The Unsung and Transformative Power of African-American Urban Adolescent Literature: Using an Adolescent Identity Taxonomy to Understand and Teach Inner-City Students

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THE UNSUNG AND TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN URBAN ADOLESCENT LITERATURE: USING AN ADOLESCENT IDENTITY TAXONOMY TO UNDERSTAND AND TEACH INNER-CITY STUDENTS

A Dissertation
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Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: The Unsung and Transformative Power of African-American Urban Adolescent Literature: Using an Adolescent Identity Taxonomy to Understand and Teach Inner-City Students

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This dissertation explores how the power of an underrepresented genre and subgenre of literature—African-American Urban Adolescent Literature (AAUAL)—can have instructional value in secondary English language arts classrooms. The use and function of AAUAL is threaded throughout each chapter. Keeping AAUAL at the forefront, I discuss the following: (1) the emergence of AAUAL; (2) a contextual pedagogical framework with eight components of an effective curriculum and with AAUAL as core pieces of literature; (3) a taxonomy suggested by AAUAL that highlights the black, urban adolescent identity construction; and (4) the reading-writing connection in relation to AAUAL and the taxonomy and in regards to meeting the argumentative writing strand in the Common Core State Standards. I use these four premises to discuss the affective and instructional implications of using AAUAL in secondary English language arts classrooms, explaining why I believe that this subgenre is a complementary segue to canonical texts and provides a platform for students to learn strategies when cognitively processing concepts. I also explain that both teachers and students will benefit from this subgenre of literature and proposed instructional model. If implemented authentically and with fidelity, they can offer wonderful learning opportunities and experiences for both teachers and students.
The major literary theory undergirding this research is Reader Response. More specifically, I draw on the work of Louise Rosenblatt—transactional reading—and Norman Holland’s notion of identity themes because of the content of AAUAL and the taxonomy which calls themes forth for black, urban teens when reading this body of literature.