RISING UP: SOCIALLY RELEVANT TEXTS, CRITICAL LITERACY, AND IDENTITY

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Summit on the Research and Teaching of YA Literature
**WHO ARE YOU?**

List 10 adjectives that describe your identity.

* Ex/
  * Teacher
  * Female
  * White
  * Cisgender

Delete 5 of the words that are less important to you.

★ What are you left with?
★ Why did you choose the words you did?

Delete 3 of the remaining words.

★ What were your final two adjectives?
★ Why were those the most important in defining you?
COMPLETE YA SUMMIT SOCIAL JUSTICE BOOK LIST
**PROBLEMS**

- Adolescents are inundated with social media, reality TV, videos, and news stories that are often difficult to differentiate as credible, biased, or outright false.

- Education has focused on a banking system (Freire, 1970/2016).
**PROBLEMS**

● Mandates require teachers to focus on high-stakes testing and the incorporation of a deficit perspective that fails to honor a student’s “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992)

● Inequity and situated power silencing students’ voices and critical thinking.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) How does using justice themed texts help adolescents shape their social identity?

2) How does engagement in classroom discourse about social justice topics impact critical literacy?
**Critical Literacy** involves actively questioning and reflecting how “language is affected by and affects social relations” (Behrman, 2006, p. 490).

**Social Justice** providing access to mainstream knowledge and practices and offer possibilities for transformation, not only of the learner but also of the social and political contexts in which learning and other social action take place (Moje, 2007, p. 1).
**DEFINITIONS OF VARIABLES**

**DISCOURSE** is “composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing … so as to enact special socially recognizable identities” (Gee, 2015, p. 166).
• Socio-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner 1979)“Spheres of Influence”

• Critical Literacy Theory (Paulo Freire, 1970)“Confronting reality with a critical lens”

• Social Identity Theory (Henri Tajfel, 1971)“categorization of people into groups affects their perceptions and behavior”
**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

- **1600s**
  - Saving children from wicked ways

- **1700s/1800s**
  - Shaping children into moral adults

- **1900s**
  - Psychological and physiological effects on reading acquisition

- **1960s**
  - Great Society: Social & cultural influences

  - Emergence of Young Adult Literature

- **1980s**
  - National standards/accountability

  - Controversial literature pushback

(Smith, 2002)
**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE - 21ST CENTURY**

**Instruction:**
*The Battle of Balance*

**YAL:**
*Experimentation Explosion*

- point of view
- new organizational features
- digital technologies
- inclusive/controversial topics

*(Koss & Teale, 2009)*
Social Identity/Social Justice

- Constructed through individual actions
- Carried out in everyday locations,
- Largely self-constructed and flexible

(Bean, 2003; Bean & Monti, 2003; Del Nero, 2017; Gee, 2006; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015; Neilsen, 2006; Nero, 2017)
Brainstorm books you have used in your class to address these identity issues.
THE BOOKS: SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Refugee by Alan Gratz
- First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung
- Harbor Me by Jacqueline Woodson
- Blue Sky White Stars by Sarvinder Nankani
THE BOOKS: SOCIAL JUSTICE

TURNING 15 ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM
MY STORY OF THE 1965 SELMA VOTING RIGHTS MARCH

MARCH
BOOK ONE

MARCH
BOOK TWO

MARCH
BOOK THREE
THE BOOKS: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. "For Everyone" by Jason Reynolds
2. "Long Way Down" by Jason Reynolds
3. "Just Mercy" by Bryan Stevenson
• Critical literacy and social justice often explored as discrete units
• It is possible to meet national standards and teach for social justice through a critical literacy lens and interactive discourse
• Schools continue to cling to traditional texts, teacher-driven discourse, and privileged curriculum

(Behrman, 2006; Blackburn 2004; Bussert, 2011; Comber, 2001; de los Rios, 2017; Dover, 2015; Janks, 2000; Serafini, 2008)
Building Critical Literacy

- Incorporation in classrooms
  - Disrupting the commonplace
  - Interrogating multiple viewpoints
  - Focusing on sociopolitical issues
  - Taking action and promoting social justice

(Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002)
Implications for Teachers

Include Diverse, Multimodal Texts to Promote Authentic Identity Formation

Incorporate Student Choice to Assure Relevance to Student Identity

Provide Direct Instruction and Open Ended Classroom Discourse to Develop Critical Literacy
Does your collection include:

★ books with characters of color? LGBTQ? Differently-abled?

★ books with a *main* character of color? LGBTQ? Differently-abled?

★ books written or illustrated by a person of color? Of different nationalities, religions or sexual preference?
Does your collection include:

★ books with a person of color on the cover? Do the characters on the book covers accurately reflect the characters in the book?
★ a mix of "mirror" books and "window" books for your students
★ books featuring diverse characters that are not primarily about race or prejudice?
★ Think about the subject matter of your diverse books. Do all your books featuring black characters focus on slavery? Do all your books about Latino characters focus on immigration? Are all your LGBTQ books coming out stories?

