Yet there are too many instances where students of color can matriculate from grade to grade and not be exposed to core texts, and in some cases supplemental texts, that are reflective of who they are culturally and linguistically. The first step toward cultural authenticity is grounded in a commitment to guaranteeing access to culturally relevant texts.

**Question:** Is your school/district committed to giving students access to books that are mirrors and windows?

**Step 2: Know your brand of culturally responsive teaching**

Whether teaching in a very diverse school setting or with a homogenous population, cultural and linguistic responsiveness is necessary for any classroom, especially as it applies to increasing academic literacy for all students. Variations of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) include culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, cultural proficiency, cultural competency, and culturally sustaining. Regardless of the name, CRT pushes teachers to recognize their own cultures and the cultures of their students.

When it comes to selecting culturally relevant texts, knowing your brand of CRT is imperative. The brand that fits best with seeking cultural authenticity is cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR), which focuses specifically on going to where the students are culturally and linguistically for the purpose of bringing them to where they need to be academically.

The basis of this brand is four words: validate, affirm, build, and bridge. To validate and affirm means making legitimate and positive that which historical institutional knowledge, research, social media, and mainstream media have made illegitimate and negative about traditionally marginalized cultures and languages. Students have been told their cultural and linguistic behaviors are bad, incorrect, insubordinate, disrespectful, and disruptive. In CLR, educators refute this narrative when talking to, relating to, and teaching students.

An equal part of validating and affirming is building and bridging. This is where the focus on school culture or traditional behaviors occurs. These behaviors are reinforced with activities that require expected behaviors in traditional academic settings and in mainstream cultural environments. Ultimately, the goal is for all students to learn situational appropriateness, which is determining what the most appropriate cultural and linguistic behavior is for the situation and to do so without losing one’s cultural and linguistic self in the process.

**Questions:** What is your brand of CRT, and is it conducive to cultural authenticity?

**Step 3: Know the three types of culturally responsive texts**

The capacity to be authentic is hinged on how texts are selected and purchased. The selection process must include an awareness of the three types of culturally responsive texts to decide which materials are most authentic and appropriate. The three types of texts are culturally authentic, culturally generic, and culturally neutral.

Culturally authentic texts are the preferred type of text for the culturally responsive educator. A culturally authentic text is a piece of fiction or nonfiction that illuminates the authentic cultural experiences of a particular group—whether it addresses religion, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, or geographic location. The language, situations, and illustrations must depict culture in an authentic manner. Examples are *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (Balzer + Bray), *Ghost* by Jason Reynolds (Atheneum), and *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales (Neal Porter). For more examples of texts, visit [responsivereads.com](http://responsivereads.com).

Culturally generic texts feature characters of various racial identities but contain few and/or superficial details to define the characters or storylines. Culturally generic texts tend to focus on mainstream cultural values but with the use of nonmainstream characters. Many culturally generic texts qualify as “multicultural.” A current example is *Everything, Everything* by Nicola Yoon (Ember) and a classic example is *Corduroy* by Don Freeman (Puffin).

Culturally neutral texts feature characters of “color,” but the stories are drenched with a traditional or mainstream theme, plot, and/or characterization. Culturally neutral texts are the least preferred texts because they are essentially race based. The only aspect of these texts is the color of the character’s skin. Note, however, that there are always exceptions, as there are many quality texts that build literacy skills but are still culturally neutral. What you need to avoid is using a culturally neutral text thinking it is culturally authentic. Examples are the Randi Rhodes, Ninja Detective series by Octavia Spencer (Simon & Schuster) and *The Season of Styx Malone* by Kekla Magoon (Wendy Lamb).

**Question:** How many culturally authentic texts are in your library?

**When does the road to authenticity begin?**

Now! Granted, these three basic steps are easier said than done, but they are the prerequisites to equitable outcomes for your students. A commitment to have culturally responsive texts is a necessary ingredient.

Knowing the brand of culturally responsive teaching you are using will determine your level of authenticity. Understanding the types of culturally responsive texts will give you focus and precision in your journey to responsiveness.

