Teaching Adolescent Literacy to Racially Diverse Students

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Outline

Abstract

Racially diverse urban youths are struggling within the public school systems. This particular demographic of students consistently performs low on reading achievement tests throughout America. The problem lies with an abundant number of White educators who are unable to meet the needs of their diverse student body. This leads in to the two overarching inquiry questions for the literature review: How can White educators support the academic achievement of urban adolescents in the classroom? Specifically, how can educators improve adolescent literacy within urban environments?

I used the Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay's culturally relevant pedagogy as framework for finding literature themes uncovering the promising practices. The four themes I revealed were culturally relevant curricula, cultural congruity in classroom instruction, cultural learning community and cross-cultural communications. The promising practices I reiterate for the reader are implementing a balanced reading instruction, utilizing specific comprehension reading strategies, incorporating popular culture in the classroom, choosing culturally relevant literature, developing situations to empower students, and creating a cultural learning community. A reflection piece is also incorporated where I implemented several beneficial strategies to help develop students' literacy.

The future implications of my findings are that culturally relevant teaching practices should be utilized in all classrooms. The promising practices that were uncovered can be successfully implemented with all students and do not need to be restricting to racially diverse students. More classroom-based research must be done to continue gauging and using innovative literacy instruction styles.

Keywords: adolescent literacy, racially diverse and urban youth, culturally relevant

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Understanding the struggles and characteristics of urban youth is imperative towards narrowing the achievement gap for students in the American school system. According to the National Governors' Association, as cited by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006), the achievement gap is "a matter of race class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts" (p. 3). The teachers in most classrooms are "overwhelmingly, white, middle-aged, and monolingual English speakers…the cultural makeup of the teacher education profession is embarrassingly homogeneous" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 38). However, the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) projects "ethnic groups of color will increase from 28 percent of the nation's population today, to 50 percent in 2050." As a White language arts teacher, I am constantly looking for the promising practices that will combat the cultural discontinuity and improve the academic achievement with both racially and ethnically diverse adolescents. This leads to my two overarching inquiry questions: How can White educators support the academic achievement of urban adolescents in the classroom? Specifically, how can educators improve adolescent literacy within urban environments?

In order to answer the leading research questions, I will first identify the issues White educators and ethnically diverse students face in urban settings and explore inadequacies within the teaching of adolescent literacy in racially diverse classrooms. Then I will define important terms that arise throughout the research and explain the methods I used for the inclusion of particular texts. Subsequently, I will review the literature to discuss the themes surrounding White educators and adolescent literacy within urban classrooms. I will also incorporate a reflection piece with personal insights regarding my

experiences at Youth Encouragement Services. I will describe important promising

practices for educators and will conclude with an implications section.

The Issues

Urban adolescents are fighting for their lives every day at school (Ladson-Billings,

2000). African American and poor urban students continually receive low reading and

math scores, are disproportionately placed in low-ability tracks and special education

programs, suspended, and expelled (Irvine, 1999). In 2005, almost half of the Black ,

Hispanic, and Native American students were achieving below basic NAEP reading

achievement levels (Department of Education, as cited by Howard, 2010). The educational

system is failing these students. Common explanations for the poor performance of racially

diverse students are socioeconomic, sociopathalogical, genetic and cultural incongruence.

Yet, Irvine explains "of all the things that are important to having good schools, nothing is

as important as teachers and what they know, believe, and can do" (p. 249). Teachers are

instrumental in the success of their students. However, few teacher preparation programs

are designed for teaching in an urban setting with low achieving students.

The majority of educators are White middle-class females. Overall, White educators

create a color gap between their students that results in a disruptive cultural mismatch.

Most White educators have lower expectations for students of color, exhibit colorblind

ideology, lack racial identity awareness, and have little understanding of racism in the lives

of their students. The majority of White institutions are slow to respond to this growing

cultural gap within their teaching education programs (Sleeter, 2001). As a result, pre-

service teachers enter urban settings unprepared to adequately teach their racially diverse

students. Pre-service programs need to address the issues of culture in an urban setting

and K-12 educators must develop practices that can combat the low achievement of their culturally and racially diverse students.

Terms

Two terms must be clarified before reviewing relevant literature pertaining to the adolescent literacy of racially diverse students. The first term is Culturally relevant pedagogy, which is widely used within teaching practices and throughout the articles (Cooper, 2003; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000). The pedagogy calls for teachers to be aware of the cultural characteristics of their environments and experiences as well as the perspectives of their diverse students (Gay, 2002). The three main tenets of culturally relevant teaching are academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The combination creates culturally responsive teaching techniques that can be extremely beneficial for urban adolescents.

