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Using Culturally And Racially Relevant Curriculum To Close The Opportunity Gap

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USING CULTURALLY AND RACIALLY RELEVANT CURRICULUM TO CLOSE

THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters

of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my primary advisor Patty Born Selly for her assistance in this process. I also would like to thank my colleague and peer reviewer Brandice Kelzenberg for her help and support in this adventure.

To my amazing students who make my job a dream come true every day, a huge thank you for being the amazing human being you are, everyday. My single biggest wish is that all your dreams come true.

A mi querida familia: Accel, Sue, Maria, Walter y Alesandro no les puedo decir lo que significan para mi y cuantos les amo para todo lo que hacen por mi y todo su apoyo en este trabajo y en mi vida. Gracias Nana Sue y Maria por su ayuda y ser mi segunda para de ojos.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

At the age of 16, I started my first job at a daycare center, working with children and it has become my passion. Over the years I have worked with children ranging in ages from two to twelve. I have worked with students who speak a variety of languages, come from different cultural backgrounds; and whose academic abilities cover a wide range. I have been an English learner (EL) teacher for the last six years, as an EL teachers I am not only responsible for the learning of our students, but in some cases I am the sole advocate for them within the educational system.

One of the biggest questions when teaching ELs is how do we ensure that ELs are achieving at the same level as their native English speaking peers; how do we close the opportunity gap? Can we use culturally and racially relevant practices and curriculum to help close this gap in students of color, including EL students?

Education reform is continually an issue on the political stage and in schools themselves. In recent years, one of the biggest concerns in education reform is the discrepancy in students success known as the "achievement gap". While this gap is often referred to as the "achievement gap", in this capstone it will be referred to as the "opportunity gap". While I believe that all students are capable of achieving, not all students are given the same opportunities to show their knowledge or to learn. I will address this issue as one of "opportunities" rather than "achievement". According to statistics, it is clear that the opportunity gap is a very real issue across the country and in Minnesota in particular. I believe that one of the biggest factors which affects EL student achievement and success is student buy-in and connections to the curriculum. Culturally

and racially relevant curriculum can include, but is not limited to, differentiating teaching styles to include styles that focus on movement, music or simply empowering students to have an active voice, rather than being passive learners in their education. Culturally and racially relevant teaching is not limited to different teaching style, but also includes the use of differentiated materials, such as things like panel books and dancing definitions that uses rhymes to increase engagement and retention of vocabulary. Racially and culturally relevant teaching and curriculum speaks to student's home language, culture and general human purpose. It is a way to see the content teachers need student to learn through the lens of student's real life experiences, culture and racial experiences that have shaped their lives and view of the world. . How can I expect my students to buy-in and make connections with the curriculum if it is not culturally or racially relevant to their human purpose. In order to best serve our EL students, we need to ensure that we are providing the most culturally and racially relevant curriculum. With laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 being signed into law, my EL students are held accountable for their learning in standardized tests such as the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) and the WIDA ACCESS test. It is imperative that I am teaching and reaching my students through my teaching and that the curriculum is racially and culturally relevant.

Another important aspect when examining achievement across racial and cultural lines is the role and presence of whiteness within our society and in our educational system. Over the last three years, I have embarked on a personal journey to be an advocate for racial equity. Being an advocate for racial equity is not limited to my personal life, but also includes my work everyday in the classroom as an educator and

role model for my students. The use of the word whiteness does not simple refer to someone's skin color, but rather is a reference to the systematic racism which is prevalent in our society and in most institutions, including the educational system. For example the idea that the only and correct type of family structure is a mother and father and two to three children, with the male being the main bread winner and considered the authority figure in the house and the female stays at home. People who come from a single parent household, live with other relatives or friends, or have two parents of the same gender are often ostracized and considered to be unsuccessful. Another example of whiteness can be seen in the idea of time. Through the lens of whiteness the concept of time includes the value of time as money or some other commodity and there are very strict unspoken expectations and rules around being on time (Figure A). In many cases, people and behaviors that do not fit into this box of whiteness are viewed as bad or wrong ways to do things and are unsuccessful by the standards of whiteness. While fitting into these ideas of whiteness is not a negative thing, it is also not the only acceptable way to do things. People who do not fit into these ideas of whiteness are often viewed as failures in the eyes of society.

In this chapter I will also share my own journey through the public education system and the reasons why I feel that culturally and racially relevant curriculum and teaching is imperative to ensuring student achievement and closing the achievement gap. Along with my own personal experiences, I will also share the impact it has had on my students, their learning and my teaching.

Throughout my last six years working in two different school districts in the Twin Cities metro area, I have seen students who are ready to learn and who are extremely

capable. However, they are not achieving to their full capacity. Observing this year after year, it became abundantly clear that I needed to change how I was teaching and what I was teaching. For the first three years of my teaching, I didn't have the tools and understanding to be able to reflect on my teaching; thus, I was unable to implement the changes that I needed to make to improve student achievement. I was finally able to take steps towards achieving this goal when I started working in my current school district.

In the district where I work, Osseo Area Schools – District 279, I have received a year's worth of training from the National Urban Alliance (NUA) on culturally and racially responsive teaching strategies. I have also received three years of training on racial equity from Pacific Education Group (PEG). With the help of these two organizations I have had a shift in how I view my students and how and what curriculum I am teaching them on a daily basis. I have begun the process of reflecting on the areas of language arts, math, science and social studies and am taking steps to ensure that the materials I am using are racially and culturally relevant to the students I serve. My goal is to have greater student interest in these subjects, to provide the students with mirrors of their lives and culture and to connect with their human purpose. Through a simple change, such as including a book about Eid and Ramadan in a unit about holidays, I was able to increase the student engagement from the Muslim students in the classroom by leaps and bounds; I have never seen them so engaged.

This level of engagement speaks volumes about the value of teaching through a culturally and racially relevant lens. Imagine the possibilities if we could reach all students in this way. We could change the face of education and student achievement.