★ Do any of your classic books contain hurtful racial or ethnic stereotypes, or images? If so, how will you address those stereotypes with students? Have you included another book that provides a more accurate depiction of the same culture?
“Literature gives us concrete evidence of how differently men have phrased their lives in different societies. But literature by its very nature, helps also to bridge those differences.”

(Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 53)
“When we segregate literature, we focus only on mirrors. Certainly, seeing yourself in books is necessary and crucial to the development of identity . . . but not allowing those same books to serve as windows into the lives of others will most certainly limit imagination and possibility.”

(Alexander, 2016, p. BR 33)
If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking.

- HARUKI MURAKAMI -
Racial/Multicultural

- Educators often take a deficit view
- Inclusive reading opportunities allow students to engage with the texts, explore their identity, and critically examine their positioning in society

(Burke & Kao, 2013; Carter, 2007; Darragh, 2017; Franquiz, Martinez-Roldan, & Mercado, 2011; Kirkland, 2011; Marsh & Stolle, 2006; Rosenblatt, 2005; Schieble, 2012; Tatum, 2006)
Brainstorm books you have used in your class to address the identity issues.
Diversity in Children’s Books 2015

Percentages of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds. Based on the 2015 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pccstats.asp

0.9% American Indians/First Nations
2.4% Latinx
3.3% Asian Pacifics/Asian Pacific Americans
7.6% African/African Americans
12.5%* Animals, Trucks, etc.
73.3%** White

* About a quarter of the total children’s books published in 2015 were picture books, and about half of those depict non-human characters, like animals & trucks.
** The remainder depict white characters.

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By 2055, the U.S. will not have a single racial or ethnic majority.
YA novels using previously marginalized voices "highlight historical and current injustices that maintain white privileges."

(Schieble, 2012, p. 215)
THE BOOKS: RACE RELATIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM

"[A] witty, sensitive debut." — People

Does My Head Look Big In This?
Randa Abdel-Fattah

The Poet X
A novel by Elizabeth Acevedo

Hidden Roots
Joseph Bruchac

"Gene Luen Yang has created that rare article: a youthful tale with something new to say about American youth."

American Born Chinese
Gene Luen Yang
THE BOOKS: RACE RELATIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM

Inside Out & Back Again
Thanhha Lai

Love, Hate & Other Filters
Samira Ahmed

The Hate U Give
Angie Thomas
THE BOOKS: RACE RELATIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM

- How It Went Down by Kekla Magoon
- I Am Alfonso Jones
- All American Boys by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely
- Dear Martin by Nic Stone
Abilities

- Schneider Award
- Same damaging tropes again and again
- Often limited to certain disabilities or specific genres
- Most disabled characters published in YA are white, cishet, and often male
TURN AND TALK

Brainstorm books you have used in your class to address the identity issues.
Previously unheard protagonists dealing successfully with a variety of disabilities

- Eating disorders
- Severe burns and disfigurement
- Physical illness
- Physical deformities & amputations
- Mental illness
The Books: Abilities

- Wintergirls
  - Laurie Halse Anderson

- Challenger Deep
  - Neal Shusterman

- Highly Illogical Behavior
  - John Corey Whaley

- Little & Lion
  - Brandy Colbert
The Books: Abilities

- Ms. Marvel
- All That I Can Fix
- You're Welcome, Universe
THE BOOKS: ABILITIES

1. The Running Dream by Wendelin Van Draanen
2. Ugly by Robert Hoge
3. A Time to Dance by Padma Venkatraman
Gender & Sexuality

- Underrepresentation of LGBTQ youth in literature and in core classroom readings delays the identity development of LGBTQ youth
- Youth supported by agencies and discussions surrounding texts gain stronger identities and are better able to assert agency in and out of schools

(Blackburn, 2004; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Blackburn et al., 2015; Hazlett, Sweeney, & Reins, 2011; Rhodes 2010)
Brainstorm books you have used in your class to address the identity issues.
"... in many recent novels, they have found not only their own identity but also a caring and supportive community of others like themselves."

(Cart, 2005, p. 1356)
Gender - Blurring the Lines

- Appeals to all genders
- Stonewall Award
- Reaching younger readers
- Recognized as quality literature
  - David Levithan - Edwards Award 2016
Past depiction-isolated, alone, ashamed
Moved from ‘coming out’ stories in early 2000’s to general life issues today.
Moving from ‘ghetto genre’ to the mainstream
2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

8% (1.3 million) of high school students described themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual
Publication Rate Increased Averages
- 1970’s - 1 book
- 1980’s - 4 books
- 1990’s - 7 books
- 2000’s - 12 (just between 2000 - 2005)

Numbers
- 59 books between 2000 - 2004
- 230% increase from the 90’s
- 13 more books than 1965 - 1989
THE BOOKS: GENDER AND SEXUALITY

1. Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda
2. George
3. Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen
THE BOOKS: GENDER AND SEXUALITY

- Gracefully
- Grayson
  
a novel by Ami Polonsky

- The 57 Bus
  
by Dashka Slater

- The Prince and the Dressmaker
  
by Jen Wang
THE BOOKS: GENDER AND SEXUALITY
OurStory App from We Need Diverse Books
THANKS!

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