

The Purpose and Power of Education and What is Black Studies

By Dr. Gholdy Muhammad

Summary

Using a historically responsive literacy framework Dr. Gholdy Muhammad provides a 2-week unit plan for discussing

- The purpose and power of Black education, and
- The foundation of Black studies.

Overview of The Purpose and Power of Black Education Unit Plan:

Education has always been a priority and foundation across Black communities. The purpose of this unit is to understand the role and methods of education across the writings of five authors: Drs. Anna Julia Cooper, WEB DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune & Martin Luther King Jr. Students will analyze the perspectives from the five authors and develop their own stances and perspective on education and how it benefits the entire society.

Overview of Black Studies Unit Plan:

This unit plan is designed to introduce students to key ideas and concepts that form the foundation of Black Studies. This unit sparks student inquiry about Black history and culture that will drive them through the semester. Students will end the unit with a deeper understanding of why it is important to study diverse histories, the power and privilege of this focused knowledge, and how ethnic and cultural knowledge is valued as a part of the national American story, and as such, a valuable course of study for the school community.

*Black Education Power Movement should be taught prior to this unit.

The unit plans illustrates the importance of using culturally responsive practices highlighting:

- Identity
- Skills
- Intellectualism
- Criticality
- Joy

Guiding Questions

After reading the unit plans, consider the following questions?

1. What resonated with you?
2. What did this spark in you or inspire you to think about?
3. What was an Aha moment for you while reading?
4. What is 1 thing you will do as a result of reading this piece? Explain.

Don't have time to read the piece? Here is the cheat sheet with what we learned based on the reading.

To create historically responsive and culturally responsive practices, educators must do the following:

Unpack and make sense of their own histories and identities

- How have you learned and used language and literacy practices in your life?
- What have you learned about Black students, families, and communities, people of color, and other marginalized groups?
- What biases, assumptions, and other oppressive thoughts have you learned and accepted in your life about Black students, families, and communities, people of color, and other marginalized groups?

Center the following during teaching and learning

- Identity:
 - Help youth to make sense of themselves, others, and the community at large.
 - Include diverse authors and material so that all students can see the diversity of Blackness in gender, religion, culture, and etc.
 - Include lessons in a longer genealogy of information emphasizing how students are building on a legacy and higher purpose
 - Discuss the collective potential to uplift the community and all of humanity.
- Skill Development (reading, writing, speaking, performing):
 - Help youth develop proficiencies and confidence across the academic disciplines.
 - Emphasize how skills can help students share their voice and their stories with the larger community.
- Intellectual Development:
 - Help youth gain knowledge and become smarter.
 - Help students understand that they are scholars and learning is an act of scholarship.
 - Include multiple modes of assessment.
- Criticality:
 - Help youth learn and develop the ability to read texts (including print and social contexts) to understand power, equity, and anti-oppression.
 - Help students understand that the primary purpose of education is for change and liberation.

- Joy:
 - Help youth find joy in learning including multiple modes of teaching - literature, audio, photography, video, movement, collective classroom montages, inviting family/home/caregiver connections, and more.
 - Help students understand that learning can and should be joyful.

Good teaching may just be the teaching of skills and intellect, but historically responsive literacy teaching is the teaching of identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy.

~ Gholdy Muhammad

Consider the following questions: Teachers and Preservice Teachers

(from [Cultivating Genius: A Four-Layered Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy](#))

1. What are the histories of the students in your class? Think about their histories in the school, community, home, and wider society.
2. How do the students' histories connect to your content areas? How have their people historically contributed to the development of mathematics, science, social studies, literature, and language?
3. Who are your students? Whom do they say they are? Who do others say they are (think also how they are portrayed in the media)? Whom do they desire to be?
4. What are your students' literacy practices outside of the classroom? What do they read and write? How do they speak? What are the ways in which they know about the world around them?
5. How do the students' histories, identities, and literacies compare to your own?

Consider the following questions: Principals and School Leaders

1. How do your interview questions screen potential teachers for culturally and historically responsive education? You may need to rewrite or revise interview questions to screen for teachers who are prepared to teach to respond to the students' identities and sociopolitical consciousness.
2. How does the diversity of teachers align with diversity of students and of the community?
3. Do students have teachers who look like them and share cultural identities? What are some ways you recruit teachers of color?
4. Are teachers prepared to teach in response to students' histories, identities, literacies, and language? How do you know?
5. Are you asking teachers to teach in culturally and historically responsive ways but implicitly pushing the teaching of skills or test preparation only? How do your observational and evaluation tools support the teaching of culturally and historically responsiveness?

Tool for Culturally and Historically Responsive Spaces -

Let's get started. Use this tool to develop your own unit.

GUIDE	NOTES
<p>Identity What are the histories of the students in your class? Think about their histories in the school, community, home, and wider society.</p>	
<p>Skills What skills/standards do students need to know and master?</p> <p>How will my instruction build students' skills for the content area?</p>	
<p>Intellect How will my instruction build students' knowledge and mental powers?</p>	
<p>Criticality How will my instruction engage students' thinking about power and equity and the disruption of oppression?</p>	
<p>Joy How will my instruction bring out the joy in students?</p>	