Educators, parents, school districts and students all want the same thing when it comes to outcomes for students within the educational system. Everyone wants all students to be successful in the classroom, and, after they leave the classroom, to contribute positively to society. As we face a continuing opportunity gap, it is obvious that what we have been doing, the curriculum we use, the methods we use to teach in our classrooms and the exhaustive formal assessments, are not working. While the latest research is constantly changing and districts move from one researched based curriculum to another, the question that comes to mind is, who is the research based on? Who did they use when they were determining the success of this curriculum? Were they taking into account cultural and racial backgrounds of the students? Were most of the students white with European cultural backgrounds? I believe that for many of our students, they do not fit within the whiteness definition of "normal" on so many levels and are in turn often excluded and overlooked. This could not be truer, then, when examining the way that students are taught and assessed within our public school system. As I have looked through social studies and language arts curriculums, I have seen the lack of representation of people of color within the lessons and the materials used to support the curriculum. Within the socials studies curriculum for second grade at the school where I currently work, I was looking through the unit of "long ago and today", roughly six of the seven lessons were based on a white European experience of colonizing the United States. There was only one lesson on the indigenous people who lived here in the United States for thousands of years before any Europeans came to colonize. After seeing this, I thought to myself, "What kind of personal investment would my students have in a history of people who hold no connections to them or their lived experiences?" For my

student of color, lessons about indigenous people can make connections to their lived experiences and hopefully they become more engaged in learning. I saw the increased engagement with my Latino students, simply by reading a book with some words in Spanish. I had a student almost fall off her chair as she strained to listen to the story, as I read the book to a different group. Imagine the impact of empowering all students through culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials.

The opportunity gap for our students of color, including our ELs, still has not been closed. As educators, we have a responsibility to our students, their families and to each other to commit to finding the best methods and resources to ensure that we are reaching all students. We must ensure that all students are learning and achieving. As students, schools and teachers continue to be held accountable with high–stakes standardized tests such as the MCAs and the ACCESS, we need to find better ways to ensure that our students are learning and engaged. I believe that the missing piece to closing the opportunity gap and in teaching all students is culturally and racially relevant teaching and curriculum. Through my trainings with NUA and PEG, I have been able to make small changes to my teaching by including culturally and racially relevant components. I have already seen an increase student engagement and buy-in.

Research Question

How can we use culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials to help close the opportunity gap?

Summary of Chapters

In this chapter I have introduced the opportunity gap and my beliefs about students ability to achieve. Additionally, I have introduced my own experiences with EL, content curriculum and culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials. I also have my concerns about the lack of student engagement and the continuing opportunity gap across the country and especially in the state of Minnesota. Chapter Two will provide a review of literature analyzing; the opportunity gap across the United States and specifically in the state of Minnesota. Additionally, I will explore teaching EL through the ELD standard and their connections to the content areas of language arts; and the use and practice of culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials within the classroom and their impact on students and their learning and success and achievement. Chapter Three provides an overview of the project, including curriculum-writing framework, setting, audience and a project description. Chapter Four will examine the completed project, its implications to the teaching profession and its impact on student achievement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will examine the opportunity gap in the United States and in Minnesota. Additionally, I will recount the history behind accountability legislations such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the function of consortiums, with in these pieces of legislation. I will also explore accountability measures for students in Minnesota, and specifically for EL students. Finally, I will analyze the use of culturally and racially relevant curriculum and teaching, and its impact on students and student achievement. By exploring the opportunity gap across the country and in Minnesota, working to unpack the legislation around education and understanding culturally and racially relevant teaching and curriculum, I will analyze the question: How can we use culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials to help close the opportunity gap?

Opportunity Gap

United States

All over the world, including in the United States, education reform is an important issue for students, educators and societies as a whole (Deville & Chalhoub-Deville, 2011). Across most of the country, there is a noticeable gap in the graduation rates and test scores for students of color compared to their white counterparts. The nation-wide opportunity gap based on high school graduation rates has begun to shrink. As of 2015, the opportunity gap still exists. For black students the gap is currently 13%, while 88% of white students graduate from high school only 75% of black students

graduate from high school (U.S. Department of Education). For Hispanic students the gap

is slightly less, but still within double digits. The gap for Hispanic students is 10%, with

only 78% of Hispanic students graduating high school (U.S. Department of Education).

For students of color versus their white counterparts graduation rates are just one of the

aspects of the opportunity gap. Along with the gap along racial lines, there is also a

sizable gap for ELs. For ELs nation wide the graduation rate is around 63%, in

comparison to the total graduation rate (Sanchez, 2017). Some states, such as West

Virginia and the District of Columbia had higher rates of graduation for EL students that

is actually higher than the general graduation rates in their states. However, in all other

states, EL students had lower graduation rates then their monolingual peers (Sanchez,

2017).

Minnesota

In the state of Minnesota the opportunity gap between EL and monolinguals is at

17.5%, graduating at a rate of 81.2% for monolingual students and 63.7% for EL students

While Minnesota doesn't have the largest gap in graduations rates in the country, the gap

is still sizable (Sanchez, 2017). This gap not only applies to graduation rates, but to MCA

scores as well. In the state of Minnesota, the accountability assessments, the MCAs are

measured in four different categories of achievement. The categories are; exceeds, meets,

partially meets and does not meet. Schools and students receive some credit for

"exceeds", "meets" and "partially meets". However, no credit is given when students fall

into the "does not meet". In 2017, 57.8% of EL students did not meet the requirements in

the math MCAs, while only 20.9% of the state as a whole scored in the "does not meet"

category; that is a gap of 36.9% (Minnesota Department of Education). In the category of

reading, the gap between ELs and monolinguals grows even more, to 44.4%, with 65.5% of EL students qualifying in the "does not meet" category, compared to the state level, which was 21.1% in the "does not meet" category (Minnesota Department of Education). The scores for the science MCAs were lower across the board, and the gap grew even more to 52.8% between the two groups. ELs in the "does not meet" category was at 74.8%, while the rest of the state was at 22% (Minnesota Department of Education).

