



3-1-2008

## Thriving in the Multicultural Classroom: Principles and Practices for Effective Teaching, by Mary Dilg

Mary McCoy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce>

---

### Recommended Citation

McCoy, M. (2008). Thriving in the Multicultural Classroom: Principles and Practices for Effective Teaching, by Mary Dilg. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 11 (3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1103122013>

This Book Review is brought to you for free with open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for publication in *Journal of Catholic Education* by the journal's editorial board and has been published on the web by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information about Digital Commons, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu). To contact the editorial board of *Journal of Catholic Education*, please email [JCE@nd.edu](mailto:JCE@nd.edu).

today are gone tomorrow, with a new name or location, or they may have just disappeared into the ether. It can be quite frustrating” (p. xi). Lerman used good judgment in having a cd-rom included. The accessibility of locating the websites was practical given that the addresses did not have to be typed in. However, the practicality of creating a book that appears to be outdated upon publication is questionable. Regardless, this is a good resource for school personnel.

*Jim Deputy is an assistant principal at Clearwater Central Catholic in Clearwater, FL.*

---

## **THRIVING IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING**

MARY DILG  
TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, 2003  
\$23.95, 240 PAGES

*Reviewed by Mary McCoy*

Dilg explains how critical, yet difficult, it is for teachers to create thriving, successful classrooms made up of students who come from different groups and neighborhoods. In *Thriving in the Multicultural Classroom*, Dilg examines factors that complicate the coming together of students from multiple cultures. The author gives many wonderful examples of actual student conversations and writings taken from home and school. Dilg uses years of classroom experience along with educational research to give suggestions to classroom teachers working with different cultural backgrounds. This book is a must read for teachers seeking advice and assistance in understanding how to meet the needs of students in a multicultural classroom.

The author begins the book focusing on the students themselves. Dilg gives several different examples of actual students whose experiences of their journeys between home and school differ greatly. These different experiences and influences are brought to the classroom, which leads to the challenge for the teacher to understand and support these students' daily journeys. Dilg describes these journeys made each day: “For other students, leav-

ing each day the neighborhood of their home for the neighborhood of the school means losing touch with family, relatives, friends, and the community where they've been raised" (p. 21).

Dilg discusses at great length how the presence of history in the classroom influences who the students are and what they know. Dilg also stresses how important it is to understand the impact of history in the classroom: "Understanding the impact of history in the classroom can lead to deeper and richer experiences for students and teacher" (p. 39). Dilg makes it clear that teachers need to recognize this power of history in their classrooms. They must acknowledge and discuss its power.

It is evident to Dilg that issues of racial and cultural identity affect how students relate to the day-to-day activities created in the classroom. Dilg offers some excellent questions teachers can use as a self-assessment of their classroom.

Do I understand something of the complexity of the issues surrounding emerging identities among these students in front of me and in my own life? Am I alert to multiple ways in which students' confusion, attitudes, or behaviors surrounding racial or cultural identity may affect moments in the classroom? Am I being attentive to the importance and significance of names? Are the choices I make on a daily basis ones that facilitate growth on the part of individuals and the group? Am I facilitating these students' growth in cross-cultural communication, understanding, knowledge, and relations? (p. 87)

The knowledge of these questions will help teachers truly think about what they teach. Dilg stresses the importance of this in a multicultural classroom, and also states how it can influence the degree to which teachers are able to support each of these students into adulthood. It can only help create a better understanding for the teacher in what he or she teaches and does not teach.

Throughout this book, Dilg uses personal experiences from the classroom of teachable moments, which are shared with the classroom teacher, in hopes that teachers can learn from some of Dilg's own mistakes. At one point in the book Dilg goes into detail about an assignment given to students. The assignment was to read a collection of poems by Carl Sandburg. Two of the titles of these poems were "Nigger" and "Singing Nigger." As discussion continued on these poems, several Black students spoke up. The poems had deeply offended them. Dilg knew a mistake had been made in assigning these poems, especially with no initial context:

In the face of what is a natural increase in tension among individuals and groups of individuals over the issues these types of texts raise, students and

teacher can come together in the classroom and use these texts as the basis of discussions that can lead us toward change, toward constructing a society among us that will move us beyond a racist past and present. (p. 155)

Since Dilg is a high school English teacher in Chicago, time is devoted to an entire chapter on multicultural reading lists in the classroom. "Reading takes us beyond the self as well; reading good works from multiple cultures equips each of us more fully for thinking about and living in the world" (p. 170). The author believes teachers must have a wide range of choices in literature. This allows as many opportunities for as many students as possible to make that personal connection. Dilg gives very detailed lists of the reading material and authors used in the classroom. These certainly give English high school teachers some fantastic suggestions and ideas to use in the classroom.

*Thriving in the Multicultural Classroom* is a book this reviewer recommends for Catholic school teachers, especially those in urban city schools, who are facing challenges in meeting the needs of students.

As so many classrooms are experiencing the largest increase of immigrant students since the beginning of the 20th century, teachers and administrators in Catholic schools can find plenty of applicable information for the classroom by reading this book. Although Dilg's experiences are those of a public school teacher, many of the author's suggestions and ideas may be easily implemented into a Catholic school culture. Being able to better serve and understand issues which might arise in cross-cultural teaching can only help teachers to better serve and understand students. In so doing, Catholic teachers and administrators can model and live out the teachings and mission of our Catholic schools.

*Mary McCoy is a campus director at St. Philip Neri School in Indianapolis, IN.*