Effects of Cultural Authenticity: A view of African American Literature

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the pros/cons of cultural authenticity or insider/outsider perspectives, the evolution of better representation of said culture in children’s books, the overriding “arch” of specific cultural themes, the application of critical literacy in order to “read the world through the word”

Abstract

**Pros authentic literature (insider)**

Madsen stated that “Children’s literature conveys powerful messages about social and moral behaviors and ideas thus are powerful tool for multicultural teaching and learning” (Madsen, 2012, p. 1).

Lobron and Selman (2007) that books that contain real social problems help them to form their own ideas about many modern issues such as racism, prejudice, and social justice. These same texts also give a teacher the opportunity to improve the child’s evaluative skills (as Cited in Madsen, 2012, p. 1).

Davis (1998) states that giving children the opportunity to find themselves in the pages of the books they read helps them in their journey to uncover who they are and to identify people from their ethnic group who they can look up to and imitate (as cited in M.D. Collier, 2000).

**Cons unathentic literature (outsider)**

Broderick (1971) found in a study of African American literature between the years 1827 and 1967 contained books that suggested that African American people were unattractive, musical inclined, superstitious, must have life goals that specifically benefit their race and are dependent on white people. Also African American children would find little to enhance their pride in their culture and contrarily white children would see themselves as superior (as cited in D.E Norton, 2013 , p. 16).

Hamilton (1981) argue that it is extremely challenging for European Americans to compose literature from an African American’s perspective because their experiences and worldviews, which often contain racism, do not line up (W. Brooks and J.C. McNair, 2009).

**Evolution of better representation of African Americans in children’s books:**

Nancy Larrick in her article, “The All-White World of Children’s Books”(1965) .found that there were few books about minority groups and those few books contained stereotypes rather than facts about the people group in question. Thankfully there have been many changes in U.S. with respect to authentic “insider” literature that has helped represent people groups in more accurate ways, and they are more widely available (as cited in D.E Norton, 2013, p .19).

Howard (1991b, p. 98) discusses the increased attention, within the past thirty years, given to research about the creation, authentication, production, and literary merit of African American children’s literature (as cited in W. Brooks and J.C. McNair, 2009).

**The application of critical literacy in order to “read the world through the word”**

Freire and Macedo (1987) state that literacy is not simply the art of understanding a language but rather a way to “read the world” for African American children (as cited in M.D. Collier, 2000).

Ira Shor (1997) says “We are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through words and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us” (Ira Shor, 1997, p. 1).

Ira Shor later takes about critical literacy used “for honoring and using the students' community language while also studying standard English” (Ira Shor, 1997, p.17).

Shor, Ira. “WHAT IS CRITICAL LITERACY? .” *Journal for Pedagogy, Pluralism & Practice*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1997, digitalcommons.lesley.edu.