

## What they really bring to class



This is exactly what it looks like. This is a box full of stuff.

Inside the box, you will find a teddy bear, *The Life Pursuit* by Belle & Sebastian and *The Sun Came* by Sufjan Stevens, and an old copy of *Alice in Wonderland*. There's a cassette tape called "Bull Frogs and Butterflies," which I had entirely memorized when I was 6. Dig deeper and find a copy of the New Testament, the first draft of my great-great-grandfather's memoirs, the diary I kept when I was eleven, and plastic dinosaurs (when given the opportunity to throw in plastic dinosaurs, who can resist?).

Each of these miscellaneous articles from my household represent the knowledge, culture and experience that I and every other individual brings into the classroom daily.

Chapter 3 on Learning and Transfer from *How People Learn* resonated with me. The reality is that each one of our students comes into the classroom with boxes and boxes of miscellaneous stuff: childhood experiences (both positive and negative), games they've discovered or mastered, songs they've learned by heart, unique family history, and critical cultural distinctions. Going back to our reading from Delpit, even the very ways that we give directions in the classroom (e.g.

“Is that where there scissors go?” “Put the scissors there.”) can change meaning depending on the background and family life of our students.

If we as teachers hope to foster understanding, we must become aware of the intricacies of the individuals who enter our classrooms daily. In practice, this means taking the time to “unpack the box.” (56-58) This relates to both content and skill. A lesson on the urban development of South Africa may never be able to compete with a student’s iron conception that Africa is a land of lions, zebras and hyenas (ref: The Lion King). Additionally, students may be incredibly skilled at deducing theme from familiar songs, but fail to understand how this same type of thinking can transfer to the novel they are reading in their World Culture’s class.

Ultimately, “all learning involves transfer from previous experiences.” (68) Transfer requires taking inventory of the box of stuff, making connections, and helping students “engage in ‘deliberative practice’ that includes active monitoring of one’s learning experiences.” (59) In so doing, students can apply classroom learning to everyday in a meaningful way.

#### References:

- Bransford, John D. et. al. “Learning and Transfer,” Chapter 3 in *How People Learn: Body, Mind, Experience, and School*. Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. 2000.
- Delpit, Lisa D. “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children.” *Harvard Educational Review* (58, 3). August 1988.