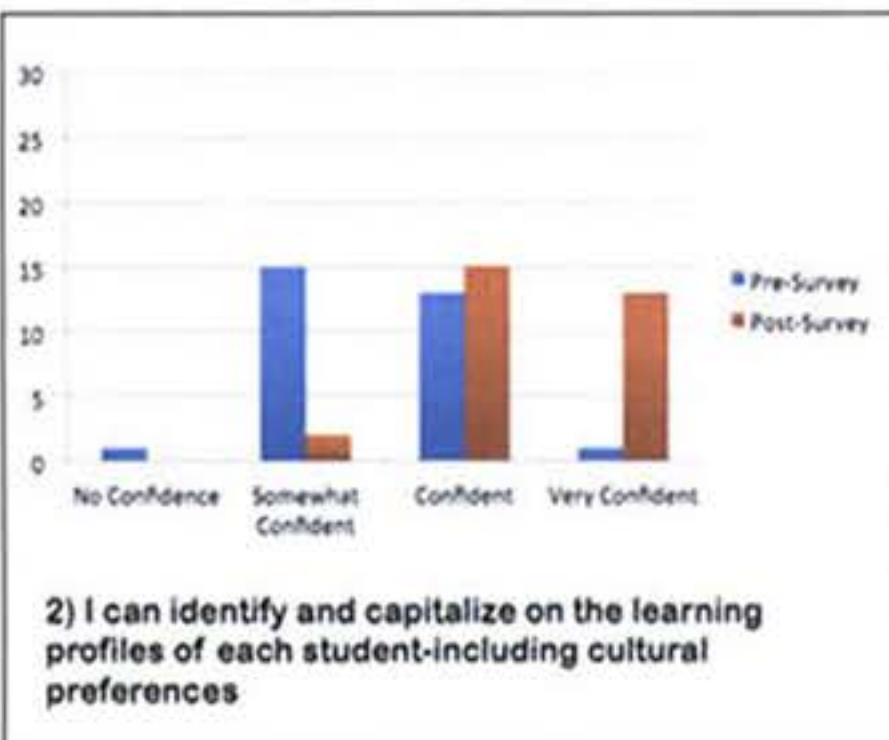
Turnage, Sheila. **Three Times Lucky**. Dial, 2012. 256p. \$16.99. 978-0-8037-3670-2. Grades 4-7. Sixth-grader Mo lives in a sleepy Southern town with an eccentric couple who found her as a baby during a hurricane. Their cafe is the center of town life, which becomes livelier when a bank is robbed and someone is murdered. When Mo, a funny narrator with a warm heart, and her best friend set up a detective agency to solve the crimes, excitement ensues.



