

“Co-Constructing Low Achievement: A Study of A Senior English Class”

A brief overview of Joan Cone’s work

Background Information

Joan Cone has been teaching for over 30 years. She currently teaches 9th, 11th, and 12th grade English in El Cerrito, California. At her school, 39% of the students are African American, 27 % are white, 20% are Asian, 11% are Latino, and 2% are Filipino, less than 1 % are Pacific Islanders. The student body includes kids from some of the most affluent neighborhoods in the area as well as some of the poorest.

A leader in untracking efforts for many years at her school, Joan has worked with other teachers, administrators, and parents to abolish tracked classes at her school. In her research, she closely examines her own teaching strategies in addressing the varied needs of students in her untracked classes, and she provides insights into the ways that students, teachers, and schools contribute to low achievement.

Joan’s CASTL Project

After over 30 years of teaching, Joan encountered what she describes as the most difficult class of her career: her English 4/Advanced Essay Writing class. In her paper, ““Co-Constructing Low Achievement: A Study of A Senior English Class,”” Joan examines that class and its implications, stating her purpose as follows.

It is my purpose in this study to draw as vivid a portrait as I can of that first English 4/Advanced Essay Writing class so that teachers of similar classes and urban school reformers in other schools will see as I have come to see that that class—brought almost to a standstill by low-achievers and reluctant workers—did not come about by accident. It was constructed over time by the school as an institution, their teachers, and the students themselves. (p.15)

Joan’s full account provides a description of the role of teachers, students, and school structures in the co-construction of low achievement. We have chosen an excerpt to share with you that focuses on Joan’s description of her contribution to the problem and how she addresses that in her own teaching.

For more information about Joan’s work, visit her “project snapshot” online, which describes each major section of Joan’s paper and provides a full text version of the paper itself. The snapshot also includes links to some teaching strategies Joan used to address problems in her class, examples of the kinds of student work produced in her class, and a comparison of two student schedules that Joan uses to describe the school’s role in co-constructing low achievement. The online snapshot also includes “The Gap Is In Our Expectations” (her article recently published by *Newsday*) and a KQED radio discussion on honors programs in which Joan was a participant.

Joan Cone’s Project Snapshot

<http://kml2.carnegiefoundation.org/html/poster.php?id=78>