Are You Prepared to Meet the Literacy Needs of African American Male Youth?

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K–12 Teaching and Learning · from the UNC School of Education
Goals

Present strategies for developing higher literacy rates and positive life outcomes for African American male youth.

Provide professional development resources that can be used to further our understanding of how to support the literacy development of African American male youth.

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African American Male Literacy & Life Outcomes

Only 14% of African American male 4th graders and 8th graders performed at or above the proficient level on national reading tests in 2011 (National Association for Educational Progress, 2011).

Fewer than half of African American men graduate from high school (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008).

African American men make up only 5% of the college population, yet they make up 40% of the prison population (Lewis, S. et al., 2010; West, H.C., 2009).

The unemployment rate is twice as high for African American men as it is for White men (Lewis, S. et al., 2010; West, H.C., 2009).

African American adolescents and young adults are 8 times more likely to be victims of homicide than White people in the same age group (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2010).
Vision for the Future

What is your vision for the African American Males you work with?
“Literacy is not just about decoding text. It is about becoming a superior human being that can act powerfully upon the world.”

-Ernest Morrell, Ph.D.
The Summit

Three day working meeting funded by the Institute for Museum & Library Services (IMLS)

Focus: How educators, librarians, and community organizations can support the literacy development of African American male youth?

Presentations by Alfred Tatum and Ernest Morrell
Panel sessions by researchers and practitioners
Panel discussion featuring six African American male students
Themes that Emerged from the Summit

High expectations are necessary for success

Students need instruction that is culturally congruent and materials that are authentic and relevant to their lives

Literacy instruction must include powerful texts that reflect African American male students' preferences and needs

Writing and reading must be connected in instruction

Voice and agency must be cultivated

The connection between popular culture and literacy development needs to recognized and built on

A network of support must be developed
Set High Expectations

“There is no research that says, ‘If I expose struggling African American boys to less, they will become excellent readers and writers.’”

-Alfred W. Tatum
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What expectations do you have for the African American male youth you work with? How do you convey your expectations to them/to their parents?
Utilize Culturally Congruent Instruction and Culturally Relevant Materials

Literacy Outcomes

Increases motivation to read & write (Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001)

Provides purpose for reading and writing (Hale, 2001)

Increases engagement in literacy activities

Improves recall & comprehension (Bell & Clark, 1998; McCullough, 2008)

Increases phonological awareness & fluency (McCollin & O'Shea, 2005)

Improves ability to navigate complex text (Duke, 2000)
Utilize Culturally Congruent Instruction and Culturally Relevant Materials

Life Outcomes

Leads to higher achievement

Connects classroom learning to real life activities

Supports racial identity development (Tatum, 2003)

Connects students with role models from the African American community

Introduces African American male students to potential career paths
Culturally Congruent Instruction

Nine dimensions of Afro Cultural Ethos

1. Spirituality: approaching life as essentially vitalistic and conducting one’s life as though supreme forces govern it

2. Affect: placing a premium on emotions/feelings

3. Harmony: viewing one’s fate as being interrelated with other elements of life

4. Oral Tradition: emphasizing oral and aural modes of communication and cultivating oral virtuosity

5. Social perspective of time: an orientation of time as passing through a social space; time is seen as recurring, personal, and phenomenological

(Boykin, 1983, 1986)
Culturally Congruent Instruction

6. Expressive individualism: the cultivation of a distinct personality and a proclivity for spontaneous, genuine personal expression.

7. Verve: preferring intense stimulation, variability, and action that is energetic, alive, and colorful.

8. Communalism: a commitment to social connectedness; being sensitive to the interdependence of people and committing to social connectedness over individual privileges.

9. Movement: interweaving of the ideas of rhythm and percussiveness often associated with music and dance into daily life.

(Boykin, 1983, 1986)
Culturally Congruent Instruction

How have you used culturally relevant instruction and materials with African American males? How have they responded?
Oral Tradition

Build on the figurative language that is found in the everyday life of African American youth (Hale, 2001)

Incorporate storytelling, spoken word, poetry, reader’s theater, and song into literacy instruction (Hale, 2001)

Utilize literature circles and book clubs that allow students to respond orally to texts (Lazar et al., 2012)

Provide opportunities for students to study African American Vernacular English as a legitimate language register (Fisher & Lapp, 2013)

Utilize writing instruction as a way to help students learn standardized English (Delpit, 1998)
Affect

Understand the lived experiences of African American male youth and how they respond to these experiences (Tatum, 2006, 2009)

Use texts that are stimulating and interesting to African American youth (Hale, 2001; Tatum 2009)

Encourage students to write about what they know (Tatum, 2011)

Include words that are meaningful and represent their experiences as a part of word study, word walls, and spelling and vocabulary instruction (Hale, 2001)

Incorporate the creative arts into literacy instruction (Hale, 2001)

Pay attention to and incorporate current events into literacy instruction (Tatum, 2006)

Utilize informational texts (Duke, 2000)
Verve, Movement, and Expressive Individualism

View the outgoing and lively nature of African American males as normal, rather than as behavior that needs to be corrected

Alternate quiet with active activities

Include hands-on activities, projects, and field trips as an integral part of literacy instruction

Diminish the use of worksheets, workbooks, textbooks, and skill-and-drill

Make movement an integral part of literacy development

Present information in a rhythmic way

Arrange the room so that it is aesthetically pleasing—sofas, easy chairs, rocking chairs, tables rather than desks, etc.

