

Examining Culturally Relevant History Pedagogy: Student Engagement, Civic Participation, and Self-Perceptions in a Minority Classroom

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Introduction

Abstract

The use of culturally relevant pedagogy serves to challenge systems of oppression and provide a powerful teaching model that promotes cross-cultural knowledge, civic participation, and engagement in teaching materials. Implementing culturally responsive curriculum in schools is an important intervention that provides students an opportunity to better understand power structures and develop the tools to expand their world views (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This study seeks to contribute to this body of research by investigating students' engagement with Black history in a minority classroom. I hope this research can illuminate the ways that intentionally teaching against a Eurocentric curriculum can motivate and empower historically marginalized students whose voices and histories have often been relegated to the periphery of mainstream curriculums.

Aims of the Research

This study aims to examine student engagement, self-perceptions, and ideas about civic participation as it relates to culturally relevant pedagogy in a predominately minority K-12 classroom. In exploring students' perceptions, this study will amplify the experiences of historically marginalized students learning Black history in culturally responsive ways. I am interested in investigating how culturally relevant pedagogy, specifically the teaching of Black history, relates to self-perceptions, cultural connections, and one's role as a civic participant. By exploring students' perceptions, the study intends to better understand what students value about culturally relevant pedagogy.

Research Questions

- How do students engage with culturally relevant history pedagogy?
- What are students' feelings about learning Black history?
- What are students' self-perceptions as thinkers and civic participants in a predominately minority classroom utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy?

Method

Research Design

This is a case study that utilizes observational research, survey questions, and semi-structured interviews to examine student engagement, self-perceptions, and ideas about civic engagement. In the study, I used culturally relevant teaching materials and led a class discussion about the Greensboro civil rights sit-ins. I collected data from pre-surveys, class discussions, and semi-structured interviews with the participants. I also analyzed learning artifacts from the history lessons to identify emergent themes.

Participants

Participants are 12 second- and third-grade students at a private school in Florida with a predominately minority student population. As students of the school, they are engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy and participate in Black history lessons throughout the school year, including a Black history program every February.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data from class lessons and utilized both notes and audio recordings to document student engagement during discussions and activities over a period of 4 weeks. Additionally, I administered a survey before beginning research and conducted semi-structured interviews with six participants to learn more about their feelings and perceptions regarding their experiences learning Black history.

After engaging students in the history lesson, I conducted a class discussion and engaged students in an activity where they drew a picture or wrote down their thoughts regarding either the lesson or more broadly learning Black history. Audio recordings were transcribed and then manually coded for emergent themes.

Preliminary Results

Conclusion

Data analysis is ongoing. The participants were generally enthusiastic about the history lesson and contributed to class discussions. Participants discussed issues including racism, inequality, disobedience, and freedom. When discussing the Greensboro sit-ins, students displayed a high level of engagement during the class discussion. Several referenced feelings of sadness, anger, and disbelief about the treatment of civil rights protesters and supported the use of protest for social change. In the semi-structured interviews, students expressed the importance of learning Black history to know about Black leaders, connect the past to the present, and understand more about their culture. Additionally, students reported feelings of joy and confidence associated with learning Black history.

Discussion

Utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy in K-12 classrooms has the potential to improve critical thinking skills, engage students in more meaningful ways, and foster important discussions about social inequities and civic participation. This study aims to better understand how the teaching of Black history in culturally relevant ways can inform students' self-perceptions, shape ideas concerning civic participation, and engage students with historical materials. The research adds to the body of literature that illuminates students' interactions with this type of pedagogy in a predominately minority classroom. Lastly, in an era of right-wing censorship of discussion of race and history, this research will provide essential insights into the effects of teaching a non-Eurocentric history curriculum for minority students.

Key References

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PURPOSE

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