<div align="center">**Student Accountability Legislation**</div>

No Child Left Behind

With the passing of NCLB in 2001 the educational system across the country was changed forever. The statue looked to hold schools, students, and teachers accountable for student progress and success. In the state of Minnesota, all students must take the MCA during their academic career from third grade up to eighth and then again in tenth to twelfth grade. The student's results on these tests not only affected the student's ability to graduate from high school, but also influenced the amount of funding each school receives. As schools and students failed to meet the standards set for passing levels on the MCAs, schools were placed into a classification system, where failing schools fall farther and farther down in ranking and funding. As funding decreases, schools had fewer resources and could possibly be required to close or completely change all staff at the school. Along with high stakes testing NCLB also brought ESL or Title III to the forefront of accountability monitoring. ELs were evaluated by the Minnesota Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (MN SOLOM), a speaking and listening assessment

and the Test for Emerging Academic English (TEAE), a reading and writing assessment, up until 2011 when Minnesota became part of the World-class Instruction and Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium. After joining WIDA in 2011 Minnesota began using the ACCESS test as a high-stakes, standardized, summative assessment of EL progress and achievement. However, as with many high-stakes, standardized, summative assessments, there is often no accounting for cultural, and socio-economic differences of students. All of this changed with the passing of ESSA, an update to NCLB.

Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015 President Obama signed the ESSA into law as an effort to update and address the problematic parts of NCLB. Under ESSA, states are not as restricted to the prescriptive nature of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education). While much of NCLB still exists in ESSA, things like high-stakes accountability testing and language testing for ELs are still required across the country. Under ESSA, the measurement of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which dictated schools standings and often times their funding, have now been removed and replaced by a requirement for states to set "ambitious long term goals with interim progress measurements" (Minnesota Department of Education). However, 95% of the school's population, according to student group, is still expected to participate in yearly high stakes testing. ESSA now gives states the freedom to limit the time they spend testing students, there is also a cap of 1%, on the number of students who can take the alternative to high stakes assessments (Minnesota Department of Education). Additionally, EL and pre-kindergarten have been placed as a high priority.

Consortiums

With the advancements in the field of EL states are striving to find common ground in regards to language proficiency assessments. Out of this need arose consortiums of EL professionals. These consortiums provide uniformity in theology of instruction and assessments. Though membership in a consortium, states have access to the same tests used across multiple states. This enables states to have comparable data to assess student learning across the country. Many states in the United States have joined consortiums and this has enabled consistent assessments for a vast majority of the United States EL population (WIDA).

WIDA Consortium

Minnesota adopted the WIDA consortium state-wide in K-12 programs six years ago starting in 2011. WIDA is a consortium which was created in 2003 in Wisconsin in response to No Child Left Behind which was enacted by President George W. Bush in 2001, this statute placed EL or title III teaching and learning under more accountability at a state and federal level (WIDA).

Today over 25 states are members of the WIDA Consortium, this Consortium was created with the mission of: "WIDA advances academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators." (WIDA) and values of: "WIDA Can Do Philosophy: believing in the assets, contributions and potential of linguistically diverse students; Collaboration: facilitating interaction among educators, state and local educational agencies, researchers, policy-makers, and experts worldwide.

WIDA works across the four modalities of speaking, reading, writing, and listening. WIDA's English Language Development (ELD) standards focus on five important areas of language; the language of mathematics, language of language arts, language of science, language of social studies, and social and instructional language.

The WIDA system categorizes EL learners into six different ability levels. The levels of the WIDA levels are as follows; level one is Entering; level two is Emerging; level three is Developing; level four is Expanding; level five is Bridging; level six is Reaching. The WIDA levels for proficiency cover students who are newcomers who have no English skills to advanced native-like English skills. An additional important element within the WIDA system is the use of Performance Indicators – PIs (or in much of the literature Model Performance Indicators- MPIs).

While Minnesota has statewide standards for mathematics, language arts, social studies and all other subject areas; the EL standards for Minnesota have recently been removed from use and replaced by the WIDA PIs. One of the benefits to using these PIs is the ability to create PIs specific to the needs and abilities of the students. These PIs include four important aspects of language teaching and learning; a language function (describe, explain, analyze), example topic (mathematics, science, social studies), support (graphs, tables, manipulatives), and examples to assist in comprehension.

Assessment of EL Student's Language Proficiency

The passing of NCLB brought EL into the spotlight with the inclusion of Title III into the accountability measures. These accountability measures in NCLB require all states to provide proof of student growth and assessment in all four language modalities of

speaking, reading, writing, and listening (NCLB, 2002). Now, under ESSA, EL students will be counted as a part of their school's accountability measures; their ACCESS scores will be used measure their success.

Federal Standards for EL Assessment

The federal government only specifies that states must approve methods for evaluating ELs on a yearly basis: students must be assessed on speaking, reading, writing, and listening; students must perform well on state standardized assessments; and annual progress towards objectives must be made (NCLB, 2002). These standards require states to meet general broad requirements, but do not specifically mention how states should execute these requirements. Additionally, states are required to prove that a certain percentage of EL students are achieving proficiency each year. Some research suggest that part of the difficulty in obtaining common ground in the assessment of ELs is the unspecific language used in the NCLB legislation (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). The passing of ESSA into federal law by President Obama on December 10, 2015, marked changes in the NCLB legislation, the system of NCLB was viewed as prescriptive and became increasingly more difficult for school districts and teachers to meet the requirements, set forth by NCLB (ESSA, 2017).

State Standards for EL Assessment

At the state level, the NCLB requirements require states to determine their own form of assessment of ELs. Each state has their own requirement and definitions of what should be used as the assessment to define proficiency. States also have the autonomy to determine how students will be assessed. However, even with the use of state-wide

adopted assessment tools, each district can still have individual procedures for how these assessments factor into exit criteria. Under ESSA, the field of EL will be considered under the umbrella of Title One and will be factored into the accountability measures at a state level.

Current Assessments in Minnesota for English Language Proficiency Level – WIDA ACCESS.

In 2011, Minnesota became part of the WIDA consortium. By joining of the consortium, Minnesota began using a single assessment to evaluate all four domains of language: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. The access includes a multiple choice reading and listening portion of the assessment, an independent writing portion and a teacher evaluated portion for the speaking. The results of the ACCESS are utilized to classify ELs into six proficiency levels: level one – entering, level two – beginning, level three – developing, level four – expanding, level five – bridging, and level six – reaching. The ACCESS also evaluates the five ELD standards; the test evaluates student's language levels through math, language arts, science, social studies and social and instructional language.

Current assessment for content proficiency in Minnesota – MCAs

In the state of Minnesota when students reach third grade they are required to take the MCA tests for language arts and mathematics. MCAs are taken in language arts and math from third grade until eighth grade. In fifth grade and eighth grade students are also assessed in science. Finally, in tenth grade students are assessed again in language arts and in eleventh grade assessed in math.

