

Services for Black Youth

Course

Literacy Education: A Social Justice Issue [6:43]

https://players.brightcove.net/2566261579001/HyuWsfFhb_default/index.html?videoId=5412519772001

About

High quality literacy instruction is both a professional mandate and a social justice issue.

Transcript

Welcome. I'm Sandra Hughes-Hassell. In this workshop series, my colleague Casey Rawson and I will be sharing information from *Libraries, Literacy, and African American youth: Research & Practice*—a book we just edited along with our colleague Pauletta Bracy for Libraries Unlimited.

As we discussed in the introduction to this workshop series, we believe high-quality literacy instruction for African American youth is a critical social justice issue and a professional mandate that needs to be brought to the forefront of library practice. In this segment, we will explore some of the institutional inequities faced by Black children and teens, and unpack some of the major concepts and terms related to libraries' work with Black youth.

Before we get started, we'd like you to pause this video and take the brief multiple choice quiz linked in the resources section. Our intent with this quiz is not to measure what you know, but to prompt you to reflect on your perceptions about the educational opportunities available to African American youth in the United States and to compare it to the reality. Go ahead and take the quiz now.

Chances are, you were surprised by some of the answers to these questions. Statistics like these should begin to give you a sense of the obstacles to success placed in the paths of Black children and teens in the United States. Faced with an increased likelihood of attending schools that lack quality resources and experienced teachers and an increased likelihood of living in a community with underfunded school and public libraries, Black students have fewer opportunities for educational achievement than their White peers. National literacy proficiency rates and high school graduation rates for Black students show the devastating impact these inequities can have on Black students' academic success. Data focused on adult life outcomes—such as unemployment rates and incarceration rates—show that these educational inequities have consequences far beyond the classroom.

While these statistics are bleak, we want to point out that this data shows **inequities in society** which disproportionately affect Black youth and their families – NOT deficiencies in Black youth themselves or in their families or communities. This structural inequity is what we mean when we use the term *racism*: a system of advantage based on race. If you are used to thinking of racism in terms of personal prejudice or bigotry, this focus on the systemic nature of racism may be new to you.

In our work with librarians serving African American children and teens, we take an asset-based approach that seeks to create positive change by identifying and building on the knowledge, skills and lived experiences of Black youth and their families.

In the first few segments of this workshop series, we'll be discussing several research-based theories and frameworks that can inform librarians' work with Black youth. The first of these frameworks is Critical Race Theory, or CRT. CRT is a multidisciplinary approach developed by legal scholars in the 1970s to address the effects of race and racism in the U.S. legal system. Since then, it has been applied within the context of education to examine the role that race plays in a number of areas, including curriculum, school funding, and school discipline policies. It also has been applied in library science to examine the cultural responsiveness of school library programs to the needs of urban youth and the cultural relevance of texts used for literacy instruction.

A full discussion of CRT would take far longer than we have, so for now, we will simply introduce the five defining elements of CRT, as identified by researcher Daniel Solórzano. You can read more about CRT in our book which is included on your bibliography.

First, CRT scholars assert that race and racism are defining characteristics of American society—that both are embedded in the structures, policies, and practices of most American institutions and that both work to the detriment of people and communities of color. Racism can also intersect with other forms of marginalization and discrimination, such as classism or sexism.

Second, CRT scholars call for issues related to race and racism to be examined within a historical context—one that challenges the dominant narrative presented in schools that racism no longer exists. They argue that understanding how race developed as a construct in this country, as well as how the current biracial system formed and continues to be reproduced, are critical to dismantling institutional and structural racism and creating just and equitable opportunities for people of color.

Third, CRT challenges the dominant deficit model ideology used to explain educational achievement differences.

Fourth, CRT scholars view the experiential and cultural knowledge of people and communities of color as legitimate and critical to understanding the impact that race and racism are having on their lived experiences, including the educational opportunity gap that they experience. Counterstories—stories told by those whose voices are often marginalized or silenced, including Black youth—are one way that CRT scholars embrace this experiential and cultural knowledge.

Finally, CRT has a deep commitment to social justice and praxis. It challenges us not only to understand the social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to determine how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but also transform it for the better.

So at this point, you may be thinking, "Enough of the theory. What does all this discussion of theory mean to my work with African American youth? How is it going to help me close the literacy gap?" We believe that too often in education, we move from identifying a problem to immediately implementing solutions, without a thorough understanding of the bigger picture. The literacy and life outcome gaps confronting Black youth are situated in a larger historical, political, social, and legal context. There are no quick fixes. Short-term solutions do not address the enduring and fundamental problems that African American and Black youth face. If we want the changes that we make to our library programs and services to have a lasting impact, they must be informed by a theoretical framework that enables libraries to identify, challenge, and address the larger systemic issues that lie at the heart of the problem.

With that said, the remaining segments of this workshop will all combine theory with practical action steps you can take in your library to begin to improve your services to and with Black youth. In the next segment, Casey will introduce one framework for engaging and empowering students of color—Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

References:

DeCuir, Jessica T., and Adrienne D. Dixon. "So When It Comes Out, They Aren't that Surprised that It Is There': Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education," *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 5 (June-July 2004): 26-31.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefani. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, 2001.

Solórzano, Daniel G. "Images and Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping, and Teacher Education," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1997): 5-19.

Tate, William F., IV. "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications," *Review of Research in Education* 95, no. 1 (1997): 195-246.

Activities

Foundations for Your Learning

Context:

According to Sandra Hughes-Hassell and Casey H. Rawson, high-quality literacy education for African American youth is an issue of social justice and "a professional mandate that needs to be brought to the forefront of library practice." Critical Race Theory (CRT), introduced in this lesson, is among the research-based theories and frameworks applied in this workshop to build suggestions for everyday library practice. Establishing this theoretical foundation is necessary in order to plan practical steps in the context of the larger picture of systemic issues pertaining to race in America.

Instructions:

Following the instructions of Dr. Hughes-Hassell, begin this course by checking your understanding of educational opportunities available to African American students by

using the Check Your Knowledge in the Resources below. Review the answers at the bottom of the page.

What information was surprising to you to learn? What topic(s) introduced here do you want to investigate further?

Resources:



Entry ID: 2128524

Article

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Annotated Bibliography.](#)

MLA CITATION

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