Affinity Spaces and Identity: Recommended Children's Literature for use in Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this review of literature was to describe affinity spaces and identity formation for children of color in schools and recommend texts currently in use. The literature reviewed included studies utilizing qualitative and quantitative research and the Undoing Racism workshop. Topics reviewed include affinity spaces, understanding blackness, and teaching whiteness. Recommendations for improving the effectiveness of using affinity spaces include teacher's challenges and a sample bibliography of 44 books by grade-level band used currently in a school to enhance practice.

Context: Morning meeting on the first day implementing Affinity Groups.

"What is *that*?" – 1st grade white male

"You don't remember that?! It was when people that are like each other, like have the same skin color, they talk together about stuff." – 1st grade black male

"Remember when we talked about hair and skin color and some people left the room to talk with people in other classes." – 1st grade black female

INTRODUCTION

Despite the history and laws that abolished state-sponsored school segregation, according to Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor (2008), American schools still reveal racial and ethnic group populations that are concentrated together. One study of North Carolina public schools found that segregation between White and non-White students had in fact increased between 1994/95 and 2000/01. Observed changes occurred in large and small, urban and rural schools, and in elementary and secondary schools (Clotfelter, et al., 2008). From this one might conclude re-segregation of schools is happening everywhere. As more and more students from diverse backgrounds populate 21st century classrooms, it is vital to look at the school dynamics and the population make-up of schools (Hughes, Newkirk, & Stenhjem, 2010). Researchers found inter-racial contact among students is largely confined to the formal school setting in desegregated schools (Zisman & Wilson, 1992).

Over the past 50 years schools have become more racial diverse than any other time in United States history, yet some claim schools are not prepared to teach to these differences and create spaces that welcome all students (Tatum, 2007). Schools not only socialize students academically, but also socialize students racially. In the school setting, Black students, and students of color are continuing to struggle and "grapple with the implicit and explicit messages that the community they represent is not as valued in school as is the majority community" (Arrington, Hall, & Howard, 2003 p.3).

How *does* race effect a child's social, emotional, and academic growth in school? This review of literature briefly discusses the effect historical events have on the education system today, the diverse population of students in schools today, the importance of identity formation and affinity grouping for both children of color and White children, and the benefit and challenges of creating affinity spaces. Finally, the review concludes with recommendations for creating authentic diverse learning communities where varying races are represented and reflected within a community. We conclude with suggested children's literature identified by grade-level bands currently used by one school for developing affinity spaces.

Research Question

The research question that guided this review of literature was: to what extent do affinity spaces effect elementary student achievement and development of identity? Using "Affinity," "Diversity," "Multicultural Education," "Black Students," "School," and "Race" as keywords, separately or in conjunction with other, searching the *JSTOR* database and *Google Scholar* yielded thousands of results. However, an advanced Google Scholar search using "affinity," "achievement," "identity," "literature," and "schools" produced 321 hits. Using the abstracts, the articles were then evaluated based on how recent the article was written, and the primary focus of the article and its relevance to this study. Finally, using "affinity groups" within the 321 articles created the reference list to review.

Teachers' Account of Using Affinity Spaces in Schools

Prior to the formal review, the opening quoted conversation was a great moment as a classroom elementary teacher. The students took ownership in explaining what Affinity Group time was and sharing some reasons why it was memorable for them. I believe affinity spaces are truly a place for students to talk together about who they are and what defines them as individuals. It is a place for students to learn to respect and embrace each other differences while working to love themselves for

who they are. A successful Affinity Group, is a group of individuals who can openly talk about who they are and their feelings without leaving any part of their identity behind. My goal is to create that group. I also believe that many people still believe that children are “color blind.” In the first year of implementing Affinity Groups in K-4 classrooms, I can attest to the students’ development of language around the topic of diversity and an understanding of differences that most adults do not articulate. At the beginning of the year, students spoke about someone else’s skin color or hair, saying, “They had brown skin like Sam,” and at the end of the year, students spoke about themselves and did not use fellow classmates as examples. Students learned to describe their skin color and hair using more descriptive language and learned to ask others how they describe their skin. One day in April, a student was drawing a picture of their friend and went over and asked that friend what color pencil they felt was most similar to their skin color. This heightened sense of awareness and care toward one another is what makes affinity space and identity time so meaningful.

Implementing Affinity Groups is not an easy task. Some critics believe that by separating children by race you are promoting segregation. Questions confronted are: What students are doing who are not going to the Affinity Group? Are those students not learning about race, or is it only the black children who need to know about race?

It is important to use Affinity Groups when specific time is built into the curriculum for whole class “Identity Time.” Teaching about white identity is equally as important as teaching students of another race. That is why it is very important that the students in the Affinity Group and the students who remain in the classroom group are focusing a discussion around the same topic. An Affinity Group is there to create a safe environment to talk about identity and other important topics that come up; it is not a place where only those students talk about what it means to be a certain race.

