Abstract

This qualitative action research study examined how reading and engaging with themes of social justice affected the writing and thinking of secondary English composition students. There were 19 English composition students in this study from a suburban high school located in the northeastern part of Pennsylvania consisting of 727 predominantly white students. Methods of data collection included: participant observation journals, non-participant observation journals, student surveys, student interviews, student work, and individual student reflections. Incorporation of the social justice themes took place before, during, and after the writing process and included reading poems by multicultural authors and novel excerpts as guided by the research of Linda Christensen, reading and responding to e-mails from English language learners, and class discussions focused on ideas such as personal identity and perceptions versus realities. The purpose of incorporating social justice themes into the composition curriculum was to motivate student writing while helping students to expand their worldviews in order to be more accepting of those different from them. The research findings suggest that students are more willing to discuss and write about sensitive social justice themes if supported by age-appropriate materials and a classroom environment that respects their opinions. Findings also suggest that examining social justice themes may lead to students revising their own thinking.