Urban youth is the second important term. The phrase, urban youths, lacks a simplistic definition. As understood within my Learning, Diversity, and Urban studies program, urban youths are adolescents within inner-city schools, commonly from low socio-economic environments, experience a higher percentage of single parent homes, as well as include a higher proportion of racially diverse students. Understanding these important terms creates a better foundation for understanding the reviewed empirical literature.

Methods

The empirically based research I incorporated in my paper focused on adolescent literacy in urban settings. I chose to focus on literature that included a combination of the following key words: adolescent literacy, racially diverse and urban students, and

culturally responsive pedagogy. The literature was collected throughout my time in the Learning, Diversity, and Urban studies program and represents a combination of empirical articles and highly referenced scholarly books. My organizational framework is based upon the main principles of culturally responsive pedagogy as defined above in my Term section.

Literature Review

The literature review is arranged into four categories: culturally relevant curricula, cultural congruity in classroom instruction, cultural learning community, and cross-cultural communication. The categories are derived from Gay's (2002) principles of culturally responsive teaching.. Each section discusses aspects of adolescent literacy and reviews articles that may include multiple aspects of the culturally responsive principles.

Culturally Relevant Curricula

Freeman and Freeman (2004) discuss the importance of connecting students to culturally relevant texts. They explain students "made higher quality miscues and produced better retellings with the culturally relevant story" (p. 7). When teachers utilize culturally relevant books "students are able to understand the books more fully, and, as a result, become more engaged in their reading" (p. 7). In addition, students can explore their own identities, be exposed to a wide range of experiences and are able to see themselves within the texts. Freeman and Freeman's (2004) article also discuss the attributes of a culturally relevant book and provide examples of texts for educators to use with English language learners. The authors conclude culturally relevant books ensure students are connecting the texts they read to their own lives.

In the book *Reading for their Li*fe, Tatum (2009) advocates for the development of textual lineages to support literacy development of African American adolescent males. The

overall purpose of Tatum's (2009) book is to help educators find and teach literature that both empowers and positively engages the African American youths, which consequently benefits the students as well as the larger society. He explains culturally relevant texts, poetic broadsides, and short stories are enabling for African American males. Tatum (2009) also provides platforms for literacy development that encourage students to use and create texts. The platforms are define self, become resilient, engage others, and build capacity. Tatum calls for literacy collaborations and short-term focus groups to discuss different texts within the classroom and to recreate a curriculum that will reconnect African American adolescent males to the text.

Gainer and Lapp (2010) discuss bridging the gap between students' real-world and school literacy practices. The authors offer educators different ways to remix literacy to promote engagement and academic success with adolescents. Remixing is described as "blending tried-and-true practice with current information and communication technologies, which results in a transformation of instruction that is more inclusive of all students" (p. 11). The first goal of the book is provide insights about the best instructional practices that utilize new literacies to support learning for students. Secondly, the authors wish to encourage fellow educators to expand their own practices and increase students' engagement and learning. Special attention is given to instruction that is responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The book creates opportunities for educators to connect to students' popular culture, promote student empowerment, and develop sociopolitical awareness within the classroom.

Cultural Congruity in Classroom Instruction

Gay (2002) argues culturally responsive teaching is needed in order to improve the school success of racially diverse and poor students. Pre-service education programs must impart the knowledge, attitudes, and skills onto novel teachers. She states, "teacher preparation programs must be as culturally responsive to ethnic diversity as K-12 classroom instruction" (p.114). Gay also explains culture strongly influences the behaviors, attitudes, and values that teachers and students bring to the instructional process. As a result, culture "has to likewise be a major determinant of how the problems of underachievement are solved"(p.114). She concludes that culturally responsive instruction must be implemented to create cultural congruity in schools to improve the academic achievement of low performing students.

Effective K-12 teachers are described as the most important component within a good school in Irvine's (1999) article. Irvine (1999) describes commonly referenced factors for low urban youth achievement and then shifts her focus to a lack of cultural synchronization as a factor in poor student performance. The lack of cultural synchronization occurs "when teachers and students bring different and conflicting cultural experiences to the classroom" (p. 246). In her article, Irvine makes clear that teachers who are caring develop a relationship as the "other mother" (p. 250) for students, have confidence in their skills, hold high expectations, and are "warm demanders" (p. 251). These characteristics help create cultural synchronization. She concludes policymakers should act on behalf of other people's children, become dream keepers of children, and recruit more Black teachers.

