BLACK MALES AND THE LITERACY GAP: HOW CAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HELP SUPPORT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY BLACK MALES IN A WESTERN SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT?

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Project Summary

I seek many opportunities to improve my craft and attend professional developments that will enhance my students’ learning experience. Many professional developments offered in this west suburban school district that I work in focus on the achievement gap amongst Black and White students, but at times I want to dive a bit deeper and look specifically at the literacy gap amongst Black and White males. This has led me to the following guiding question for this project: *How can professional development help support literacy development of Black males in a western suburban school district?*

The project consists of professional development that involves four one-hour sessions where educators in pre K-6th grade, specialists, and SPED staff will engage in courageous conversations about the path of the Black male in education. This topic often brings many emotions and misconceptions and educators need the space to be able to talk about solutions for our students. Having a deeper understanding into the mindset of the Black male is highly important and the information available should be of use to educators. Each session dives into a different topic but provides meaningful opportunities for reflection. The professional development session titles are titled: The Black Male Literacy Gap, Engaging Black Male Learners in Literacy, Making Meaning Using Culturally Relevant Teaching, and Putting It all Together.

In research from my project, I learned about Adult Learning Theories which speak to how adults learn and think. Equity is an important topic in education and when educators speak to these topics, certain guidelines should be addressed as many could possibly feel discomfort when speaking about them. The Black male literacy gap has been highly researched and it is
evident that certain groups of students aren’t getting an opportunity to be successful in schools and society. Black males are intelligent individuals who need to be understood and taught with love and care.

The framework used for the sessions came from the Making Meaning reading program which was developed out of the Center for Collaborative Classrooms. It is the first program to combine research-based best practices in reading comprehension with support for fostering students’ growth as caring, collaborative, and principled people (Making Meaning, 2019). It is focused on academic and social/ethical learning. Children learn and grow best in environments where their basic psychological needs are met.

The professional development uses strategies from the curriculum Making Meaning. Here are some of the comprehension strategies that are used in Making Meaning and the project; using schema/making connections, visualizing, wondering/questioning, using text features, making inferences, determining important ideas, and summarizing. Conversation is an integral part of Making Meaning as students need to understand how to communicate, develop empathy, and work together. There are many opportunities in the project that involve those key components.

This was developed for pre K-6th grade teachers in a school that resides in the western suburbs of Minneapolis. The data for the demographics of licensed staff is: 94.23% White, 3.85% Black, and 1.92% Asian. All other groups reported no data for this statistic (Minnesota Department of Education). The target school is also recognized as a STEM school. STEM concepts and skills are implemented at every level to help foster 21st century learning skills. The district is a leader in using digital content. These tools are essential in student learning,
curriculum development, and as well in teacher training. The target school is Title 1 funded in which all services and programs are supplemental to classrooms.

Professional development and equity work should go hand in hand when looking to engage Black males and ultimately close the achievement gap that exists. Although the topic can be stressful and emotional, understanding oneself as an educator and the perspective of others is critical in the process. Having courageous conversations allow for powerful dialogue which could lead to solutions. This project will ultimately help Black males in their school experience and not only growth of the student, but growth of the educators who will spend much of their time teaching these young souls.
PROJECT SOURCES


Other Materials

Icebreakers:

Video: Best Practices for Teaching African American Boys

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeUFhei81wg&t=233s

Project:
https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1-OnrW2BuxBu1-1ej7oqJhP_7MZVUV3R1