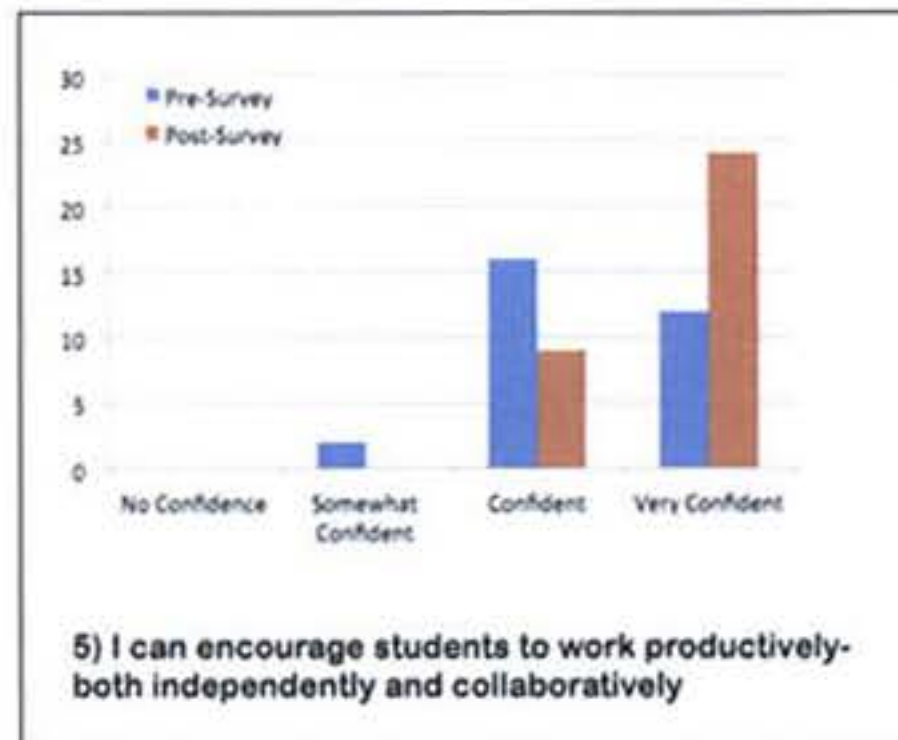
Statement 1



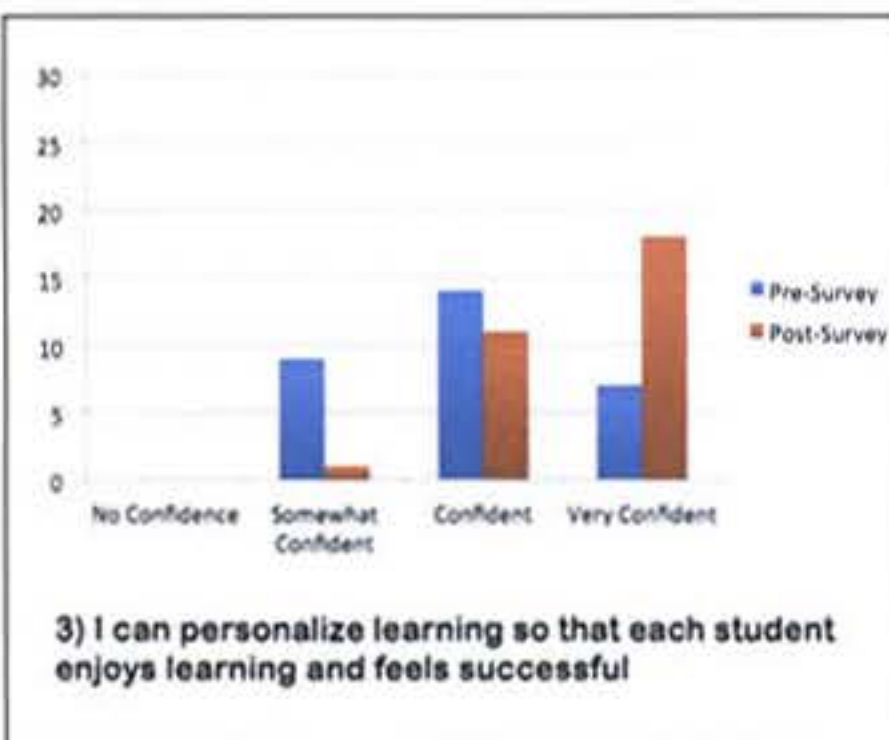
Statement 4



Statement 2



Statement 5



Statement 3

4. I can engage and challenge students while also providing developmentally appropriate learning activities

5. I can encourage students to work productively – both independently and collaboratively

We asked candidates to rate their level of confidence from 1 to 4, with

- 1 = No Confidence
- 2 = Somewhat Confident
- 3 = Confident
- 4 = Very Confident

For their online learning during the following week, candidates read Summers' (2010) full article and reflected on what they had learned and how they would apply

that learning in their own future practice as a school librarian. Through their reflections, they shared their ideas and plans for providing inclusion through relationships built on respect, and providing authentic learning through choice and relevance. Based on their reflections, we knew they were beginning to raise their awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices. Candidates were then tasked with locating and watching two videos from *Teaching Tolerance*, and once again reflected on what they had learned and how they would apply that learning in their own future practice as a school librarian. Candidates began to ask questions about connecting to their students on a personal level and ensuring high achievement by addressing multiple learning styles. They began to examine their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, and confront biases that may have influenced their current teaching practices. Their awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices was beginning to peak.