Lastly, forming an Affinity Group is not something meant for every school. Some schools are ready to have that space, while others are still grappling with the concept of creating a school

community that supports differences. It takes support, patience, understanding, communication, cooperation, and courage from the entire school community to develop and implement effective affinity groups. With that, we now turn to a more formal review of race in schools and the development of Affinity Space.

The Literature

Brief History

Desegregation hit its peak in the 1960s and 1970s with a subsequent re-segregation of schools in the 1980s and 1990s (Tatum, 2007). Tatum also described the American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit of 2000 filed against the State of California on behalf of children in eighteen public school districts. Children in the affected schools, "attend schools without such basics as sufficient books, materials, working bathroom facilities, clean and safe buildings, trained teachers, and enough seats for every child and are being denied their fundamental right to an education" (Tatum, 2007 p. 15). In this case, "96.4 percent of the children affected by these dismal conditions were children of color, even through as a group, children of color represent only 59 percent of the public school population in California" (Tatum, 2007 p. 15).

According to the 2004 Census, the top racial populations in the US are non-Hispanic White at 67.4 percent, Hispanic at 14%, and Black at 12.8%, that diversity however is not reflected in most neighborhoods (Tatum, 2007). In 2000, "76% of those living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty were Black or Latino. Black people continue to experience the most residential segregation (Tatum, 2007, p. 13). People often live in governmental housing, which in many cities forces people to live segregated lives meaning the children in these area attend the same schools.

Race Formation and School Setting

DeBlois (2008) described children's fate mostly rests on the socioeconomic status of their parents, the language spoken at home, and the mother's level of education. Children of color are often

denied equal opportunity to adequate schooling that will help them grow from their initial disadvantages. Unequal funding for schools is very likely in places that are geographically racially segregated. “In Manhasset, New York, which is 80 percent White, per-pupil spending is $21,000 per year. A short distance away in an outer borough of New York City, where the student population is just 15 percent White, per-pupil spending is a mere $10,000” (DeBlois, 2008 p.1). Besides the lack of money-spent per pupil, there is a lack of money spent on building upkeep, hiring and retaining experienced teachers, and keeping a positive atmosphere for children to grow and develop.

When children enter a school they carry the culture of their communities and families into their school with them. Children of color who enter predominantly White schools are often taught implicitly to leave their culture at the door and have to adjust to a different way of acting. In a truly multicultural school, “students carrying the culture of their community and family to school would not be an issue, since the cultures of all racial and ethnic groups would already be represented and respected in the school” (Arrington, et al., 2003 p. 2). This can often be a challenge for students entering into a school where they are the minority. A 2002 National Association of Independent Schools study indicated that approximately 82 percent of students in US independent schools are White, 5 percent are Black, and 12 percent are other students of color (Arrington, et al., 2003 p. 2). That means of a school of 500 students there may only be 25 Black students, many in different grades. Students often lack the commonality of a peer within their grade when they are such a low minority group.

Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) conducted a questionnaire to students of color within the National Association Independent Schools system. The questionnaire focused on racism asking students about their experience with any of approximately 40 events or situations that could occur at school, in public, on the job, or when hearing racist statements. Some of the most relevant events and situations encountered include: 47 percent reported being followed while shopping, 43 percent said that White people act surprised at their intelligence or hard work, 41 percent stated that people think they will act

out their stereotypes of how they think a Black person is supposed to act (sports, dress, speech, etc), and 40 percent feel that it is necessary to change their speech or appearance when around White people (p. 3-4).

Students need to feel a "strong sense of connection to the school community; a positive sense of self across contexts, but especially in the school" (Arrington, et al., 2003 p. 1). With a nation where school systems are historically "White society," Black children and children of color need something to change to be successful in our countries schools. DeBlois added that, "In order to improve education, we need to make a bold statement of principle that a child's education will not be limited by the chance of birth. We need the full weight and authority of the federal government to shift the cultural thinking about education and its inextricable link of equity and justice and the future of this democracy" (p. 1-2).

Identity Formation and Affinity Grouping

Through life experiences, children are likely to absorb many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture regardless of his or her cultural background (Tatum, 2007). Children often absorb beliefs about White superiority from different sources.

Derman-Sparks & Ramsey (2006) tested many different theories of race through interviews and observations with children and with parents. First, pre-school, day care, and elementary workers recorded comments about racial identity and how the comments connected with the "color-blind" theory and Pigets theory of development. Next, Derman-Sparks and Ramsey interviewed 60 parents of children ages 3-12 representing different racial and economic groups. Their studies found that there are many contributing factors to a child's racial identity development and their thoughts and beliefs of other racial groups. One item the study found particularly interesting in their research was the fact that the media "Regularly conveys positive images of powerful, wealthy, attractive, and "deserving" Whites and negative or limited images of people of color" (p. 42). Students watch and absorb "intentional and unintentional messages about race from significant people in their live including discomfort in

neighborhoods of color, authorities, literature, media" (p. 42). Children of color and White children need role models and allies to help identify with and to begin building a strong and positive identity for themselves.

