

Chapter 6

Multicultural Literature as Critical Literature: Redefine the Trajectory for Black Students

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ABSTRACT

In traditional classroom literature, students of color are often left out prompting division, isolation, and discrimination among racial and ethnic groups. The purpose of this literature analysis is to argue the need for multicultural literature to develop identity and social capital for students of color. The literature analysis allows for research from multiple scholars to be used to argue for a particular action in education. The results suggest that an inclusion of multicultural literature demonstrates an increase in engagement, academic achievement, community engagement, and purpose. The need for multicultural literature has been discussed in academia for several decades; however, the implementation and incorporation has yet to manifest fully across educational programs, with stakeholders, or across districts. This review serves to illuminate both the necessity and strategies for multicultural literature.

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INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to redefine the trajectory of education for Black students. As our education system changes year-to-year, it seems that educational perspectives are still rooted in deficit-thinking with little concern of cultural perspectives (Gay, 2018). The inclusion of cultural practices and multicultural literature stems from ensuring all learners have the same opportunities for success despite the varying circumstances one faces internally or externally. Multicultural literature within this text relates to literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, media formats) from the African diaspora. Sometimes as educational stakeholders, from classroom teachers to the U.S. Department of Education policymakers, we fall short in understanding the importance of how multicultural literature and critical cultural pedagogical practices assist in the identity and social capital of student development that leads to academic achievement (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2012; Nieto, 2017). Developing identity and social capital through the practice of incorporating critical literacies, such as multicultural literature, is an approach worth exploring to assist in providing both social and emotional supports for Black students. While the incorporation of multicultural literature is not new, nor is the research emphasis, there is not enough evidence to suggest that schools are incorporating multicultural literature to create learner-led critical literacy classrooms that address and remove personal biases, have high expectations for all learners, and increase student achievement.

To genuinely engage in an exploration of multicultural literature, a Critical Race Theory lens is helpful to provide an increased understanding regarding the development of identity and social capital for Black students, two components necessary to ensure Black students receive whole-learner education practices. Through a Critical Race Theory lens, educators have additional resources to challenge, defend, or qualify themes, discussions, and texts within the context of racial identity – historically and contemporarily (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Incorporating multicultural literature within a Critical Race Theory lens is to illustrate the need for multicultural literature to ensure whole-child development with social and emotional supports that will lead to further exploration of identity and social capital.

BACKGROUND

Understanding the experiences of Black students warrant an examination of the historical underpinnings, roles, and functions of race and ethnicities. The expectation is that students, teachers, and other educational stakeholders will have the knowledge to engage in respectful, empathetic, and critical discourse to approach and support students in their engagement with critical literacies, community service, and global citizenship.

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