We were excited about candidates returning for our next class session in October, and the instruction and activities we had planned for them. They had not

yet had the opportunity to discuss their thoughts, questions, and “AHA” moments with each other. We wanted our first activity of the class session to provide a framework for candidates to share and discuss in a new way by making connections between the big concepts they had reflected on, and their day-to-day teaching practices in the school library.

As candidates entered the classroom, they noticed white boards with the following statements: 1) *Honoring each student's culture, heritage, language, and life experiences*; 2) *Ethically treating students from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds*; and 3) *Ensuring each student benefits academically, socioculturally, and linguistically in his or her educational setting*. Candidates were asked to take a moment and read each of these Culturally Responsive Teaching Goals. They were to choose a goal, and on sticky notes write down two to three pieces of evidence that would demonstrate how they could meet that goal. As an elbow-partner activity, candidates shared their two to three pieces of evidence, without sharing the goal that the evidence pertained to. We wanted our candidates to understand that their pieces of evidence could fit multiple goals. Each of the candidates then went over to the goal they had chosen, and shared their pieces of evidence with others who had chosen the same goal. Critical conversations ensued as candidates quickly realized that the pieces of evidence are the teaching practices that ensure they are meeting culturally responsive teaching goals.

The final learning opportunity of the evening included a panel of school librarians from culturally diverse schools in the Omaha Public Schools District. The populations include those with dual-language programs, high poverty, socioeconomic diversity, migrant and refugee students, and integrated special needs students. The panel consisted of three elementary school librarians, one middle school librarian, and one high school librarian, each of whom practices culturally responsive teaching by creating an environment of trust and acceptance for students and their families, resulting in greater opportunities for

student success. As candidates listened to the panel members' stories of learning about and connecting to the lives and experiences of their students, and embracing the families and communities as resources to contribute to the educational growth of those students, we sensed a shift in the culture of our own classroom. Our candidates began to share with the panel their own stories of how they may have overlooked the strengths of their students due to cultural differences, and they openly reflected on current teaching practices in their classrooms and proposed changes for teaching practices as school librarians. These school librarian candidates began to recognize their own personal biases and pre/misconceptions, as well as those in our educational system as a whole. They also began to recognize more personal pieces of evidence, which demonstrate their current engagement in culturally responsive teaching practices.

As our class session drew to a close, we once again posed the survey with the same five statements regarding culturally responsive teaching and anticipated a change in their confidence for promoting and providing a culturally responsive school library. As the results show, we were not disappointed. Our candidates' confidence levels had grown.

As our UNO Library Science Education Program candidates explored their personal histories and experiences, their confidence levels for being culturally responsive school librarians increased. As instructors in the Special Methods: School Library course, we are convinced that by raising our candidates' awareness of culturally responsive teaching practices, we have in turn raised their confidence in creating trusting and caring environments where all students will become more successful through relevant and authentic learning. Although we are far from “done” in our formal instruction of culturally responsive teaching in the school library, we are pleased with the data that we have accumulated thus far. We hope that our candidates have come to learn that when we celebrate the differences and similarities that we each bring into our community

of learning, we become more introspective of our teaching practices and consider how we might transform our teaching practices to be inclusive of all learners.

#### REFERENCES:

Summers, L. (2010). Culturally responsive leadership in school libraries. *Library Media Connection*, 28(5), 10-13.

---

Bridget Kratt is a faculty member for the University of Nebraska at Omaha Library Science Education Programs. She is currently working on her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with an emphasis in school libraries. Bridget can be reached at [bkratt@unomaha.edu](mailto:bkratt@unomaha.edu).

Courtney Pentland is the school librarian at Burke High School in Omaha, Nebraska and an Adjunct Professor for the University of Nebraska at Omaha Library Science Education Programs. Courtney can be reached at [Courtney.pentland@ops.org](mailto:Courtney.pentland@ops.org)