Ladson-Billings (1992b) describes the literacy instruction debate between a whole language and skill approach. She explains that a culturally relevant approach to teaching is more effective in promoting adolescent literacy by balancing the two forms of instruction. Also, cultural synchronization can be achieved in the classroom by using "student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualizing knowledge" (p.314). Ladson-Billings highlights two culturally relevant teachers, Ann Lewis and Julia Devereaux that promote cultural synchronization in their adolescent literacy instruction. The teachers promote culturally responsive techniques such as linguistic code switching, team building, multicultural texts, student discussions, personal journals, and social action. Overall the teachers assert, "that literacy is a tool of liberation, both personal and cultural" (p. 318) and allows for students to achieve success. Promoting adolescent literary through culturally relevant pedagogy is beneficial to urban students.

Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2007) explain many educators have behavioral issues in their urban classrooms that ultimately "separate low-performing students from literacy instruction" (p. 56). Often, disciplinary actions only perpetuate the issue. The authors state "specialized interventions should begin early and should include direct instruction" (p. 56). Several specific strategies are described to help urban students: balanced reading instruction, early identification of at-risk learners, supplemental instruction, active student responding, small group instruction, regular monitoring of reading achievement, peer mediated activities, positive nonexclusionary classroom management practices, and parental involvement. Most importantly, Musti-Rao and Cartledge explain that all the

strategies should be applied in culturally responsive ways to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse urban learners.

Cultural Learning Community

Cooper's (2003) empirical research article explores White teachers effectively teaching predominantly African American classrooms. The teachers were asked to volunteer after being selected using Foster's "community nomination" (as cited in Cooper 2003, p. 416) method. Cooper was observing the beliefs and practices of three White educators and how these two concepts compare to effective teachers of Black children. The study discovered all three teachers used an authoritative discipline style, were committed to developing racial consciousness, had positive images of self, and viewed their teaching self as a second mother to their students. These practices resulted in the creation of a positive cultural learning community. All three teachers' viewed reading and writing curriculum as foundational to their children's future academic success. Teachers developed a routine that incorporated rhyming words, sounds of words, sounds of letters, writing of letters, writing of words, and other visual, audio, and print-related mini-lessons everyday. The teachers also did not hesitate to modify or deviate from the reading program to meet the needs of their students.. Cooper (2003) advocates the need for reimaging the possibilities for intersection of White teachers and Black communities "in the learning lives of Black children" (p.426). Creating a community that is culturally responsive to different students is imperative for urban youth's learning.

Ladson-Billings (1992a) argues for culturally relevant instruction to promote literacy for African American students. She explains literacy can be used as a liberatory tool that "develops skills that are technical, social, political, and cultural" (p. 381). Ann Lewis, a

sixth grade literature teacher, is described by Ladson-Billings (1992a) as an educator that successfully uses a culturally relevant approach to literacy in the classroom. In the article, Ann Lewis uses small groups, allows student questions and discussion, promotes personal connections, writing of metacognitive journals, provides visuals, and includes a variety of supplemental materials to enhance the book *Charlie Pippin*. Ann Lewis successfully created a "community of learners" (p. 386) that empowered students. Ladson-Billings concludes that educators must be willing to engage in culturally relevant teaching that empowers all students, which inevitably supports the democracy of our nation.

Ladson-Billings (2009) well renowned book, *The Dreamkeepers*, advocates for culturally responsive teaching strategies in order to promote the academic success of African American students. She provides case studies of eight teachers that use different methods in their classrooms that incorporate culturally responsive teaching. She argues to "make literacy a communal activity and demonstrate ways to make learning to read and write a more meaningful and successful enterprise for African American learners" (p. 113). By highlighting particular strategies that several of the teachers implement in their classroom, Ladson-Billings (2009) provides culturally relevant methods to promote adolescent literacy.

Fisher (2004) describes an urban high school that implemented important changes in order to create a community of readers through Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). The students who were allowed more time to read independently "on a daily basis had statistically higher reading scores" (p. 142). Fisher presents eight factors for the successful implementation of SSR within schools. In order to promote successful implementation of SSR, students provided testimonials about their favorite books, the school raised money to

buy more books, and follow-up activities for book discussion and sharing were developed.

To promote community, all the adults within the school were required to read during the

allotted time and school administrators often visited classes to read with students as well.