Preparing Educators to Provide Culturally Relevant Teaching

A large part of providing culturally and racially relevant teaching to students is to properly prepare teachers to understand what it means to be culturally responsive. According to Gay (2002), "Five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching are examined: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students and responding to ethnic diversity in delivery of instruction" (p.106).

Developing a Cultural Diversity Knowledge Base

The idea behind this aspect of culturally relevant teaching is the idea that to teach any given topic, educators must have an understanding of the topic. As an educator understanding and learning about the cultures of others is an imperative part of creating a knowledge base around teaching in a culturally and racially relevant manor. Part of creating this knowledge base includes learning about and understanding the norms, contributions and characteristics of different cultural groups (Gay, 2002). These norms might include things like understanding the roles of and expectations of adults and children within a culture or how gender plays out within a culture. Additionally, learning about and providing students with examples of contributions to society by people of different cultural groups provides students with mirrors of who they are and could be in the future. Finally, it is very important for educators to learn factual information around different cultures (Gay, 2002).

Designing Culturally Relevant Curricula

This aspect of culturally relevant teaching addresses the cultural inequities that are commonly found within the educational system; from the textbooks used in the classroom, the rules and policies found in all school districts, the visuals that students see in and around the classroom and to how different cultural groups are portrayed in society through the media. By working to supplement and support the current curriculums and state standards with culturally relevant materials educators can ensure that students are provided with culturally relevant education (Gay, 2002).

Demonstrating Cultural Caring and Building A Learning Community

The third facet of creating a culturally relevant teaching is building a community of acceptance, high-expectations and caring within a school and classroom. This idea of community includes positive relationships between students and teachers, and between the students themselves (Gay, 2002).

Cross-Cultural Communication

The fourth aspect of ensuring culturally relevant teaching is to examine the way students are being taught using a communication style that is relevant to their culture. This aspect of understanding and incorporating the different methods and norms of communication that students from different cultures bring to the table in an important part of creating a culture of communication. Part of this inclusion includes the understanding and acceptance of different communications styles that fall outside of the norms of whiteness (Gay, 2002).

Cultural Congruent In Classroom Instruction

The final aspect of culturally relevant teaching addresses the strategies and techniques used by educators. Traditionally, the strategies and teaching methods employed by educators so often are steeped in whiteness and are not successful in reaching a wide variety of students. By utilizing teaching strategies and methods that are geared toward students of different cultural and racial backgrounds and are based in their cultural experiences, students of varying cultural backgrounds will become more engaged, and in turn have greater success in the classroom (Gay, 2002).

Culturally and Racially Responsive Teaching in the Classroom

According to Gay (2000) the definition of culturally responsive teaching is, "Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). The theory of culturally relevant teaching is a theory based on the concept of focusing on students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Griner & Stewart, 2012; Zhang-Wu, 2017; Gay, 2000). By focusing on these students and the unique aspects of their race, culture, language and ethnic backgrounds, teachers, schools and administrators can increase engagement and achievement of students of color. Culturally responsive teaching contains a variety of aspects. These elements include, caring learning communities, recognizing the diversity of student population and teaching accordingly in response, having a clear understanding of what cultural diversity means, and identifying the aspects of curriculum that is culturally diverse (Gay, 2002).

Connections with Families and Community

While the focus in schools is primarily on students and their success, the inclusion of families and communities plays an integral role in culturally relevant teaching (Zhang-Wu, 2017; Griner & Stewart, 2012). By including families in the process of integrating and implementing culturally relevant curriculum and practices, schools, teachers and administrators are provided with a unique view into the student's culture and daily lives (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Along with an increase in background knowledge around students, families indicated a feeling of being a part of the school community and a higher willingness to participate in school activities. Families also indicated that when they participated in school activities and committees they felt a sense of belonging and were often treated in a more inclusive manner by staff (Griner & Stewart, 2012). Along with families, community members are also an important piece to the puzzle. Community members provide not only an additional lens to viewing the students and families, but also provide an invaluable resource as mentors and leaders (Griner & Stewart, 2012).

Connections Between School and Home

While the primary focus of culturally relevant teaching is still within the classroom, many researchers also point out the differences between school and academic language used in the classroom and the social language used at home and the different cultural norms used at home (Griner & Stewart, 2012; Chu, 2011). Additionally, the connections between the home cultures of students and the methods used to teach on a daily basis in the classroom can help to make deeper impacts on student engagement and achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Summary

In this project, I will examine curriculum used in the Osseo Area Schools for language arts, social studies and science in kindergarten through second grade, ELD standards and state standards to create a curriculum kit to focus EL instruction. These curriculum kits will be a cross-content collaborations, incorporating the language arts, social studies, science and writing to create a comprehensive curriculum to support students in the classroom. I will also be looking at the opportunity gap and how racially and culturally relevant practices and materials can be used to close this gap. Finally, I will be creating culturally and racially relevant materials to ensure student engagement and to provide students with mirrors of their daily lives and to teach to their human purpose.

As the field of EL continues to evolve and change, not only through new research done, but also through many states becoming a part of the WIDA consortium and a shift to focus on the five ELD standards, one of the biggest questions is; how do we best prepare and support EL students to be successful in their content areas, such as, social studies, science and mathematics? The connections between racially and culturally relevant practices and teachings and student achievement, success and engagement have been shown to have to have a positive impact on students of color as well as EL students.

This is so very important because as EL teachers we need to ensure that students are achieving at the highest levels possible. We also know that while ELs and students of color are just as capable of achieving success as their monolingual counterparts, their standardized test scores and graduation rates are not reflecting their potential. As the

accountability measures in education such as, NCLB & ESSA continue to evolve, students, teachers and schools are still being held to the same standards, but are provided no resources, education or support in working with these students from diverse racial, linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Until teachers and administrators are provided with the training and resources to reach and teach all of the diverse students in the classroom we will never close the opportunity gap.

As a teacher and advocate for my EL students, it is imperative that I look at the curriculum and ensure that I am implementing culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials. My research and project will be directed by the following question:

How can we use culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials to help close the opportunity gap?

Chapter Three

In my 6 years of teaching ELs, I have found that there can be serious and concerning lack of racially and culturally relevant materials and curriculum available to EL and mainstream students. After having worked in two different districts I have still found there to be a lack of culturally and racially relevant materials in social studies curriculums. Having gone through the Minnesota public school system myself, I know how much it would have meant to me to have culturally and racially relevant materials interwoven into the classroom curriculum. I can see that for my EL students, the increase in engagement when there are culturally and racially relevant materials used to support their content area instruction.