(Hale, 2001)
Communalism

Develop a nurturing relationship between yourself and each student and between each student and his peers (Hale, 2001)

Utilize small groups (Hale, 2001)

Lower the teacher-student ratio (e.g. connect with a local African American church) (Hale, 2001)

Emphasize cooperation over competition (Tatum, 2006, 2009)

Apprentice students to success (Tatum, 2006, 2009)

Utilize peer mentors and coaches (Boykin & Noguera, 2011)
Harmony

Place literacy in a meaningful context (Tatum, 2006, 2009)

Find ways to help African American male youth see the implications literacy has for their lives, their futures, and their communities (Tatum, 2006, 2009)

Build on the shared domains of literacy between the African American church and mainstream school (Lazar et al, 2013)

Integrate reading and writing into all aspects of the student’s day (Hale, 2001)

Develop thematic units that blend literacy learning with subject area content (Hale, 2001)

Foster the development of spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence (Hale, 2001)
The Power of Text

Enabling texts encourage and empower young men to take action in their own lives and the lives of others

Include literary and informational texts

May or may not feature African American characters or individuals

(Tatum, 2009)
Characteristics of Enabling Texts

Promote a healthy psyche (Tatum, 2009)

Reflect an awareness of the real world (Tatum, 2009)

Focus on the collective struggle of African Americans (Tatum, 2009)

Serve as a road map for being, doing, thinking, and acting (Tatum, 2009)

Recognize, honor, and nurture multiple identities (Tatum, 2009)

Demonstrate resiliency (Tatum, 2009)

Are interesting and provocative (Tatum, 2009)

Avoid caricatures (Tatum, 2009)

Include a mentor or a role model (Rawson & Hughes-Hassell, 2012)

Provide counterstories to the dominant narrative about African American male youth (Hughes-Hassell, 2013)
Examples of Enabling Texts

Can you think of other enabling texts?
Text Mediation: Tatum’s Framework

Literacy Platforms
Defining self
Becoming resilient
Engaging others
Building capacity
Other ___________

Introducing the Text (getting students into the text right away)
Required vocabulary (1-3 words)
Text to introduce-use an excerpt to get the students involved right away

Framing Question(s)

Writing Connection (calling attention to the text as a language model & helping students see themselves as writers)

Mediating Texts Around One of the Framing Questions
Assign pages to be read. Best to begin with one page of text and discuss it together before releasing responsibility to students

Evaluating the Discussion & Students’ Ongoing Needs in Future Discussions

Tatum, 2009
Alfred W. Tatum

READING for their LIFE

(Re) Building the Textual Changes of African-American Adolescent Males

By Michael Smith
**Introducing the Text:**

Sometimes I feel like I have walked into the middle of a movie. It is a strange movie with no plot and no beginning. The movie is in black and white, and grainy. Sometimes the camera moves in so close that you can’t tell what is going on and you just listen to the sounds and guess. I have seen movies of prisons but never one like this. This is not a movie about bars and locked doors. It is about being alone when you are not really alone and about being scared all the time...Maybe I could make my own movie... The film will be the story of my life. Not my life, but of this experience....I’ll call it what the lady who is the prosecutor called me. MONSTER. (p. 4-5)
Monster, by Walter Dean Myers

Framing Questions:

Does a person become a “monster” by choice or are they forced into becoming a “monster”?

What impact do the judgments of others have on self-esteem and self-efficacy?
Introducing the Text:

You know, I’ve been wondering lately,
Trying to figure out just how it could be
That we call each other brother,
And you still don’t know a thing about me. (p. 6)

The stars
On fire
Inside me
Shining
Refining
Reminding
Me
That only I define me
And
The brightness of my destiny. (p. 7)
You Don’t Even Know Me: Stories and Poems About Boys, by Sharon G. Flake

Framing Questions:

How does a person communicate their identity to others who refuse to view them as an individual?

Is it more important to belong to a group or to be an individual?
Connect Writing with Reading

Reasons African American men wrote historically:

- To define self
- To become resilient
- To engage others
- To build capacity

(Tatum, 2009)
Connect Writing with Reading

Create a Community of “brother authors” charged to:

- Write prudently and unapologetically, not only for yourself, but for future generations
- Become part of a storied lineage of Black authors
- Create a new national vision by putting [your] voice and vision on record…write new beginnings

(Tatum, 2011)
Connect Writing with Reading

How do you encourage African American male youth to write?
What forms of writing have you found to be most successful?
Untitled, By Brother Poet VI
12 years old

My mom don’t like me,
My family treats me like I’m a person on the street.
Most of my family never worries about their kids. Isn’t that something?
I cannot go next to my cousins.