The case study of this urban high school was successful in its implementation of SSR

because it allowed students in the school community the "opportunity to read" (p. 149).

The authors conclude that "students need the opportunity to read books of their own

choosing and they need time to do so" (p. 149).

Jocson (2005) provides a case study that describes the Poetry for the People

program that was implemented in an urban high school. The program is a collaborative

intervention based upon the understanding that poetry involves "one's ability to read,

create, analyze, and criticize" (p. 133). The Poetry for the People is a "program for political

and artistic empowerment of students" (p. 137) that creates a safe space for dialogue and

demonstrates "youth's voices are just as valuable as adults" (p.139). The program uses

mixed skill level groups, constructive feedback, and affirms students as poets. The program

culminates into a showcase of the students' work in a public speaking event where the

students and community are supportive of each other's literacy endeavors. The author

ends by explaining the program provides a pedagogical model for rethinking the potential

of poetry for invigorating classroom practice.

Cross-Cultural Communications

Sleeter's (2001) article discusses the four problems that must be addressed to

improve effective teaching: racism in interpersonal interactions, low expectations for

students of color, ignorance towards communities of color, and lack of cultural awareness.

Her article reflects her observations of effective teachers in predominately African

American schools. She offers several solutions that would help towards the development of multicultural teachers, such as internal coherence, cross-cultural community-based learning and reflection strategies.

Morrell (2002) advocates for the critical teaching of popular culture to help students acquire and develop literacies that are necessary to be successful in today's schools. He explains, " popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices" (p. 72) to help create a more inclusive society. Often the poor performance of urban students results from the inability of students to access the school curriculum. The pedagogy of popular cultural is a pedagogy that allows students and teachers to learn from one another while engaging in authentic dialogue centered on experiences of urban youth as participants and creators of popular culture. The article goes on to describe how hip-hop culture, popular film, television and media can be used to promote adolescent literacy. Morrell believes "critical-literacy educators should envision teaching popular culture as compatible with the current educational climate and, at the same time, as culturally and socially relevant" (p. 76). By utilizing popular culture in instruction, different cultural groups can experience educational instruction on a common ground.

Delpit (1988) discusses the process-oriented versus skill-oriented debate in writing instruction that inevitably points to the culture of power present within society. The author provides five complex rules of power that influences an educator's means of meeting the needs of African American and poor students. Inevitably, Delpit argues for a balance between skill and process approaches within literacy instruction. She also recommends

that students need to be explicitly taught the codes of power to interact cross culturally and be an active and successful member within society.

Youth Encouragement Services Reflection

During my graduate program at Peabody College, I was an intern at Youth Encouragement Services (Y.E.S). This non-profit organization, located in East Nashville, is an after school program that offers a safe haven for urban youths of all ages. Y.E.S. provides food, school tutoring, and enrichment programs for their adolescents. My role as an intern was to assist students in the after school program as well as create a math curriculum that will be used for tutoring material this fall. The current math curriculum being used is a binder of handouts lacking order, systematic progression, written directions, and modeling equations. In order to combat the issues of the current math curriculum, I developed a binder for each grade level at Y.E.S. Using Houghton Mifflin's *Math Expressions* as a guide I was able to create a logical progression for the students and allow students to build systematically upon their math skills. I was very intentional in using materials that contained explicit directions(Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1992a) and modeling problems to help scaffold the students in their learning. I also included checkpoints that contained assessment materials to track and gauge the students' mathematical progression and understanding through the tutoring curriculum. I look forward to observing how the students receive and interact with the new math curriculum.

During my after school interactions with the students, I helped the youth at YES develop literacy by assisting them in creating a scary movie. The students would create a movie to show an audience of Y.E.S. adults and students. During the process, the students chose to participate and create a scary movie (Gay 2002). We discussed and referenced

scary movies from popular culture (Morrell 2002) to use as a guide. Asking why is this movie scary enhanced our discussion and began the brainstorming session. The students developed their own plot, wrote the script, and acted in the film. Throughout the process, students felt empowered because they were creating their own product for a real audience (Delpit, 1988). The making of the movie was very powerful and created a lasting positive impression on the urban youth at Y.E.S.

Promising Practices for Promoting Adolescent Literacy

The synthesis of the literature presented several important promising practices for educators to promote adolescent literacy within their urban classrooms. The promising practices are divided into the categories of implementing balanced reading instruction, utilizing spcific comprehension reading strategies, incorporating popular culture, choosing culturally relevant texts, developing student empowerment, and building a learning community.