As an EL teacher in my district I am a first-hand participant and observer of district policies regarding ELs, specifically in regards to teaching the five ELD standards. As I help support students to be successful in their classrooms in the subject of language arts, I have begun to see the lack of mirrors and racial and cultural representation within the district-mandated curriculums. This project will examine and analyze the number of racially and culturally elements in the language arts curriculum. In addition to examining the curriculum, I will create culturally relevant curriculum, supplemental materials, which marries the language arts content with materials that are culturally and racially relevant.

As a teacher of color I believe that making my work as an EL teacher culturally and racially relevant is one of the most important things I can do to increase student engagement and increase student achievement in the classroom and on standardized tests. If we do not start to examine our teaching practices and the content we are using to teach, we will never succeed in closing the opportunity gap that exists across the country and very predominantly in the state of Minnesota.

Chapter Overviews

In this chapter I have introduced the background behind the opportunity gap, the history of NCLB and ESSA, WIDA Consortium. Additionally, I have introduced my own experiences with EL, content curriculum and culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials, and my concerns of the lack of student engagement and the continuing opportunity gap across the country and especially in the state of Minnesota. Chapter Two provides a review of literature analyzing; the opportunity gap across the country and

specifically in the state of Minnesota; teaching EL through the ELD standard and their

connections to the content areas of social studies; and the use and practice of culturally

and racially relevant teaching and materials with in the classroom and their impact on

students and their learning and success and achievement. Chapter Three explores the

intended audience, the framework used to create the curriculum kit, the setting of the

project and a description of the curriculum kit including a detailed description of

supplemental resources included with in the kit. Chapter Four will examine the Capstone

as a whole, it will touch on the import aspects and connections of the literature review to

the Capstone, a review of the results, possible limitations and benefits of the curriculum

kits, and potential future avenues of research relating to this theme.

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project combines the content areas of language arts, science, social studies and writing with a focus on ELD standards, all while using a racially and culturally relevant lens to create a curriculum kit to support EL students in their classrooms as they work towards proficiency in each content area. This curriculum kit includes: cross-content grade-level scope and sequences for kindergarten through second grade, cross-content lesson plans, assessments for science and social studies units, visual support posters for language arts, culturally and racially conscious panel books to support language arts units, bins containing additional support books and materials for each grade level content areas such as science and social studies, and bins with books and support materials for each language arts unit. Through the use of these curriculum kits EL teachers can support EL students in their classroom content areas and focus on providing culturally and racially relevant mirror for EL students and their experiences. By using the Understanding By Design as a framework for the curriculum kit, this allows for teachers to focus on the state standards students are expected to reach in each content area at every grade level.

Research Framework

The framework methodology of Understanding by Design is a complex framework, which goes backwards to forwards. While it may seem logical to start with a lesson plan and work from there to determine assessments and outcomes. The Understanding by Design works in three stages, according to Wiggins & McTighe (2011), "Stage 1 - Identify Desired Results: What long term goals are targeted? What

meanings should students make to arrive at important understandings? What essential

questions will students keep considering? What knowledge and skill will students

acquire? What established goals/standards are targeted?" (p.8) In Understanding by

Design, the first stage is to understand what the expectations are to demonstrate

comprehension for each unit? For example, most states have state standards in math,

language arts, science and social studies. All students are expected to show

comprehension and possibly mastery of these different ideas. By understanding the

content knowledge that state standards require students to provide proof of

comprehension, it provides a broad scope and sequence to begin planning assessments,

lesson plans and activities. The second stage is described by Wiggins & McTighe (2011)

as, "Stage 2 – Determine Acceptable Evidence: What performance and products will

reveal evidence of meaning-making and transfer? By what criteria will performance be

assessed, in light of Stage 1 desired results? What additional evidence will be collected

for all Stage 1 desired results? Are the assessments aligned to all Stage 1 elements? After

the broad scope and sequence of each unit has been identified, the next step is to begin to

examine the different ways in which students will be able to demonstrate understanding.

There needs to be a comprehensive and consistent form of assessment for students to

demonstrate comprehension and mastery. The assessments should encompass all of the

different aspects of the overarching ideas or content area. Formal assessments can include

written assessments, oral assessments with rubrics or projects that demonstrate the

content objectives. The third and final stage of the Understanding by Design as stated by

Wiggins & McTighe (2011) is, "Stage 3 – Plan Learning Experiences and Instruction

Accordingly: What activities, experiences and lessons will lead to achievement of the

desired results and success at the assessments? How will the learning plan help students

achieve transfer, and meaning and acquisition, with increasing independence? How will

progress be monitored? How will the unit be sequenced and differentiated to optimize

achievement for all learners?" (p. 8). The final part of the Understanding by Design

framework focuses on lesson plans and activities. This portion focuses on the daily

activities and plans used in the classroom to support the learning and comprehension of

the content ideas and objectives, and to create enough understanding to empower students

to be able to show enough understanding and mastery to pass the assessments. Informal

assessments can also be used to guide daily instruction, what needs to be retaught and

what are students already understanding. Through the use of lesson plans and activities

that contain a focus on the broad topics of the content areas and the assessments, the

activities will be more effective and productive in moving students towards an

understanding of the content. If you start with an unfocused activity or lesson plan, it will

not necessary be contributing to the comprehension and mastery of the overall content

objectives. While the lesson plans and activities might happen to coincide with the topic

or theme, it is much more efficient and meaningful to use teaching materials that are

focused on the long-term goals for the content area.

Method

When deciding on what method to do for this project, a curriculum kit seemed

like the logical choice given the lack of curriculum and resources offered by most school

districts. All the EL curriculums I have seen in the schools I have worked at have no

direct correlation to the content areas students are being held accountable for in their

classrooms. While there may be connections to the content being taught in the classroom

and the EL curriculum, they can be difficult to flesh out and often are few and far between.

