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Claudia Milena Noguera Yara

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USING DIVERSE LITERATURE ALONG WITH CRITICAL LITERACY
STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN SPANISH IMMERSION
CLASSROOM

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Literacy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	5
Background.....	7
Teaching Experience.....	10
Current Practices.....	13
Conclusion.....	15
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	17
Introduction.....	17
Definition of Critical	Literacy
Literacy.....	18
Critical Literacy Theory.....	20
The Principles of Critical Literacy.....	22
Critical Literacy Strategies.....	22
The Importance of Critical Literacy in the classrooms.....	24
Culturally Responsive Teaching.....	26
Equity.....	26
Diversity.....	27
The Power of Inquiry.....	28
Important components in the Inquiry Process.....	31
Multiple Perspectives.....	32

	3
Diverse literature.....	33
Gender.....	38
Culture.....	38
Ethnicity.....	39
Social Justice.....	40
Immersion Education.....	41
Twenty-First Century Learners.....	42
Authenticity.....	43
New Literacies.....	44
Conclusion.....	45
CHAPTER THREE: Project Description.....	47
Introduction.....	47
Chapter Overview.....	48
Project Description.....	48
Purpose.....	49
Rationale.....	50
Setting.....	51
Audience.....	52
Framework.....	52
Timeline.....	and
Assessment.....	54

Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion.....	57
Introduction.....	57
Chapter Overview.....	58
Learning Experience.....	59
Revising the Literature Review.....	62
Implications.....	64
Limitations.....	65
Future Plans.....	67
Communicating Results.....	69
Benefit to the Profession.....	69
Conclusion.....	70
REFERENCES.....	72

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Working as a Spanish immersion teacher for four years in the Eden Prairie School District has been an incredible learning experience. I always have had the opportunity to discover new things, not only from my colleagues, but also from my students and the cultures they brought into the classroom. My long-term goal has been to reflect on my teaching profession and how I can make a difference in my students' lives through the daily activities we worked on. I also seek to help my students leverage the resources and strategies they use to succeed in their academics, social and personal lives.

While many thoughts arise on how best to achieve this, there was one that has been more intriguing: do students feel represented with the books they are reading in our classroom and getting from the school library?

When I decided to enroll in the Master of Arts in Literacy Education at Hamline University, I was committed to bringing to the classroom new and applicable knowledge regarding teaching strategies that I could implement to support the needs of my second graders. Lately, I have engaged my students in conversations about social issues. We prioritize time during our busy day to talk about the diversity we have in our school community and how we can learn from each other, respect each other's customs, points of view and interests. These conversations have helped them to develop their critical

thinking skills and use inquiry when analyzing a picture, a video clip or a situation.

Students are actively engaged in expressing themselves during these discussions.

Comber (2001) stated that “teachers can help children learn to think about and question texts in ways that develop their analytical capacities and critical reading practices” (p. 2). The discussions teachers include in the classroom need to be student-centered and engaging. Through these discussions, students authentically ask and answer questions among themselves. Their world and thought process is expanded by the diversity of life and experiences from students in their grade.

Since I am educating twenty-first century learners, I want them to learn how to engage and participate in the community no matter where they are from or what language they speak. I want to provide spaces and resources so that students can analyze and discuss the most current and important issues. I want my students to feel connected and represented with the books they read as well. Through my research process, I want to answer the following question: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* The goal is that if students feel represented and are being exposed to diverse literature, they will see themselves through the texts they are analyzing and prejudices can be reduced because others are learning to value and respect cultural backgrounds and experiences.

In Chapter one, I describe my professional and personal background which inspired me to do my research around this question. I want to include in the rationale why

I am interested in such an important topic for all educators, and how we can best support our students in making education equitable for each student.

Background

Growing up in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, I got used to seeing a lot of people from all over the country and the world. Walking downtown provided me a view of mixed cultures, diversity, and exposure to various spoken languages. People went to Bogota to find jobs, explore the city, learn Spanish and/or enroll in public or private universities. When I was doing my undergraduate program in teaching languages, I was positively influenced and amazed by my professors. They traveled all over, spoke three or more languages, lived in different countries and went to graduate school abroad. Hearing about my professors' experiences as students, teachers, and global citizens had a great impact on me. The professors were supportive of all of their students who wanted to follow a similar path. I started working diligently learning English and French, and I learned more about Spanish and other languages that were spoken in Colombia. My passion for languages was growing as I learned to analyze them from more of a linguistic lens. It was a journey that I never thought I was going to go through, because learning two languages at the same time seemed confusing and impossible. The successful role models and cultural diversity helped me realize this was a possibility, despite the challenges of studying and working at the same time.