Developing Awareness of Identity and Differences

Tatum (2007) describes identities as "the stories we tell ourselves and the world about who we are, and our attempt to act in accordance with these stories. Our Sense of identity – of self-definition is very much shaped in childhood by what is reflected back to us by those around us" (p. 24). Children start to develop their identities early in life whether they recognize it or not. Experiences help form who someone is and therefore their identity. Walking into a racially mixed elementary school, you often see "young children of diverse racial backgrounds playing with one another, sitting at the snack table together, crossing racial boundaries with an ease uncommon in adolescence" (Tatum, 1997, p. 214). The information society gives them formally and informally about what it means to identify with a certain race changes their ideologies of people who are different than them.

As children grow and develop through the elementary grades they start to ask; who am I and who can I be? For many Black and African-American children it means asking, "What does it *mean* to be Black?" As children begin questioning who they are, Tatum contends children begin to consciously or unconsciously internalize the messages seen through media and other sources. At this stage in development, "Not only are Black adolescents encountering racism and reflecting on their identity, but their White peers, even when they are not the perpetrators (and sometimes they are), are unprepared to respond in supportive ways. The Black students turn to each other for the much needed support they are not likely to find anywhere else" (Tatum, 1997, p. 217).

This stage of beginning to identify oneself and finding the support needed comes around the same time many students move from elementary school to middle school. This transition includes going to a different school and/or meeting new friends. During the first few years of transition to middle

school or high school, it is very common for children to associate and become friends with peers who are alike themselves. Therefore, children are beginning to organize themselves racially. Being around those similar to them gives middle school children a sense of safety they may not feel in a diverse group (Tatum, 1997).

Natural Affinity Grouping

Sociologists have documented the importance of social categories in high school for defining behavior norms. Groups such as "jocks or athletes," "the in-crowd," "potheads," and other are meaningful in creating social groups for students to associate with and to be a part of (Kao, 2010). The downside to the social grouping is the minority adolescents are left to face another dimension of social categorization. These "group images that link ethnicity to innate ability not only directly imply norms of behavior for members of each group, but also specify their distinct areas of expertise in various realms of social and academic life" (Kao, 2010, p. 408). By identifying as a certain race, students are placed into societal categories thought to identify strengths, weaknesses, and passions and ambitions in life. Kao argues that these categories, in some cases, predict ones future job and life. Kao studied the achievement and aspirations among different race and ethnic lines. He used interviews with students to compare Black and Hispanic students' educational aspirations and compared those of their White peers. Then, Kao looked at test scores and other statistics including more academic areas and in the athletic arena. Kao viewed the socialization of same-race peers in academic, athletic, and social situations and compared the tests scores the ideologies of student stereotypes identified though interviews about academic success and images presented through race.

For example, stereotypical understandings of competency includes, "Asians are good at math and science; Blacks do poorly in school relative to Whites, and Hispanics have manual labor jobs exemplified by factory work or outdoors gardening work" (Kao, 2010, p. 429). While these over generalized identification of different races are easily recognized, these society/ media-driven identities

continue to identify the children within diverse classrooms and the expectations put on by others that after a while children start to believe. Kao (2010) found both quantitative and qualitative data of "evidence that youths determine their aspirations by evaluating their achievement levels relative to their same-race peers" (p. 429).

While observing high school social groups, studies found tight-knit groups tend to be racially homogenous. In contrast, the loose-knit groups are both racially segregated and integrated (Zisman & Wilson, 1992). The *Peoples Institute for Survival and Beyond* discuss in the *Undoing Racism* workshop that there can never be a 100% trust or understanding between two people of different races. Although one may love or marry another from a different race, there will never be that 100% trust and understanding of what it means to be that race, which one can only find within their own race (Undoing Racism Conference, 2010). As students continue to grow socially, emotionally, and academically so does their understanding of their identity and the impact history and society play on their current and future life.

There are "distinct images of racial groups that work to maintain boundaries between groups and provide rationales for students to maintain racially segregated peer groups at school (Kao, 2010). Looking at a high school from a lens of social grouping, studies show that there is a link between race and behavior that works to maintain racially segregated peer groups in the classroom as well as in extracurricular activities. This segregation leads students to evaluate their own achievement relative to their same-race peers (Kao, 2010).

Natural affinity groups happen when students are first drawn together by something that is common among them. Race is something most people tend to notice from the "outside." As students develop their identities much of their initial identity comes from what is on the outside, meaning skin color. From their initial understanding, they learn more about themselves and are often molded from the assumption society places on them because of their race. In racially mixed settings, "racial grouping

is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism. Joining with one's peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy" (Tatum, 1997, p. 218). Students grouping by race is not just a "Black" thing, it should be pointed out that there are just as many groupings of White students sitting together at lunch as Black students (Tatum, 1997). Race is all around students and is something that holds a huge weight of importance in adolescent lives.