Implementing Balanced Reading Instruction

A common debate within the literacy instruction is whether to use phonic-centered, skill based instruction or the whole-language, process approach (Ladson-Billings, 2009). As cited by Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2007), the National Reading Panel recommend teachers adopt a balanced reading approach that would include "instruction in phonemic awareness, alphabetic understanding, and automaticity with code forming" (p. 57). Good reading instruction must be explicit, intensive, and systematic (Musti-Rao & Carledge, 2007). Delpit (1988) elaborates by explaining that both process and skill approaches must be used in order to "help students to establish their own voices, but to coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society" (p. 296). Jonathan Kozol (2005)

discusses the implementation of a "balanced Literacy" (p.307) in an urban New York school district that goes against scripted phonics program and monotonous drill sheets. Urban youth are better equipped to learn how to read and write from a more balanced holistic approach.

Utilizing Specific Comprehension Reading Strategies

Throughout the literature, specific strategies were discussed that help racially diverse students with their reading comprehension. First, educators should use read-alouds during the class period (Fisher, 2004, p. 139). For instance, teachers should read aloud portions of the text in order to allow students to follow along in their own text. Students can alternate reading aloud as well (Ladson-Billings, 1992b). This is also a good opportunity for teachers to share their own personal reading strategies as they read a text with their students. The activity allows students to see, read, and hear new information to develop their reading comprehension. Another strategy is to instigate student note taking (Fisher, 2004). Ann Lewis has students maintain metacognitive journals that allow students to record new information and ask their own questions (Ladson-Billings, 1992a; 1992b; 2009). Graphic organizers, such as Venn Diagrams, webs, and mind maps, are another way for students to record their insights and important pieces of information in an organized framework (Fisher, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1992a).

Teaching reading within small groups is another effective strategy to promote comprehension (Ladson-Billings, 1992b; Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007;). Small groups allow for student discussion (Ladson-Billings, 1992a; 1992b) and at times allow for the teacher to differentiate reading instruction according to the students' ability level (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007). Also, small reading and discussion groups create an opportunity for

students to become "intellectual leaders of the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 1992a, p. 386) by leading discussions and initiating questioning.

Incorporating Popular Culture

Popular culture can be defined as the exchange between subordinate and dominant groups in society (Morrell, 2002). Incorporating components of popular culture allows entry points for racially diverse learners to access the school curriculum and develop their literacy skills. Using popular culture is a form of cultural scaffolding because it uses the students' own "culture and experiences to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievement" (Gay, 2002, p. 109). For example, hip-hop music is the "representative voice of urban youth because the genre was created by and for urban youth" (Morrell, 2002, p.74). Using hip-hop music within an English poetry unit can allow students to gain a better understanding for the poetry genre, and increase critical engagement dialogue because the lesson is situated in the experiences of the students' own cultures (Morrell, 2002; Jocson, 2005).

Incorporating popular culture through visual literacies such as film, television, and media also allows for racially diverse students to learn, interpret, and deconstruct literary texts. For instance, incorporating a popular film with a traditional curriculum can promote meaningful connections for the students; such as *The Godfather* trilogy and Homer's *Odyssey* (Morrell, 2002). Through discussions concerning similarities and differences urban students are able attain deeper connection to the material and begin to make connections to their own lives.

Choosing Culturally Relevant Texts

Implementing culturally relevant texts in racially diverse classrooms allows for students to teachers to connect instruction with the student's culture (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007). Culturally relevant texts are also another form of cultural scaffolding within the classroom (Gay 2002). The urban learners who are immersed in literature that explicitly connects to the experiences of urban and ethnic communities demonstrate higher achievement and interest in reading (Must-Rao & Cartledge, 2007). Culturally relevant texts have the capability of increasing students' engagement and motivation to read more (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Tatum, 2009). The culturally responsive texts can connect with a variety of aspects within a student's life; family dynamics, life experiences, geography, time frame, age, gender, and dialect (Freeman & Freeman 2004). Tatum (2009) discusses the power of culturally responsive texts to help develop the textual lineages of African American adolescent males. By developing their textual lineages these young males can begin to analyze their personal identities and look towards the future (Tatum, 2009). The students' personal connection to culturally relevant texts can have positive outcomes for urban students that inevitably can promote their literacy development (Ladson-Billings, 1992a).

