Goals for Today

• To discuss strategies for developing higher literacy rates and positive life outcomes for African American male youth.

Presentation Outline:

• Present primary strategies for working with African American males that emerged from an IMLS funded summit at UNC
• Discuss the importance of culturally relevant texts with an emphasis on selecting and utilizing enabling texts
• Connect culturally relevant and enabling texts to the Whole-to-Part Reading framework
• Provide a framework for developing school library services that meet the needs of African American male students
• Questions and comments
African American Male Literacy Today

• National Association for Educational Progress: Only 16% of African American male 4th graders and 14% of 8th graders performed at or above the proficient level on national reading tests in 2009.

• Low literacy for African American men leads to:
  • Fewer than half of African American men graduate from high school (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008).
  • African American men make up only 5% of the college population, yet they make up 40% of the prison population (Lewis, S. et al., 2010; West, H.C., 2009).
  • The unemployment rate is twice as high for African American men as it is for White men (Lewis, S. et al., 2010; West, H.C., 2009).
  • African American adolescents and young adults are 8 times more likely to be victims of homicide than White people in the same age group (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2010).
The Summit

• Three day working meeting co-sponsored with the School of Library and Information Science at NCCU and funded by the Institute for Museum & Library Services (IMLS)

• 68 participants from around the U.S. representing multiple stakeholder groups

• Presentations by Alfred Tatum and Ernest Morrell
• Panel sessions by researchers and practitioners
• Panel discussion featuring six African American male students

• Focus on three essential questions:
  1. Why should libraries focus on the literacy needs of African American male youth?
  2. What do we know about research, programs, and resources?
  3. What actions must the library community take?
“Literacy is not just about decoding text. It is about becoming a superior human being that can act powerfully upon the world.”

-Ernest Morrell, Ph.D.
Themes that Emerged from the Summit

1. High expectations are necessary for success.
2. Students need instruction and materials that are authentic and relevant to their lives.
3. Voice and agency must be cultivated through instruction and library programming.
4. The connection between pop culture and literacy development needs to be cultivated and built on.
5. Writing and reading must be connected in instruction.
6. Text is powerful, but only if the selection of text is mindful of African American male students’ needs.
7. Connections with the larger community are needed through family literacy programs, partnerships, collaboration, and mentoring.
Set High Expectations

“There is no research that says, ‘If I expose struggling African American boys to less, they will become excellent readers and writers.’”

-Alfred W. Tatum

• Positive academic and life outcomes can result when high expectations are combined with powerful texts, opportunities to read, write, and speak with purpose, quality instruction, and ongoing support.

• Setting low expectations sanctions silence, stifles intellect, suppresses agency, and hampers future economic growth.
Utilize Authentic and Relevant Materials/Instruction

• Research suggests that students tend to prefer and are more likely to engage with literature if it reflects their personal experiences and portrays characters that look like them and their families, friends, and peers (Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001).

• Research shows that when readers interact with literature that relates to their culture-specific experiences, their reading recall and comprehension performance will improve (Bell & Clark, 1998; McCullough, 2008).

• Research found that using culturally and linguistically relevant reading material not only fostered reading comprehension, but also helped address phonological awareness gaps and contributed to improved fluency (McCollin & O'Shea, 2005)/

• Culturally relevant teaching—“designed not merely to fit the school culture to the student’s culture but also to use student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1992).
Cultivate Voice and Agency

• Motivate students to develop literacy skills by empowering them to make demands and change their communities through instruction and activities that are authentic and relevant to their lives.

• Show students how to use tools that allow them to develop and utilize literacy skills to speak out and make a difference, such as:
  • Filmmaking
  • Podcasting
  • Blogging
  • Word Processing
  • Website Creation
  • Creative Writing
  • Presentations
Connect Literacy Instruction to Popular Culture

• Research shows that the critical teaching of popular culture can produce powerful academic and social results for African American male youth (Morrell, 2002; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Paul, 2000; Tatum, 2005).

• Popular culture is relevant to students’ lives, and the skills students use to process it are transferrable to the dominant literacies promoted in schools (textual, informational, technological, media, and etc.) (Morrell, 2002; Edwards, McMillon, & Turner, 2010).

• Popular culture provides a forum for the critical examination of social and political issues (Morrell, 2002).

• Popular culture can motivate African American male youth to become creators of content, not just consumers, and to engage in social action (Morrell, 2002; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).
Connect Writing with Reading

• Reasons African American men wrote historically:
  1. To define self.
  2. To become resilient.
  3. To engage others.
  4. To build capacity.

• Every summer, Dr. Tatum and the University of Illinois-Chicago host a summer writing institute for Black male students between 12 and 17 in which they participate in a writing community of “brother authors.” He charges them to:
  • Write prudently and unapologetically, not only for yourself, but for future generations.
  • Become part of a storied lineage of Black authors.
  • Create a new national vision by putting [your] voice and vision on record…write new beginnings. (Tatum, 2011)
My mom don’t like me,
My family treats me like I’m a person on the street.
Most of my family never worries about their kids. Isn’t that something?
I cannot go next to my cousins.