Setting

The setting for these curriculum kits is a suburban school district in the Twin Cities, at a school where seventy-seven percent of the student population are students of color, sixty-three percent of students are on free or reduced lunch and almost twenty percent of the students are ELs (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). Students range in ACCESS proficiency scores from level 1 to level 5. Students are in kindergarten, first and second grade. Most of the EL students are clustered into a single classroom to maximize service time; there are a few outliers who were placed in a classroom other then the cluster classroom. The students who were not placed into the cluster classroom are pulled into the cluster classroom to participate in groups with the other EL students. There are two EL teachers in the school. One teacher works with kindergarten, first and second grade. The second teacher works with third, fourth and fifth grade. EL in kindergarten, first and second grade is taught in a co-teaching station model with the classroom teacher working with students in one area of the room and the EL teacher working in another area of the room, and other students work independently at different stations within the room. While the setting of the project is in the classroom with collaboration between the classroom and EL teachers the primary audience for the project is EL teachers.

Audience

The primary audience for this project is EL teachers. For most classroom teachers, there are often so many different subjects to teach on a daily basis, there often is little to no time to supplement the curriculums. Most curriculums are already so full of extra supplemental pieces it is often difficult to complete them all. However, most of the supplemental pieces and in many cases the curriculum as a whole, is not culturally and racially relevant. While the curriculum kits are mainly geared toward EL teachers as they support their ELs in the content area standards, classroom teachers could supplement the curriculum and their teaching with racially and culturally relevant materials from the kits. The kits contain multiple resources across multiple content areas; language arts, science, social studies and writing. The next paragraph will describe the project in detail, including descriptions of each resource and how they are used in a classroom setting.

Project Description

The curriculum kits have a wide range of resources geared toward the needs of EL students. These resources include an overarching scope and sequence of the cross-content units, cross-content lesson plans, cross-content assessments, language arts resources in the form of strategies posters and panel books, and other support materials for social studies, science and language arts units.

Scope and Sequence

When examining how to incorporate culturally and racially relevant materials into current district mandated curriculum of language arts, science, social studies and writing, it is imperative to have a broad view of what each different curriculum entails and which pieces have the flexibility to be moved or the order of units to be changed. In this case the Benchmark reading curriculum is the only piece of curriculum that cannot be moved and must be followed in the correct order and on a specific timetable. The science, social studies and writing curriculums can be moved and changed to best make other connections with the language arts curriculum. For example, in the kindergarten scope and sequence (Figure B) character analysis and visualizing have been combined with the writing unit of a book review. By combining these two specific aspects of language arts and writing, students are more likely to make more meaningful connections because the two content pieces are related. The first grade scope and sequence (Figure C) and the second grade scope and sequence (Figure D) make similar connections across content area in an effort to create more connections for students, and not be learning different content areas in isolation. After the general scope and sequence have been established, the next step is to concentrate on what students will be expected to be proficient in by the end of each unit. Each unit will be guided by creating formative and summative assessments to ensure student comprehension f the different content areas.

Assessments

After the scope and sequence has been outlined, assessments play a critical role in guiding the rest of the planning for each unit. Determining the content information that

students will be held accountable on report cards or on classroom assessments is the first step to creating assessments that will guide instruction of the entire unit. In the case of the first grade curriculum kits the science assessments (Figures E – J) are designed to incorporate reading and writing in an effort to convey understanding of Minnesota state science standards. Each assessment includes reference to the Minnesota State Science Standard being assessed and includes visuals to scaffold students at all levels. There are also a variety of assessment levels, which vary depending on language levels and abilities. Students at lower levels are provided with more scaffolds for their writing, while students at higher levels have fewer scaffolds and are required to provide more information. Each assessment is designed to elicit specific academic language around certain content areas. After assessments have been created to target specific content related themes and language, the next step is to focus on the lesson plans for each cross-content unit.

Lesson Plans

When designing cross-content lesson plans it is imperative to look at state standards within the content areas, academic language, and what other support materials will be needed to teach each unit. In the case of first grade science (Figure K), the lesson plan begins with a summary of the content areas that will be included within the lesson plan. Next, there is a section that identifies the Minnesota State Standards in multiple content areas, which will be addressed within the unit lesson plan. There is also a section that includes content and language objectives, which assist in focusing on a specific content goal and language goal for the unit. The content goal relates directly to the science standards, while the language goal relates to the specifically to one aspect of

language arts, sequencing in particular. Since these lesson plans are cross-content, the language arts focus on sequencing is combined with the science content of and insect life cycle. By combining different content areas into one unit plan, the different content and language objectives are reinforced across all the different activities in each unit and are interrelated to create a deeper impact and meaning for students. There is also a specific section on academic language development, which includes a vocabulary word bank, from tier one to tier three. This section also provides sentence frames around the language objective of sequencing which helps elicit academic language from students. The final section of academic language development is a section on discourse level, which provides a brief overview of what kind of language students should be able to produce at the different language levels. The next three sections of the lesson plan include ideas for building background, possible instructional activities and possible co-teaching models. The next section provides examples of possible support materials, in the form of books, for both language arts and content area topics. After that, there are examples of possible activities that can be done as part of teaching the unit. These include a brief description and possible duration of each activity. Finally, the lesson plan includes a list of assessments, both formative and summative assessments that can be used to determine student's comprehension across content areas. The final piece of the curriculum kits is a wide variety of content support materials that range from hands-on manipulatives to vivid visuals.

Content Support Materials

The idea of content support materials encompasses a wide variety of resources. These resources include: books supplemental books across all content areas, which can

be used to supplement the science, social studies and language arts curriculums used by the classroom teachers, sentence frames used to promote and support academic language in all students, visuals to increase comprehension of complex concepts and panel books to empower students to see stories from a variety of points of view.

Language Arts-Support Posters. Within the language arts curriculum there are ten different units. Each unit consists of one metacognitive strategy and one comprehension strategy. The metacognitive include: asking questions, visualizing, determining text importance, summarizing & synthesizing, making connections, fix-up monitoring, and making inferences. The comprehension strategies include: identifying main idea & supporting details, analyzing characters, sequencing, analyzing story elements, making inferences, summarizing information, making predictions, comparing & contrasting, identifying cause & effect, and drawing conclusions. For each metacognitive and comprehension strategy there is a corresponding visual poster to help students understand the concepts (Figure L). Each poster has a clear, student-friendly definition and a graphic to assist in understanding each concept. Along with these visual posters there are also panel books to accompany the different units.