Understanding Blackness

Black youth identify themselves as "Black" because that is how the rest of the world views them. Their "self-perceptions are shaped by the messages received from those around us, and when young Black men and women enter adolescents, the racial content of those messages intensifies" (Tatum, 1997, p. 214). It sometimes takes years and experiences for Black youth to internally identify themselves as Black.

Tatum (1997) suggests that there are five stages of racial identity: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. Throughout these stages a Black child views and absorbs many of the beliefs and values from the dominant White culture. The stereotypes, omissions, and distortions reinforce the notion that Whites are superior beings. Black children begin to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of beauty represented by society and either try to become that or resist societies internalized racism. Black children are often placed in lower tracks in school, emphasizing the apparent sorting along racial lines (Tatum, 1997). Often this tracking reinforces the idea that doing well in school as a Black child is identified as trying to be White. Being smart becomes the opposite of being cool for a Black child (Tatum, 1997).

Black children have a lot of opposing ideas and responsibilities thrown at them. Educators need to recognize that many Black students may not want to be identified as "Black" or associated with that race. One student recalled, "I didn't want to do anything that was traditionally Black, like I never played basketball. I ran cross-country…I went for distance running instead of sprints." He felt that he had to

show his White classmates that there were “expectations to all these stereotypes” (Tatum, 1997). Although this student had proved his classmates stereotypes wrong, when he left his safe community he encountered overt racism quickly realizing the Black stereotypes he had to fight everywhere.

Teaching Whiteness

Recognizing the meaning of Whiteness is “recognition of the meaning of privilege in the context of a society that rewards being White” (Tatum, 2007, p. 36). Professor Gregory Jay from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee discusses eight important reasons for teaching about Whiteness. The reasons include:

1. White people need to take responsibility for race. The question of race should not just be raised when studying "people of color".
2. Studying Whiteness means studying institutional racism, especially practices that create “White privilege.” Since White privilege is systemic and not personal, this approach can combat the tendency to get stuck in the “White guilt” syndrome.
3. Studying Whiteness can change the dynamic of any classroom, whatever its ethno-racial makeup, by moving the conversation from personal attitudes (and guilt) to the objective analysis of historical events, legal codes, social institutions, and cultural practices.
4. Silence about Whiteness lets everyone continue to harbor prejudices and misconceptions, beginning with the notion that “White” equals normal. Whiteness oppresses when it operates as the invisible regime of normality, and thus making Whiteness visible is a principal goal of anti-racist pedagogy.
5. Whiteness has been a significant legal and political category, and thus a powerful reality. Whiteness is a way of distributing wealth and power according to arbitrary notions of biological difference.

6. Whiteness has been a significant aesthetic and cultural value (or symbol or commodity), and thus requires a defamiliarizing or deconstructive interpretation.
7. Teaching about Whiteness helps move classes beyond the "celebrate diversity" model of multiculturalism.
8. Teaching about Whiteness moves antiracist education in new directions by presenting difficult challenges to the very idea of "race."(Teaching About Whiteness, 2010)

Teaching about Whiteness is something often not found in schools. It is just as important for White people to understand their identity as it is for a Black person. Although many feel guilt towards being White, society has placed that guilt on the White race. White people can only help become allies for change and become allies to helping support, understand, and respect the challenges and sacrifices many have to face when identifying themselves as Black or people of color.

As identified by reason number two above for why teaching Whiteness is important, studies around race focus mostly on non-White groups. Race is thought of in general as anything other than White. White children need to learn to identify with their race and what it means to be White. Paul Kivel in *Uprooting Racism* sums up Whiteness as “A concept, an ideology, which holds tremendous power over ones life and, in turn, over the lives of people of color…It is an arbitrary category that overrides individual personalities and governs our day-to-day lives just as much as being a person of color does” (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 29).

Importance of Formal Affinity Groups

Nicole Walker, a mentor for a 5th thru 8th grade affinity group for students of color at The Cathedral School of St. John the Divine commented, “Affinity spaces let conversations happen” (N.Walker, personal communication, February 14, 2011). Affinity groups allow for students to not feel like they are in a vacuum, but in a place that acknowledges their differences and embraces the need for them to develop a safe place to talk about the struggles and successes happening within their school.

These affinity spaces help empower students and help them develop positive feelings about their identity. Allowing students to have that freedom to speak in a small "safe" group helps build students confidence about discussing their experiences with others of the same and of different races when they are ready.

Although there will always be fear from teachers, students, administrators, parents, and the school community in general that by creating affinity groups you are only separating students of color more and identifying them as different, these groups have shown again and again to be a powerful investment for students of color. Some parents and students need time to see the impact and importance, but with time many will agree that affinity groups only help to empower their students who have had their power stripped from them through decades of institutionalized racism.