Developing Student Empowerment

Racially diverse students should be given the opportunity to feel empowerment and ownership within their learning in order to create personal investments in their education. Allowing students to select their own texts to read based on their personal interests is one strategy toward giving students ownership of their learning (Fisher, 2004; Morrell, 2002). Creating a space for students to generate their own pieces of literature is another powerful

strategy (Delpit, 1988; Fisher, 2004; Jocson, 2005; Tatum, 2010). For example, allowing

students to create a self-reflective identity piece (Jocson, 2005;Sleeter, 2009) or a

reactionary poem supports students in becoming "cultural producers themselves…and

called for critical dialogue and critical engagement with the [educational] texts" (Morrell,

2002, p. 74).

Another way students can develop ownership within the classroom is by remixing

literature to represent their own perspective (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). In addition, providing

students with a "real audience and purpose" (Delpit, 1988, p. 288) for the students to read

their work allows them to "own their words, deliver them with an air of confidence, and

have fun with them" (Jocson, 2005, p.144). Ultimately, social action is created when

"students understand that they could do something that expressed their concerns if they

prepared themselves to make informed decisions (Ladson-Billings 1992a, p. 384). For

instance, Ann Lewis's students made 1,000 paper cranes to advocate peace after reading

and reflecting upon a particular novel (Ladson-Billings, 1992a; 2009). Student

empowerment is important in literacy toward promoting engagement and motivation with

racially diverse students and gives them a voice within their communities.

Building a Learning Community

Building a positive learning classroom community that promotes adolescent literacy

involves parental involvement and peer relationships. Ladson-Billings (1992a) explains,

"students are apprenticed into a learning community rather than taught isolated and

unrelated skills" (p. 387). Using parents to help reinforce adolescent literacy is a good

strategy toward creating a community of learners. Teachers should evaluate how the

parents of each student are involved in their child's education and set realistic goals to

increase parental involvement. Providing explicit directions to parents on how to help their children's reading development at home is important (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007). Parents can implement these home-based practices and utilize a logbook that shows teamwork between the teacher and the student's parents (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007).

Developing supportive peer relationships within the classroom can also promote adolescent literacy. Small groups can be implemented in the form of student-centered conferences with the teacher that allows them to discuss their own writings and share insights (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2009). A peer mediated learning environment is useful towards creating a communal learning environment because students facilitate classroom learning. The students become responsible for their own learning and the learning of their peers (Musti-Rao & Carledge, 2007). Through the support of parental involvement and peer relationships, educators can develop a safe learning community that fosters adolescent literacy.

Implications

The general implications of this literature review suggest several practices that White educators should develop for their classroom. By incorporating culturally relevant teaching practices within the classroom, teachers can combat cultural discontinuity and increase the reading achievement of their urban students Integrating culturally relevant texts (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings 1992a; 1992b; 2009; Musti-Rao & Carledge, 2007; Tatum, 2009), elements of popular culture (Gay, 2002; Jocson, 2005 Morrell, 2002), promoting student empowerment (Delpit, 1988; Fisher, 2004; Gainer & Lupp, 2010; Jocson, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1992a;1992b, 2009; Morrell, 2002, Sleeter, 2009) and developing communities of learners (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1992a; 2009;

Musti-Rao & Carledge, 2007) support the development of adolescent literacy within an urban setting. In addition, using a balanced literacy approach can also be an effective approach to developing literacy in racially diverse settings (Delpit, 1988; Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007; Kozol, 2005). These strategies are specifically presented as techniques to use with racially diverse students but these practices can also be beneficial for all students. (Misti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007). Supporting literacy learning gains for all students takes well planned, "explicit, motivating instruction that builds on each student's knowledge base and learning behaviors" (Gainer & Lapp, 2010, p. 5) Educators in all teaching environments should utilize aspects of a culturally relevant pedagogy to increase the student achievement of their students.

Developing adolescent literacy with racially diverse students in urban environments is not a simple task. Educators often "struggle to find curricula and pedagogical strategies that are inclusive and affirmative yet facilitate the development of academic and critical literacies" (Morrell, 2002, p. 72). There is no perfect exact way to teach reading and writing because every student and classroom is different (Cooper, 2003). Educators need to conduct classroom-based research on innovative practices that can support their students and participate in policy debates at every level of schooling to have a voice in the practices of their districts (Morrel 2002). In addition, more research is needed to uncover more strategies to develop and support the literacy of racially diverse students. Also, educators, specifically White females, must develop a racial and cultural awareness of their students in order to meet their needs as culturally relevant educators in the classroom and combat cultural discontinuity (Sleeter 2001).

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