Panel Books. In conjunction with the visual posters for each language arts unit the other big piece of supporting students in understanding the metacognitive and comprehension strategies is the use of panel books. Panel books are a strategy from NUA trainings. The idea of a panel book is to take two copies of a picture book, disassemble them and put them together in a horizontal succession, and connecting them again so the story can be spread out over a larger area. By looking at a story in a linear succession, spread out over a larger space students are able to see the complete story at once and can

more easily explore metacognitive and comprehension strategies such as; sequencing, character analysis and identifying cause and effect (Figure M). Each panel book was selected specifically to match each metacognitive or comprehension strategy and for their connection to various racial or cultural groups. While every student will not see themselves in every book, but there will be at least one book in the series where all students should be able to see themselves and make a connection. Each grade level, kindergarten through second grade has one panel book for each of the ten units. In all, there are thirty panel books (Figure N). Along with visual posters and panel books, sentence frames support students in creating complex academic language.

Sentence Frames. Sentence frames are a tool that can be used with EL students as well as with their mono-lingual peers. Sentence frames are also known as sentence starters and are written, scaffold examples of sentences students can use to discuss the different metacognitive and comprehension strategies. The sentence frames vary depending on the different strategies being taught. The language used in the sentence frames are aimed to elicit academic language from students across content areas (Figure O). While students may have high language levels in social interactions and even with peers in the classroom, the use of academic language often needs to be specifically taught and fostered by adults in the classroom. While the support materials of visual posters, panel books and sentence frames help support students, often times the lack of content specific vocabulary can also hinder student's success in content areas such as science and social studies. Concise vocabulary instruction can aid students in their understanding of specific content related topics.

Vocabulary Cards. As students enter the school system and begin their journey of learning math, language arts, science and social studies, there is a large amount of content specific vocabulary which students are expected to understand and use in the classroom. There are three different tiers of vocabulary. The first is tier one. This includes simple vocabulary related to a content area, which can be simply described, or a picture that can be used to convey meaning. Examples of tier one words are: rock, brick and sand. The second tier words consist of words that can be used across content areas and can have multiple meanings. Examples of tier two words are: infer, predict, sort, alike and rough. The third tier words, are very specific to the content area and can be very technical. Examples of tier three words include: basalt, metamorphic, geologist, fossil, mineral, sedimentary and igneous. By teaching and reinforcing vocabulary, students are empowered to have a greater understanding of the content and can have richer academic writing and discussions in the classroom. For the social studies and science units, content specific vocabulary cards with a student-friendly definition and picture aim to increase student understanding and mastery of content (Figure P). Along with all to the resources in this section, the final resource is the use of supplemental resources to increase student's background knowledge.

Supplemental Resources. Supplemental resources and books provide students with additional information and background they may need in order to access the content standards or classroom curriculum. In the subject areas of science and social studies, supplemental books are focused around the different units. In science for kindergarten through second grade, each grade level contains three different units throughout the year. Kindergarten focuses on animals, trees and wood & paper. First grade units are insects,

rocks and states of matter. Second grade works on plants, balance & motion and air & weather. In first grade, the supplemental books include subject such as rocks, insect life cycles, background knowledge of insects and manipulatives (Figure Q). For the unit about rocks, the supplemental resources include, books on how Earth Materials are used to make everyday items, the rock cycle, real rocks and an activity book that is focused on the science unit (Figure R). The first grade science unit on matter has supplemental materials including, books on differences in materials, examples of different states of mater and properties of different matter. Social studies supplemental resources consist mostly of books focused on the different units in each grade level. Kindergarten social studies units include the units: *Family & Friends* - family, *A Big Wide World* - landforms & seasons, *Long Ago & Today* -now and then, *Our Country, It's a Great Place* - U.S. Government, symbols of the U.S. and rules. First grade social studies units taught include: *People Everywhere* -family/community helpers/immigration, *Where We Live* - landforms/natural resources/community, *World of Work* - money/wants & needs/goods & services, *Everything Changes* – long ago & today, *Good Citizens* – Government & Rules. The following are units for second grade social studies: *People and Places*, communities, rural/suburban/urban, *Places Near and Far,* landforms, climate and natural resources, *Ways of Living,* culture and holidays, *People At Work*, money, wants & needs, goods & services, *America's Past,* Indigenous American, Jamestown and Plymouth, *American Government*, rules, laws and U.S. government (Figure S). The supplemental books for each social studies unit were also selected for their representation of different racial and cultural groups. By choosing books and resources that represent a wide-variety of racial

and cultural groups, all students are provided mirrors and connections to their identity as human beings and assist in creating a racially and culturally relevant curriculum.

All of the pieces of the curriculum kit provide background knowledge, vocabulary and more importantly racial and culturally relevant resources to reach students across racial and cultural groups. Since the materials within this kit have been chosen through a racial and culturally relevant lens, many of the methods such as panel books, deviate from the cultural norms of whiteness that surround how and what is taught in the school system.

Timeline

The timeline for this project is a complete school year; the scope and sequence covers the entire school year across many content areas. The creation of all of the materials took close to a full school year and over one thousand dollars for materials used. Once the scope and sequence is put into place, the assessments, lesson plans and activities assist in guiding the instruction. Observations can be done daily to assess students comprehension and can be used to determine pacing and direction, and guide instruction. Assessments will also provide a different form of observation By providing proof of comprehension or mastery students, will be providing feedback on the effectiveness of the curriculum kit and teaching. Students will also be interviewed once a trimester to determine student perception of curriculum effectiveness.