Benefits of Affinity Groups

During the maturation of students in the adolescent state of development most students *just don't want to be seen or noticed* if they are different from the "norm." Affinity groups are a great way of bringing together students who have something important in common. Affinity space is a place that welcomes students of a similarity to sit together, chat, enjoy each others' company, and ultimately have a safe place to reflect upon who they are individually and collectively. In a school setting this group meets before, during, or after school in a private setting usually with a mentor or advisor that is a person of that affinity group.

The space is not a "teaching" space, yet spaces to learn and to share experiences, and to talk about the commonality the members have. There are many things that can just "pop-up" in these groups or are topics that the advisor may bring to the group to start a discussion. The National Association for Independent Schools (NAIS) describes why schools would create affinity spaces. After researching the programs used within Independent Schools throughout the country they identified the following reasons for creating Affinity groups. Affinity spaces gives students space so they "can discuss

issues related to racial/ethnic/cultural identity development, provide a save environment where people who share a racial/ethnic/cultural identity can come together for building community, fellowship, and empowerment, facilitate opportunities for affirming, nurturing, and celebrating, and empowering participants who share a racial/ethnic/cultural identity" (Batiste, 2006, S. 7).

Research by NAIS also indicated that Affinity groups allow for: building community, identifying issues, sharing successes, promoting ideas for action, preparing for deep and honest cross-cultural dialogue with other affinity groups, provide opportunities for affirmation and celebrating how the "why" defines the "what" (Batiste, 2006). The development of Affinity groups in many independent schools across the nation stemmed from the needs of students. Students needed a place to build relationships with students similar to them, and discuss the challenges and issues associated with being a student of color in an independent school setting and in the greater community.

Affinity spaces are not only meant for children of color, but for White children to discuss what it means to be White. Bringing up the topic or "race" can quiet a room instantly, and that is the idea that is perceived by the youth in this nation. Talking about race or bring race up constitutes that you are "racist." By forming places for students to openly talk about race in a safe environment allows for exploration, discussion, and identity building space.

While the conversations that happen in Affinity groups stay confidential in those groups, it is a place for student to get things out and to get out of the vacuum society has placed them in. These groups empower students with language and confidence that they can take with them back into the larger community. Having affinity groups not only helps those students involved, but the greater school community as a whole. Schools are expected to be safe places for students, but many students of color do not feel safe coming to school everyday. Giving students the space, time, and purpose for connecting with others likes them only helps make school a more safe and welcoming place for all students. When students better understand themselves they can begin to respect and understand those around them

that may be different. Becoming an ally to their peers is the first step in creating a respectful and welcoming school community.

Challenges in Creating Affinity Spaces

One of the most pervasive arguments against affinity group spaces is the notion that young children are "color-blind." That is, they do not notice racial differences among people (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Studies show that parents believe that bringing up race only causes students to notice difference more, which leads to prejudice towards people who are different from them. One study quoted a parent who disapproved of diversity education, "I don't see why we have to do all this diversity stuff. Can't we just let kids be kids and not bother them with all this depressing information that has nothing to do with their lives?" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Affinity groups are mostly developed when students show a need for such a space other than during lunchtime or at recess. Although students are the ones who want and need this space, over the years NAIS has identified the most common reasons for parents, students, teachers, and community members to disagree with affinity spaces. Many opposing people believe that racially segregated spaces have:

- *False Parallels:* "The same thing happened to me…"
- *Inverting the Injustice:* "By focusing on affinity groups you have offended me"
- *Outright Dismissal*: "Race has nothing to do with it"
- *Minimization*: "It really isn't a program for them/us here…"
- *Righteousness:* "We're a good school so we can't be racist…"
- *Colorblindness:* "People are people – We don't see color, gender, etc."
- *Jealousy:* "Why do they get a special group, to be treated to something I/we can't have" (Batiste, 2006, S. 9)

While parents have a right to know what is happening at school and the right to question and gain knowledge about new developments at school, it is also important that they learn how to take risks and trust the research and teachers that they will do what is right for the best interest of the children at the school. White parents cannot empathize with students or parents of color and vice versa. Experiences of students of different races are the experiences of those students and when working through the challenges and pushback of starting affinity groups, one must try to respect and understand where another is coming from. Ultimately giving the choice to the child of whether to join or not may be the best result. In the end, affinity groups are there to benefit the students and to help give them this space and opportunity.

A Teachers Role in Creating Authentic Communities

To begin to create schools that accept affinity space and help to build respectful and understanding students, it is important to look at the makeup of the US education system and at the heart of teaching, teachers. History has shown not only a lack of culturally diverse schools, but culturally diverse faculty and staff. To educate the youth of today, teachers need to be more diverse and accepting of multicultural education. Teachers must first understand the importance, internalize what diversity means to them, and develop ways to enhance and strengthen their current curriculum with the needs of all students in mind.