So kill me. Let me roll over and die.
When I go, don’t let my writing go with me.
Let it stay with you.

I know people are getting tired of reading about my blank life because I am.
I can’t take it anymore.
Someone kill me, get it over.

I’d rather die and be remembered than live and be forgotten.
So when I turn to dust, don’t let my writing turn to ashes.
Young Man, you are just like your father. 
The resemblance is uncanny. 
You have the same face, your bodies have the same shape and you walk as if you took your first step from the same place! 
Your voice has the same pitch, you two have the same hobbies and you adorn the same attire. 
Well, I’ll be Damned if you’re not him.

Good Sir, I am not just like my father. 
We look and sound the same, the resemblance stops there. 
I walk with a purpose — he walks to move his feet. 
I like art and music and he prefers sports. 
I dress for success, and well, he dresses so that he isn’t naked. 
Good Sir, with all due respect 
You’ll Be Damned 
Because I am Not my father, nor would I ever want to be.
The Power of Text

• Enabling texts encourage and empower young men to take action in their own lives and the lives of others.
  • Include literary and informational texts
  • May or may not feature African Americans

• Counterstories respect the experiential knowledge of the Black community.
  • Counteract the dominant discourse that presents African American male youth as at risk, without hope, or “out of control and dangerous.”
Identifying Enabling Texts

- Dr. Alfred W. Tatum identifies enabling texts as those that:
  - Promote a healthy psyche
  - Reflect an awareness of the real world
  - Focus on the collective struggle of African Americans
  - Serve as a road map for being, doing, thinking, and acting
  - Recognize, honor, and nurture multiple identities
  - Demonstrate resiliency
  - Are interesting and provocative
  - Avoid caricatures

- Enabling texts also include a mentor or a role model.
Example Enabling Text
“This is a mess.”
Grandmomma knows right away
I’m not talking about the dishes.
She hugs me and says,
“No, this is a family.”
“This was the law’s recipe for segregation. Its instructions were easy to follow: Do not combine white people with black people. Segregation was a bitter mix.”
"We got into this mess together. But it's just me paying for it."
When the three young men met in high school, they recognized in each other the desire and ability to “beat the street.”
# Text Mediation: Tatum’s Framework

## Literacy Platforms
- Defining self
- Becoming resilient
- Engaging others
- Building capacity
- Other ___________

## Introducing the Text
(getting adolescents into the text right away)
- Required vocabulary (1-3 words)
- Text to introduce-use an excerpt to get the students involved right away

## Framing Question(s)

## Writing Connection
(calling attention to the text as a language model & helping students see themselves as writers)

## Mediating Texts Around One of the Framing Questions
Assign pages to be read. Best to begin with one page of text and discuss it together before releasing responsibility to students.

## Evaluating the Discussion & Students’ Ongoing Needs in Future Discussions
Introducing the Text:
You know, I’ve been wondering lately,
Trying to figure out just how it could be
That we call each other brother,
And you still don’t know a thing about me. (p. 6)

The stars
On fire
Inside me
Shining
Refining
Reminding
Me
That only I define me
And
The brightness of my destiny. (p. 7)

Framing Questions:
How does a person communicate their identity to others who refuse to view them as an individual?
Is it more important to belong to a group or to be an individual?
Monster, by Walter Dean Myers

Literacy Platforms: Becoming resilient; Defining self

Introducing the Text:
Sometimes I feel like I have walked into the middle of a movie. It is a strange movie with no plot and no beginning. The movie is in black and white, and grainy. Sometimes the camera moves in so close that you can’t tell what is going on and you just listen to the sounds and guess. I have seen movies of prisons but never one like this. This is not a movie about bars and locked doors. It is about being alone when you are not really alone and about being scared all the time...Maybe I could make my own movie... The film will be the story of my life. Not my life, but of this experience....I’ll call it what the lady who is the prosecutor called me. MONSTER. (p. 4-5)

Framing Questions:
Does a person become a “monster” by choice or are they forced into becoming a “monster”?
What impact do the judgments of others have on self-esteem and self-efficacy?
The Result of Enabling Texts
### Summit Findings & Whole-to-Part Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole-to-Part Groups</th>
<th>Best Instructional Practices &amp; Summit Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Word Identification           | • Include culturally relevant words and phrases on the word wall and in word bingo  
                                 • Include words from popular culture in word identification activities  
                                 • Select culturally relevant & enabling texts for reading at the end of lessons                                                                                           |
| Language Comprehension        | • Select culturally relevant and enabling texts for group reading  
                                 • Engage students in authentic discussions about the texts that connect the social, economic, and political (Tatum’s framework)  
                                 • Set high expectations—make sure discussion is cognitively and affectively challenging  
                                 • Connect literacy to action (social justice)                                                                                                                             |
| Silent Reading                | • Guide students to select books that will challenge them intellectually, not just textually  
                                 • Provide culturally relevant & enabling texts in a variety of formats (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, graphic novels, newspapers, magazines, etc.)  
                                 • Use a variety of techniques to introduce texts to students (booktalks, book trailers, peer recommendations, etc.)                                                   |
Reading Standards