Summary

This curriculum kit project was designed to work across-content areas at each grade level to assist students in making connections to multiple content areas at the same

time. This curriculum kit is geared mainly toward EL teachers who are working to support students by increasing background knowledge, supplementing vocabulary, and empowering students to use and create academic language, while providing students with racially and culturally relevant teaching techniques and materials and by providing a mirror for all students. By using Understanding By Design, teachers are able to work backwards from a broad overview of students will be expected to understand in each unit, assessments which will be needed to measure understanding, and to the lesson plans and activities designed to support the unit content information. Through the use of a scope and sequence and state standards for kindergarten through second grade, teachers can create a clear understanding of what students will be able to comprehend and master over the course of the year. Next, each unit is examined more closely to determine appropriate assessments to measure students comprehension and mastery across the different content areas. Finally, the unit lesson plans and daily activities will be created and designed to support the assessments and the overarching learning goals for each unit and for the school year. These resources include a wide variety of supplemental materials including: language arts posters, panel books, sentence frames, content vocabulary and supplemental books and materials. Through a combination of all of these materials and teaching techniques, this curriculum kit provides students with a racially and culturally relevant experience, which will empower them to access the content curriculum in their classrooms.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four will examine the Capstone as a whole and will explore the connections of the Capstone theme of racially and culturally relevant curriculum kits and

the literature review and the most important aspects of the literature review. It will also

explore the possible implications for future research and effects on policy with in the

educational system. Additionally, Chapter Four will examine the limitations of this type

of curriculum kit and how results, finding will be used to drive future instruction and

what possible benefits culturally and racially relevant curriculum kits can have in

education.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

As administrators, educators, students and families struggle to empower their students to meet federal and state standards and to pass standardized assessments to prove understanding and comprehension across multiple content areas, the achievement gap continues to persist and in some cases widen. For our students of color, there is no more time to wait to see of eventually the gap will close on its own. The urgency of finding a solution to closing the achievement gap is paramount. My research question aims to explore one possible solution to this achievement gap: How can we use culturally and racially relevant teaching and materials to help close the opportunity gap? Through the use of racially and culturally relevant curriculum as a society, we have the opportunity to make meaningful connections with all students in their educational journey, not just those who fit into the patterns and norms of whiteness. The curriculum kit I have designed is meant to be racially and culturally relevant, all while using cross-content teaching and learning to empower all students to be able to achieve at the same levels. As I wrote this Capstone and began compiling my curriculum kit I realized that this process was not as simple as I had once believed.

Through the process of writing this Capstone I have realized that my initial inclination, over five years ago, of supporting my EL students through background knowledge, vocabulary and correlating with their classroom content, was a step in the right direction. In the past three years as I have grown in my own equity journey and as my racial consciousness has been raised, I realized that I needed to add the component of racially and culturally relevant components to my teaching and resources. This was just one more step in that direction, towards including all students. I have seen the direct

benefits and increased engagement with my own students when I started utilizing racially and culturally relevant curriculum and teaching methods.

Some of the things that surprised me as I wrote this Capstone was the depth of research that is needed to do a literature review, and the difficulty I had in finding materials pertaining to the subject. I knew that the literature review would be a difficult part of the process, but I underestimated the time and work that would go into writing the second chapter. I was also surprised at how long it actually took to compile and document all of the different elements of the curriculum kit. My work on this curriculum kit has take over three years of work. It also would not have been possible with out my own paradigm shift around racial equity, which has been a three-year process. It has only been possible with the assistance of excellent trainers, co-works and family who have helped me grow as a human being.

This chapter includes a revisit of the most important aspects of the literature review and connections to the literature review. Additionally it addresses the limitations of curriculum kit project, possible future research themes in this field and how the results from the curriculum kit project will be utilized. It also speaks to implications in the future for policy surrounding curriculum and what possible benefits this curriculum kit could hold for the profession of education.

Limitations

Possibly the biggest limitation of this type of curriculum would be the resistance of administrations, teachers, students and families to the idea of learning outside the whiteness many people have become accustomed to within the educational system. Another big limitation to creating a racially and culturally relevant curriculum kit are the

factors of time and money. It has taken over one thousand dollars to create this curriculum kit to supplement the classroom content. In addition to the monetary expense, there have be over five hundred hours of time put into doing research on what is racially and culturally relevant as far as books and resources, physically creating the panel books and creating the other resources of sentence frames and visual posters.

Future Research Opportunities

In the future, I think that continuing to put the curriculum kits into practice and refining the actual time lines to include a day-by-day schedule would increase the effectiveness of the kits. Any additional support materials that are culturally and racially relevant would help increase the potential to reach more students. I think that continued research into the use of racially and culturally relevant and their impact on closing the achievement gap and general success in the classroom could contribute to ground-breaking revelations into how and what we teach in the classroom. I had a difficult time finding research on the topic of culturally and racially relevant curriculum, but I have seen its impact with my students. Seeing the impact on my students has led me to believe that there is further need for more quantitative research, in order to get curriculum companies to move towards being more racially and culturally relevant.

Results

My results will be observed in a formal and informal fashion. The assessments and daily lesson plans and activities will be used to gauge student's comprehension and mastery and to guide my teaching on a daily basis. If students are not understanding things on the assessments or in the daily activities, that is my cue to re-examine my assessments, teaching style and materials that are being used with the students. The

results of the efficacy of the curriculum kits will be apparent on a daily basis and will be the driving force of the pacing and usage of different resources and materials. The results will also drive the re-evaluation of assessments and of the comprehension of the big ideas for each content area.

Benefits To The Profession

This project allows our students bridge from the classroom content curriculum, which is often steeped in whiteness and is inaccessible to our students of color, and access the content and the academic language that surrounds the content, and be successful in the classroom. Determining the aspects of our educational system that are failing our students and failing to close the achievement gap is a crucial piece to increasing student success and achievement in their educational journey. Through a successful educational experience, students will be better prepared to graduate from high school, go to college and graduate and have the opportunity eventually have a higher quality of life.

Future Policy Implications

The change from using traditional curriculums, which are steeped in whiteness, to a more inclusive racially and culturally responsive curriculum could trigger a change in student achievement and in the preconceived notions about achievement and students of color. In order to switch over to a racially and culturally relevant curriculum, teachers, students, administrators and families would have to be able to successfully accept a paradigm shift in their way of thinking and acknowledge the prejudices all people carry. These preconceived notions and prejudices are possibly one of the biggest barriers to the implementation of this type of curriculum.

Summary

Through the process of creating a culturally and racially relevant curriculum, and through my own journey toward racial equity over the last three years, I have come to realize the need for new ways to reach students and work on closing the achievement gap. Through the use of curriculum kits that are culturally and racially relevant, I believe that more students can be reached and achieve academic success in the classroom. Regardless of the possible limitations, the future implications of this type of work could prove revolutionary in the area of closing the achievement gap in this country. My own experience with culturally and racially relevant curriculum has reinforced my belief that providing students with mirrors in the classroom and opportunities to make connections with the curriculum is a very impactful way to increase student engagement and learning. Watching my own student's engagement increase through my use of culturally and racially relevant teaching and curriculum has been an amazing experience in my teaching career.

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