Challenges Teachers Face/Teacher Population

Historically speaking, US schools have been structures to identify those with high potential and those without. With this structure in place children are sorted accordingly, often by race. Although schools are segregated based, many decision makers do not see the importance of investing resources of time or money in any large conversations about race in schools (Tatum, 2007). Many school districts talk about closing the “achievement gap,” which in reality is usually defined as the performance discrepancies between White students and students of color (Tatum, 2007).

As the US grows more and more diverse, so does the student population. Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and other characteristics. To meet the challenges of a more diverse student body, teachers must learn to include culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create a "classroom culture where all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn" (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 1).

Besides the need for teachers to become more culturally aware and develop a sense of multicultural importance, a large barrier in the education field is the lack of teachers of color. Of the more than 3 million teachers in the United States, "only 15.6% are teacher of color, 7.5 percent African American, specifically" (Tatum, 2007, p. 25). With most teachers being White, that means that most students of color are being taught by predominantly White teachers. This statistic stems back to the elementary classroom where teachers do not embrace students of color learning and show them the capabilities they posses to become excellent students. The system runs in a cyclical manor, teachers and society pushing students of color away from education at an early age and in the end, having few teachers of color as role models to stop the cycle.

Importance of Teacher Opportunity/Identity Development

A teacher chaperoning a dance wondered why most of the Black students, who did not live in the neighborhood, did not want to attend the dance. The well-intentioned teacher finally said to them, "Oh come on, I know you people love to dance" (Tatum, 1997, p. 217). What message did these students take from this message sent by a (once) respected teacher? Did the teacher know what she had said was extremely offensive and stereotyped her students? Since the majority of teachers are White, they truly lack the knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a Black student. With knowledge comes understanding of ones self and others, and a greater appreciation of differences. When teachers can be unbiased in their instruction, communication with students and parents, and

become all around more aware of their own identity and the difference in their students, they can better respond to the needs of all their students (Hughes et al., 2010).

Regardless of race, students look up to their teachers for guidance and support in getting by in school, and living in a diverse and complex society. Educators need to prepare students to live in a multiracial society (Tatum, 2007). An important part of teaching students to live in a multiracial society is to help students become aware of the "hidden curriculum" found in the social and cultural structures. Studies have identified these "hidden curriculum" pieces such as in the lunchroom, on athletic teams, and in other social and academic situations (Zisman & Wilson, 1992).

Teachers have the responsibility to help all students achieve to the best of their abilities. Instruction must reflect the values of all students and help create a culturally responsive classroom that addresses the needs of all learners. The educational system "plans the curriculum for schools, and teachers as their "institutional agents" transfer the prescribed content to their students. This daily contact with students produces teachers with a unique opportunity to either further the status quo or make a difference that will impact not only the achievement but also the lives of their students" (Hughes et al., 2010).

Teachers must be culturally responsive if students are going to become culturally aware and become respectful of diversity. Utilizing material, engaging in practices, and demonstrating values that include rather than exclude student from different backgrounds will help teachers fulfill their responsibility to all their students. Self-reflection is one of the key steps for teacher to begin to teach students through a culturally diverse lens. Since teachers' values impact relationships with students and their families, teachers must conceal any feelings that may potentially be racist towards any culture, language, or ethnic group. Teachers need to work to rid themselves of biases and create an atmosphere of trust and acceptance for students and their families, resulting in greater opportunity for student success (Hughes et al., 2010).

In a culturally responsive classroom, no child should have to leave any part of their racial or cultural identity at the door. All children have a right to feel safe, welcome, and acknowledged in a school setting. Although it is rarely the case that schools offer a secure and friendly enough place for all children to walk right in leaving nothing behind, that is the ultimate goal for a culturally responsive community. Culturally responsive pedagogy has three dimensions:

1. Institutional: Reflects the administration and its policies and values
2. Personal: Cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive
3. Instructional: Includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 1)

These three dimensions significantly impact the teaching and learning process and are critical to understanding and implementing effective culturally responsive community.

Changing Practice

According to Tatum (2007), a common beginning step for educators to start including multicultural education in their curriculum is to acquire bibliographies and purchase multicultural books and other classroom materials (See Appendix for sample reference list aligned with grade levels). While many teachers already have these materials in place, many teachers stop at the simple purchase of classroom materials and feel that by having the materials in the classroom they are creating a multicultural community. To begin building an understanding and accepting community of diverse learners a teacher must live through experiences that are taught, not just put materials out and expect the children to learn from the supplies given.

It is pertinent that 21st century teachers embrace cross-racial interactions in the curriculum and use tools to help build a class community. There are many different strategies, tools, and resources to help embrace a diverse learning community. Children's literature can build a foundation for discussions

stemming from the characters, settings, and events in the story. Reading books from different cultures helps children question, relate, and observe a race or culture different than their own. Literature can also help students understand bias written about races and the displays of bias in literature and in the real world (e.g., Knowles & Smith, 2007; Hadaway & McKenna, 2007).