Grade 4: Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

Grade 8: Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

Grades 11-12: Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Strategies

• Incorporate culturally relevant and enabling texts into reading lists.
• Select readings that will challenge students.
• Carefully mediate texts to help students find ways in which they can connect to them.
• Compare themes in popular culture to those in literature to help students transfer comprehension skills.
• Explicitly show students why these texts should matter to them and how they are applicable to their own lives.
• Give students writing opportunities to help them understand literary themes.
### Example Standard

**Example Writing Standard, Grades 3-12**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Provide students with larger outside context and purpose for writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Help students see themselves as part of a community of authors by connecting their work to other works of literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Form “brother authors” groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Train students to use multiple writing genres (fiction, non-fiction, poetry) and tools (word processing software, blogs, recording devices and software, etc.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Connect with the Broader Community

• Form *collaborative partnerships* with other like-minded organizations to create a network of support
  • More services at less cost
  • Avoid duplication of services
  • Connect families with organizations with which they may be unaware

• *Engage mentors* to provide guidance, pass on knowledge, share experience, provide a background for solid judgment, and establish friendship.
  • Adult mentors
  • Student mentors
  • Temporary mentors
# Effective Library Services for African American Male Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Librarians</th>
<th>Library Space</th>
<th>Library Resources</th>
<th>Library Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interact with AA male youth as individuals, set high expectations, and develop agency</td>
<td>Provide a welcoming place to increase and express literacy</td>
<td>Nurture resolve of AA male youth, help them reconcile different identities &amp; reimagine their place in the world</td>
<td>Connect literacy to the real world; enable AA male youth to act in their own communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Librarians</th>
<th>Library Space</th>
<th>Library Resources</th>
<th>Library Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Culturally competent</td>
<td>• Nurturing</td>
<td>• Meaningful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Caring</td>
<td>• Respectful</td>
<td>• Relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affirming</td>
<td>• Responsive</td>
<td>• Legitimate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Committed</td>
<td>• Comfortable</td>
<td>• Developmentally appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accountable</td>
<td>• Welcoming</td>
<td>• Enabling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Courageous</td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Honor &amp; promote voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increase engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Set high expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide authentic &amp; relevant experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Foster community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Support from Administrators and Policy-Makers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Administrators and Policy-Makers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>To provide the necessary infrastructure for developing and delivering quality library services to African American male youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>• Hire dedicated staff&lt;br&gt;• Provide adequate and equitable funding&lt;br&gt;• Engage in research-based practice&lt;br&gt;• Develop responsive policy&lt;br&gt;• Foster community partnerships&lt;br&gt;• Provide ongoing professional development&lt;br&gt;• Advocate at the local, state, and national levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recap

1. Set high expectations
2. Utilize instruction and materials that are authentic and relevant to their lives
3. Cultivate voice and agency
4. Connect popular culture and literacy development
5. Connect writing and reading
6. Utilize powerful and enabling texts
7. Develop strong school library programs and partner with school librarians
8. Connect with the larger community through family literacy programs, partnerships, collaboration, and mentoring.
Selected Resources

Dr. Alfred W. Tatum, Associate Professor, University of Illinois-Chicago
College of Education
• Email: atatum1@uic.edu
• Office Phone: 312-413-3883

Dr. Ernest Morrell, Professor of English Education, Teachers College,
Columbia University
• Email: em2822@tc.columbia.edu
• Office Phone: 212-678-3159
• Website: http://www.ernestmorrell.com/

Building a Bridge to Literacy for African-American Male Youth: A Call to
Action for the Library Community (bridgetolit.web.unc.edu)

In addition to providing free downloadable copies of our report and additional
information about the summit, our website includes many other resources including
a bibliography of related research and lists of outside resources such as websites,
blogs, book lists, and selection tools to help you.
Selected Resources

A Celebration of Identity Bibliography
(http://bridgetolit.web.unc.edu/files/2012/06/celebration-of-identity-ppt.pdf)
This list of 256 titles that feature black males was prepared by Jane M. Gangi, PhD
(janegangi@snet.net) for the Summit.

Building a Bridge to Literacy for Adolescent African American Males
(https://sites.google.com/site/bridgetoliteracy/)
This website provides background information about Dr. Alfred Tatum’s research, and details
the work we have done to bring his research to the attention of the library community. Our aim
is to encourage the library community to join the national efforts of organizations such as the
Council on the Great City Schools to support the literacy needs of African-American male
adolescents.

Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (http://coseboc.org/content/welcome)
“COSEBOC intends to develop a collaborative network of schools that nurture success in boys
of color. Working with these schools, COSEBOC is committed to high standards, exemplary
instruction, and the building of coalitions within and outside the community. The intended long-
term outcome of this coalition will be boys of color who are fully equipped to achieve
academically, socially and emotionally.”
Contact Information

For any questions or comments about today’s presentation, please contact us via email at:

Sandra Hughes-Hassell
smhughes@email.unc.edu

Amanda Hitson
hitson@live.unc.edu
References


References


