

Creating a Better Path to Literacy: The Relationship of Black Males and Literature at a NFFS (Grades 6-8)

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Introduction

Abstract

Tallahassee houses two major North Florida Freedom Schools with the goal of providing culturally relevant and literacy rich instruction to almost 200 students.

Throughout the country, research has documented lower performance of Black males on standardized reading measures, often framed uncritically in terms of “an achievement gap” (Wood & Jocius, 2013). In contrast, the CDF Freedom Schools provide a culturally relevant model designed to support positive relationships with literature, and researchers have shown literacy growth throughout students’ time attending the program (Roehrig, Clemons, & Norris, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to take a closer look at the relationship of black males and literature at the North Florida Freedom Schools. This study sought out black males, their interest in literature, and individual motivation through their experience with the culturally relevant instruction/discussion and culturally relevant literature at the Freedom School and in their personal lives.

Aims of the Research

The aims of this research was to better understand the relationship of black males enrolled in the North Florida Freedom School (NFFS) and literature. Questions were created to better understand each boys individual circumstance and cultural background and how that tied into their response to the kinds of literature at the freedom school.

In addition, it was aimed at looking into black males, literature, and what motivates them to engage with literature. Specifically, what they found interesting and exciting about the literature at NFFS.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions used for this study:

1. What relationships do black males have with literature in Freedom Schools?
2. How do black males respond to literature with characters who identify in ways they also identify?

Method

Research Design

This study used a case study design. Case study methodology was selected because of the importance of closely studying the phenomenon of scholars’ self-identification, or their ability frame their own identity through narratives in their interview responses.

Participants

The participants for this study ($N=4$) were selected using a non-random, purposeful sampling technique based on the following pre-determined criteria:

- Identify as Black
- Male
- Middle School (Grades 6-8)
- Enrolled in Freedom School for at least 4 weeks

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over the entire six week camp period and included multiple data sources.

Data collection timeline:

Week 1: Surveys and observations.

Week 2: Observations.

Week 3: Observations.

Week 4: Observations.

Week 5: Observations.

Week 6: Observations and interviews.

Observations: weekly (>2).

Survey: During week 1 prior to observations and interviews.

Interview: Face-to-face and one-on-one.

Results

Conclusion

Black males observed in this study showed interest in the curriculum, specifically, in the kinds of novels being read during class time and the activities associated with each text.

Multiple black males interviewed stated they learned:

- More vocabulary words/definitions
- Topics of protest/how to protest

Multiple black males interviewed stated they enjoyed:

- Chants/Harambe
- All books read

Discussion

The role that cultural relevancy and community plays in black male students’ literacy and lives seems to be both integral and defining. Weeks after reading novels, many of the black males interviewed were able to summarize large portions of the novels they read and were able to express their favorite parts indicating engagement and interest.

Key References

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