Literature is a great tool to use in integrating many core subjects as well as integrating social problems and identity development. Understanding the world around them can be very challenging for a student, and specifically a minority student. Books provide opportunities for children to explore their life experience as well as the rich diversity of the many people on our planet. If given the right tools, literature enhances a child's sense of self and connections to the world.

Books can also expose children to misinformation about themselves and others, including stereotypes and racism. Teachers and adults alike must practice critical thinking when previewing books before giving them to children. Often times books that do include racism and stereotypes can be good books to read in developing sympathy and understanding for others, yet the teacher should do this with careful guidance. It is pertinent that teachers guide students though any piece of literature that depicts a race, culture, or ethnic group. One book or story does not encompass all there is to a group of people. Many books can help illustrate a picture of a group of people, but not one or two stories can give you a true depiction of what it is like to be a part of that particular group of people. Literature is a great resource and tool to use in helping student embrace the differences among themselves, classmates, and the world.

Beyond literature there are other strategies for helping implement diversity learning and understanding within a classroom. Modeling inclusive practices helps students see multicultural information, pictures, beliefs, and other materials in a classroom everyday. Giving students math problems about measuring to make an authentic meal, reading an international piece of literature, studying different countries and the similarities and differences with the US, and just having photos of

multiracial people around the classroom tells the students that everyone is welcome and included in the classroom. Using multicultural materials throughout the year is more important than using books only during a particular month, such as using Barbara Parks books only during February for Black History Month. Teaching with diverse materials throughout the year and with varying activities will be more meaningful to students and give students a better understanding for the importance placed on diversity within the classroom (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Building upon and exploring the racial and cultural diversity that exists within the classroom and the larger community helps students better understand where they live. Taking neighborhood walks with students; visiting local restaurants, grocery stores, and shops can help students gain a better understanding of the cultures around them and gives students a chance to ask questions they may feel unsafe or racist in asking. Giving students a chance to ask someone why they wear their hair in braids or wear authentic looking clothes helps give them real answers. When children are afraid to ask or do not know the true answers, they often make up their own assumptions which can often lead to stereotypes or inappropriate and inaccurate ideas (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006).

Besides literature and using other tools and resources to build a authentic multicultural classroom, affinity groups and spaces can help give students a time and place to ask questions and talk with others like themselves. Using their peers is a great resource for adolescents when peer influence is often more valued than adult guidance and support. In the early grades it might be important to use literature and other resources to guide conversations about what makes us different and how it feels in affinity spaces and in the general classroom. Some topics might include: skin color, hair, ability, perception in society, effects of media, and other factors that contribute to the differences among us and how society has institutionalized race. While creating a multicultural classroom is not an easy task, the populations within our schools are becoming more and more racially diverse and with that our

curriculum must change. In order to expect students to learn and excel it is important to first create a safe place for all students to grow socially, emotionally, and academically.

Summary and Conclusion

Attending school is a commonality among children; however the experience of attending is very diverse. Schools should welcome difference by embracing varying races and cultures (among other differences). When a child feels safe, welcome, and wanted in a school, their academic, social, and emotional growth will continue to increase. Fighting history of segregation and the media influence of encouraging “racial” beauty and intelligence is something teachers cannot eliminate. But what teachers can do, is help give students a place to collectively join with others who share their racial identity and talk about what it means to identify with a particular race.

Children of color and White children all need to begin to understand the constructs of race and help each other understand the differences and similarities between them. Beyond creating affinity groups to help empower children, schools must start embracing different races throughout the curriculum and throughout the school year. Too often books are shared and celebrations take place only on nationally recognized holidays and not any other time of the year. Black history should not only be taught when the calendar says “February is Black History Month”, but the impact of important Black people should be integrated throughout the curriculum daily.

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DuBois, D.L., Burk-Braxton, C., Swenson, L.P., Tevendale, H.D., & Hardesty, J.L. (2002). Race and gender influences on adjustment in early adolescence: Investigation of an integrative model. *Child Development, 73,* 1573-1592. Retrieved from http://jstor.org

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Tatum, B.D. (1997). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* NY: Basic Books

Tatum, B. D. (2007). *Can we talk about race?* Boston: Beacon Press

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Valdez, A. (1999). *Learning in living color: Using literature to incorporate multicultural education into the primary curriculum.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon

Zisman, P., & Wilson, V. (1992). Table hopping in the cafeteria: an exploration of "racial" integration in early adolescent social groups. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 23,* 199-220. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org

Appendix

Below is the minimum list of recommended books for a classroom or library attempting to utilize affinity spaces. This list was created with help from teachers and staff at the Cathedral School of St. John the Divine, New York, NY and from the following books: *Breaking Boundaries with Global Literature* (Hadaway & McKenna, 2007); *Learning in Living Color* (Valdez, 1999)*;* and *Understanding Diversity Through Novels and Picture Books* (Knowles & Smith, 2007)*.*

Grades K-2

Adoof, A. (2002). *Black is brown is tan*. China: HarperCollins.