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**ILA Intensive: Nevada**

Sharroky Hollie will be a keynote speaker at ILA Intensive: Nevada, a two-day event focusing on equity and access to literacy taking place June 21–22, 2019, in Las Vegas, NV. For more information, visit literacyworldwide.org/nevada.
STICKING WITH IT

The importance of task persistence

By Jenny Nordman

For many teachers, increasing reading motivation is toward the top of their priority list because they understand the significance of instilling a genuine love of literature in their students. As a result, incentives abound that are meant to make reading more fun through earning points, giving rewards, having celebrations, and providing recognition. Although these methods can increase interest, an essential aspect of motivation is often overlooked: task persistence.
Based on a student’s internal volition, persistence involves the dedication to finish a task once it has been started, even if it becomes challenging. As a life skill, the benefit of task persistence is obvious. People who overcome barriers and finish what they start are more likely to be successful. Interestingly, the same concept applies to reading.

Research links literacy achievement to volition and has found that higher achieving readers display more effort. In this regard, motivation is defined not only by the impulse to pick up a book, but also by the impetus to continue to read that book, even if it is long or difficult. This concept holds true even for emergent readers, because effortful control in students as young as preschool has been reliable in predicting literacy achievement.

With task persistence being such an important evidence-based skill, how can teachers better facilitate its development in relation to reading and the acquisition of literacy concepts? More specifically, how can teachers cultivate the skills of students who are not only motivated to pick up a book, but also persist at reading content that may be complex or challenging?

**Strategies to increase reading persistence**

With these questions in mind, here are some practical strategies I have found to help build persistence in readers of all ages:

- **Have students graph their progress and set goals.** Students should be encouraged to graph their reading progress and set their own reading goals. This process can be based on a variety of measurable factors: number of books or chapters completed, words correct per minute, number of correct comprehension questions and, for younger students, the number of phonemes (or letter sounds) learned. Graphing and goal setting are concrete and student-driven practices. More important, they are motivating because learners are able to visualize their progress over time and celebrate successes when they meet the goals that they have set for themselves.

- **Make a Dedication vs. Excuses chart.** Sometimes students simply need to know what persistence means in order to apply more effort. One way to facilitate this understanding is by creating a Dedication vs. Excuses chart. When doing so, be explicit about expectations when reading and have students brainstorm what dedication looks like and sounds like. The same should be done for the excuses part of the chart, and this can be referred to frequently as students self-evaluate their behaviors while reading.

- **Model encouraging self-talk.** Students need to know that it is all right occasionally to become frustrated or discouraged when reading. However, they also need to know how to encourage themselves to persist when this happens. A good way to assist in this process is to model positive self-talk. For example, when reading aloud to the class, the teacher might say: “I am not sure what the author meant by that statement. That is a bit frustrating to me. However, I think I might get some clarity if I keep on reading, so I am not going to quit. I am going to press on.”

- **Praise effort instead of innate qualities.** Praise is a powerful and effective motivational tool. With this in mind, it is important for teachers to praise effort far more than “innate” qualities. In other words, rather than saying, “Tim, you are so smart,” a more effective way to offer praise would be the following: “Tim, I know that you picked out a challenging book. I am very pleased with your effort and persistence. Look, you are almost done, and think of how much you have learned and grown!” This type of praise is both specific and encouraging, and it promotes task persistence and effortful control for students of all ability levels.

- **Provide time for reflection and self-evaluation.** Giving students a chance to reflect on their own successes and growth is important. This can be done through a specific self-evaluation task or even just having students write a few sentences on how they perceive their reading growth. Either way, the point is to help students see the connection between their effort and achievement.

**The positive impact**

Research has shown that students who apply themselves and show effortful control while reading also show higher levels of reading achievement. By providing students with opportunities to build their task persistence, teachers can help those who struggle with this volitional skill to become more effective readers.

As a bonus, building reading persistence will also aid students in other academic areas and will help to create more confident, effective learners.