

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: REPRESENTATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND AGENCY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN POSTSECONDARY LITERACY INSTRUCTION: A CRITICAL, QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTAL READING TEXTBOOKS

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The impact of race and social class on African American students has major implications for developmental reading curriculum and instruction. Developmental reading courses, which are often gateway courses in higher education, must address issues of race and social class if they are to be successful in meeting the literacy needs of African American students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and thereby helping these students persist throughout their college careers. Using critical race theory, critical literacy and sociocultural theories of learning as a theoretical framework, this study investigates developmental reading curriculum and instruction, as exemplified by developmental reading textbooks, with the goal of determining how African Americans and their experiences are represented and framed in terms of race, social class and education. I conducted a critically conscious, qualitative content analysis of the reading selections and pedagogical techniques in a representative sample of five of the most recently published developmental reading textbooks.

The content in the reading selections related to African Americans from the five textbooks cover four major themes pertaining to race, social class and education: racial inequality, Black-White relations, poverty and mobility, and educational disparity. While issues of race, social class and education are generally being addressed in these textbooks, the pedagogical techniques used in the textbooks do not always promote a critical examination of these issues in ways that are pivotal, to students' success and persistence. Nevertheless, in comparison to previous studies of developmental reading textbook content and pedagogical techniques (e.g., Wood, 2003), there does appear to be some movement toward incorporating a sociocultural theoretical orientation and critical literacy pedagogy in developmental reading textbooks. This emerging trend has the potential to positively impact developmental reading classroom practice, which could lead to greater success and persistence among African American students from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.