So kill me. Let me roll over and die.
When I go, don’t let my writing go with me.
Let it stay with you.

I know people are getting tired of reading about my blank life because I am.
I can’t take it anymore.
Someone kill me, get it over.

I’d rather die and be remembered than live and be forgotten.
So when I turn to dust, don’t let my writing turn to ashes.
Young Man, you are just like your father. The resemblance is uncanny. You have the same face, your bodies have the same shape and you walk as if you took your first step from the same place! Your voice has the same pitch, you two have the same hobbies and you adorn the same attire. Well, I’ll be Damned if you’re not him.

Good Sir, I am not just like my father. We look and sound the same, the resemblance stops there. I walk with a purpose — he walks to move his feet. I like art and music and he prefers sports. I dress for success, and well, he dresses so that he isn’t naked. Good Sir, with all due respect You’ll Be Damned Because I am Not my father, nor would I ever want to be.
Cultivate Voice and Agency

Connects literacy to the real world

Empowers African American male students to make demands and change their communities

Builds a sense of self esteem and self trust

Shows them that their thoughts and ideas are important and worthy of sharing

Allows the integration of technology into learning in authentic and meaningful ways

UCLA/IDEA Summer Seminar Videos

(Morrell, 2002)
Cultivate Voice and Agency

Show students how to use tools that allow them to develop and utilize literacy skills to speak out and make a difference, such as:

- Filmmaking
- Podcasting
- Blogging
- Word Processing
- Website Creation
- Creative Writing
- Presentations

LITERACY
Traditional Literacy
Information Literacy
Media Literacy
What projects have you undertaken that provide African American youth with an opportunity to communicate their ideas to others and make changes in their schools/communities?
Connect Literacy Instruction to Popular Culture

Develops analytical skills that are transferable to the dominant literacies promoted in schools (textual, informational, technological, media, and etc.) (Morrell, 2002; Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010)

Promotes the critical examination of social and political issues (Morrell, 2002)

Motivates African American male youth to become creators of content, not just consumers (Morrell, 2002; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002)

Empowers African American male youth to engage in social action (Morrell, 2002)
Connect Literacy Instruction to Popular Culture
Connect Literacy Instruction to Popular Culture

How do you use popular culture in your work with African American male youth?
Create a Network of Support

Develop relationships with parents/guardians

- Talk to parents/guardians to learn how literacy is used at home (Lazar et al, 2012)

- Provide professional development for parents/guardians

- Create organizations modeled after the African American social club that allow parents/guardians to identify and share resources and cultural activities (Hale, 2001)

Form collaborative partnerships with other community organizations

- Build on established relationships

- Connect families with organizations with which they may be unaware
Create a Network of Support

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Build on established relationships

Connect families with organizations with which they may be unaware

What organizations might you form partnerships with in your community?
Create a Network of Support

Connect with African American churches in the community (Hale, 2001; Lazar et. al, 2012)

Engage mentors to provide guidance, pass on knowledge, share experience, provide a background for solid judgment, and establish friendship

- Adult mentors
- Peer mentors
- “Temporary” mentors
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- Adult mentors
- Peer mentors
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How are you connecting African American male youth to mentors?
Recap

Set high expectations

Utilize instructional strategies that are culturally congruent and materials that are authentic and relevant

Select powerful texts that reflect the preferences and needs of African American male youth

Connect writing and reading
Recap

Cultivate voice and agency

Build on the connection between popular culture and literacy development

Connect with the larger community

Develop strong school library programs and partner with school librarians
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Be Courageous
Selected Resources

Building a Bridge to Literacy for African-American Male Youth: A Call to Action for the Library Community (bridgetolit.web.unc.edu)
In addition to providing free downloadable copies of our report and additional information about the summit, our website includes many other resources including a bibliography of related research and lists of outside resources such as websites, blogs, book lists, and selection tools to help you.

Libraries, Literacy, and African American Male Youth
http://librariesliteracyandaamaleyouth.weebly.com/
This free professional development resource is for school and public librarians to help them develop programs and services that will best meet the needs of African American male youth. This resource, developed by Amanda Hitson, is divided into ten modules that focus on research-based strategies for working with African American male youth in school and public libraries.
Selected Resources

A Celebration of Identity Bibliography
   This list of 256 titles that feature black males was prepared by Jane M. Gangi, PhD (janegangi@snet.net) for the Summit.

Building a Bridge to Literacy for Adolescent African American Males
https://sites.google.com/site/bridgetoliteracy/
   This website provides background information about Dr. Alfred Tatum’s research, and details the work we have done to bring his research to the attention of the library community. Our aim is to encourage the library community to join the national efforts of organizations such as the Council on the Great City Schools to support the literacy needs of African-American male adolescents.
Contact Information

For any questions or comments about today’s presentation, please contact us via email at:

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Thank you, from LEARN NC
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Boykin, A.W., & Noguera, P. (2011). Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.


References


References


References