Ancona, G. (1993). *Powwow*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Anzaldua, G. (1995). *Friends from the other side.* San Francisco: Children's Book Press.

Cave, K. (2003). *One child, one seed: A South African counting book*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Collier, B. (2000). *Uptown*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Davol, M.W. (1993). (1993). *Black, white, just right!* Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Hoffman, M. (2002). The color of home. New York: Penguin Putnam Books.

Katz, K. (2002). *The colors of us*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Lester, J. (2005). *Let's talk about race*. New York: HarperCollins.

McCain, B.R. (2004). *Grandmother's dreamcatcher.* Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Park, L.S., & Durango, J. (2005). *Yum! Yuck! A foldout book of people sounds*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Pinkney, S.L. (2006). *Shades of black: A celebration of our children*. New York: Scholastic.

Rappaport, D. (2001). *Martin's big words: The life of Dr. Martin Luther King*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children.

Raven, M.T. (2004). *Circle unbroken: The story of a basket and its people*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ryan, P.M. (2000). *The name jar*. New York: Dell Dragonfly Books.

Son, J. (2003). *Finding my hat*. New York: Orchard Books.

Tarpley, N. (1998). *I love my hair!* Hong Kong: Little, Brown and Company.

Vogl, C., Vogl, H., & Vogl, N. (2005). *Am I a color too?* Bellevue, WA: Illumination Arts.

Woodson, J. (2001). *The other side*. New York: Penguin Putnam Books.

Grades 3-5

Aksomitis, L. (2005). Adeline's dream. Canada: Coteau Books.

Bridges, R. (1999). *Through my eyes*. New York: Scholastic.

Cofer, J.O. (2004). *Call me Maria*. New York: Scholastic.

Delacre, L. (2000). *Salsa stories*. New York: Scholastic.

Fleming, C. (2003). *Boxes for Katje*. Ill. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Glaser, L. (2005). *Bridge to America: Based on a true story.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Giovanni, N. (2005). *Rosa*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Hamanaka, S. (1995). *The journey: Japanese Americans, racism and renewal*. New York: Scholastic.

Hoffman, M. (2002). *The color of home.* New York: Penguin Putnam.

Kissinger, K. (1994). *All the colors we are: The story of how we get our skin color.* St. Paul: Redleaf Press.

Lester, J. (2005). *Let's talk about race*. New York: HarperCollins.

Littlesugar, A. (2001). *Freedom school, yes!*. New York: Philomel Books.

Mochizuki, K. (1993). *How baseball saved us*. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Press, P. (2000). *Coretta Scott King*. Chicago: Heinemann Library.

Ryan, P.M. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.

Savageau, C. (2006). *Muskrat will be swimming*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House.

Grades 6-8

Altman, S. (2001). *Extraordinary African-Americans from colonial to contemporary times.* USA: Children's Press.

Bausum, A. (2006). *Freedom riders: John Lewis and Jim Zwerg on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement*. USA: National Geographic.

Bell, W. (1998). *Zack*. USA: Simon & SchulsterCarmi, D. (2000). *Samir and Yonatan*. New York: Scholastic.

Curtis, C.P. (1995). *The Watsons go to Birmingham – 1963.* New York: Delacorte Press.

Erdich, L. (1999). *The birchbark house*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Fogelin, A. (2006). *The big nothing*. Atlanta: Peachtree.

Headley, J.C. (2006). *Nothing but the truth (and a few white lies).* Little, Brown and Company.

Hidier, T.D. (2003). *Born confused.* New York: Scholastic.

Nislick, J.L. (2005). *Zayda was a cowboy*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Ryan, P.M. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. New York: Scholastic.

Ryan, P.M. (2004). *Becoming Naomi Leon.* New York: Scholastic.

Sachs, M. (1995). *Call me Ruth.* New York: Scholastic.

Grades 9-12

Bagdasarian, A. (2000). F*orgotten fire*. New York: Dorling Kindersley.

Carlson, L.M. (2005). *Moccasin thunder: American Indian stories for today*. New York: HarperCollins.

Curtis, C.P. (1999). *Bud, not Buddy*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Draper, S.M. (1998). *Forged by fire*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Draper, S.M. (1994). *Tears of a tiger*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Gaskins, P.F. (1999). *What are you: Voices of mixed-race young people*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Mead, A. (2005). *Swimming to America*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Shea, P.D. (2003). *Tangled threads: A Hmong girl's story*. New York: Clarion Books.

Singer, M. (2004). *Face relations: 11 stories about seeing beyond color*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Yang, G.L. (2006). *American born Chinese.* New York: First Second.

Other professional resources for the classroom teacher

Derman-Sparks, L. (1989). *Anti bias curriculum tools for empowering young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of You.

Muse, D. (1997). *The new press guide to multicultural resources for young readers.* New York: The New Press.

Okazawa-Rey, M., Menkart, D., & Lee, E. (2007). *Beyond heroes and holidays*. USA: Teaching For Change.