Abstract

In this phenomenological study, I take a journey into the lived experiences of African American students reading Great Books literature. The research question that guides my study is “What are the lived experiences of African American students reading Great Books literature?” In order to unpack the enlightenment gained through this study on the students’ lived experiences, I call upon the phenomenological writings of Martin Heidegger, Hans George Gadamer, Max van Manen, Edward Casey, John O’Donohue, and David Abram. African American educators and philosophers speak into the journey, such as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Marva Collins, Anna Julia Cooper, Gloria Ladson-Billings, James Baldwin, and others. My research path follows the methodological guidance of Max van Manen.

Years ago, I taught a Great Books literature class for 6 years at a small private school in Southern Maryland. Twenty-two African American students came through my class years ago and 5 of those students were able to participate in this study where I explore their lived experience reading Great Books literature. For this study, we all met around a table, just as we did years ago for the Great Books class that I taught. The five former students who participated in this study and I went away for a weekend retreat to engage in conversation about their lived experiences. Upon careful review of the transcripts from these conversations I identified themes that reflected their progression through the course. The themes are the following: The Flickering Light, When the Flame Catches, Being in the Light, and The Lived Experience Shining into the Present.

These themes reveal how students started out struggling with embracing and internalizing the books, but then progressed to transformative insights they brought forth—even allowing the lived experience of reading the literature to affect their current lives as adults. As a culminating event, the participants created and performed a play, entitled “The Table,” which provided a visual representation of their lived experiences reading Great Books literature. They chose the title “The Table” because as we all reflected on the lived experience, they realized that my classes were only taught around a table and from the unity created around the discussions at the table, something happened to their inner selves. The play was performed at St. John’s College during President’s Day weekend and Frederick Douglass’ birthday. After the play, the former students responded to questions from the audience, expressing their journey into reading Great Books literature and also provided insight as to how teachers can help African American students engage in the literature. This was included as a part of my study as well, in order to bring to the light how the students’ present lives were affected by their lived experience reading Great Books literature. The insights gained from this study are a guiding light for me as I move forward as an educator of primarily African American students, especially in the area of literacy education (literary and cultural literacy). The school I opened is a way for me to put into practice the insights gained in this study. In addition, my interests in forming multi-age Great Books literature circles of all races, backgrounds, etc.; round table discussions with educators, parents, etc. on these matters; and teacher training sessions where these insights can be shared, have become more illuminated for me.

URI

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This phenomenological study examined the developmental experiences of 8 African American doctoral student mothers. Findings and related themes indicate that identity and curriculum preparation influence African American doctoral student mothers’ adult development. Implications for training and practice are included along with recommendations for future research. View. Daley was a pioneer in the counseling field as the 1st African American president of the American School Counselor Association in 1971 and the 1st African American and 3rd female president of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (now American Counseling Association [ACA]) in 1975. African American literature gained a major new writer in 1845 when Frederick Douglass published his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself. One of the first African American poets to make a living through literature and by far the best known of nineteenth-century African American poets, Paul Laurence Dunbar garnered his fame by mastering dialect poetry of the so-called plantation tradition. For most African American writers, getting a book published may have been the ultimate goal, but newspapers and magazines reached the broadest audiences, and because of this they constituted significant vehicles for cultural expression during the Harlem Renaissance. The importance of the Great Books in maintaining the nation’s cultural heritage, in teaching the general public what should be valued and highlighted in their lives, in cultivating a nation’s taste, and in developing its potential for open-mindedness, generosity, and greatness can never be overemphasized. 6. More than fifty years after it was first published, Invisible Man is still one of the most widely read and taught books in the African-American literary canon. Why do you think this is so? How true is this novel to the lives of black Americans in the twenty-first century? How true is it to the life of every one of us? 10.