During this journey, I was learning to see the world in a different way. I was learning cultural components from English and French as well as things that I did not know about my country, helping me to value and respect indigenous tribes. This knowledge served as a valuable foundation of the diverse cultures represented in every corner of my country. It also impacted how I saw the benefits of learning from each other. I was also using the language to read literature that provided a lot of information regarding culture, traditions, and ways to understand the world. (Boyd, Causey and Galda, 2015) described that “classroom and school libraries should reflect multiple ideologies that parallel diverse student populations” (p. 383) One of my goals I want to accomplish when researching my question is that students can understand different cultures and also they can have access to resources that they can find information about cultures represented in the classroom or cultures that they feel they want to learn more because they have been interacting with diverse people.

The months went by and exchange students, mainly from the U.S, UK, Jamaica, France, Alger and China came to our college campus to help us with our language learning experience. It also helped me to know more about their culture and experiences. Those conversations reinforced what I was thinking, which was the importance of being respectful and open-minded to new people and their cultures, traditions, and languages.

The discussions we had were not just around grammar; it went much deeper than that. The curiosity deepened my passion about getting to know new cultures and find common connections with people from other countries. Conversing with exchange

students gave us an opportunity to exchange interests as well as apply our different backgrounds and knowledge to find resolutions to common issues and problems. The most important finding in our daily discussions was to see ourselves as a community of learners from different environments, backgrounds and experiences but with a common purpose of valuing our cultures and respect for varying perspectives.

Before finishing my degree program, I applied through *Amity* and was accepted to be a teacher assistant in the school I am working now. The experience I had as a Spanish assistant in the Midwest, increased my awareness of all the cultures I was being exposed to at school and other places I came across on my daily routine. I had the opportunity to live with a host family and improve my English skills, while simultaneously teaching my host sister to develop her Spanish language skills. I was teaching the family cultural aspects of Colombia while I was being immersed in the American culture; my host family and I both benefited from this exchange.

At school, I got to know local teachers who lived abroad to acquire their Spanish language skills; I was pleased to be supporting students in both first and fifth grade classrooms. As soon as I was done with my teacher assistant program, I enrolled in an English Conversational Program at Hennepin Technical College where I had conversations with people from India, Russia, Ecuador, Brazil, Spain, Venezuela, and Iran among other countries. I was so impressed with all the cultures together in one place.

The most powerful learning from this experience was that I got to know amazing people and professionals who were learning a foreign language, like me, and I did not

feel excluded or different. My accent did not matter when I was talking to them, because it was a natural learning process for all of us. We supported and learned from each other's culture. This learning opportunity really meant the world to me since I was passionate about hearing and learning languages. Again, this was a passion that was developed in college through being exposed to various cultures and languages. When I meet someone from another country, I really value the space we can create where different cultures are respected and accepted within our diverse society. It has been my experience when one feels connected and valued, they are more likely to express their opinions or ask questions. One needs to be seen, respected and know their questions and thoughts have value. My goal is to ensure students feel represented in the literature they have access in the classroom. As a teacher, I can make an impact on the environment and tools students need that can support and motivate their own learning. I believe this approach can help teachers become more effective and help students learn and grow in their critical thinking skills.

Teaching Experience

Following my teaching experience in the United States, I returned to Colombia, where I taught English in middle and high school. I also taught English to adults for two years and did my internship in an evening shift program for students who belonged to gangs and guerrilla units; the commonality among each of these students was a desire to study and improve themselves in order to find better jobs. During our discussions, besides learning English grammar, we talked about my experience as Spanish assistant in

Minnesota. I let my students know about the different opportunities they could have once they graduated from high school and the various cultures they were going to find outside of their communities. They were curious to know about my experience living in a different country and the challenges I came across. They explored the potential of following in a similar path.

I feel lucky that I brought passion to my lessons which included cultural components of the language. An important goal was to inspire the shift program students to be professionals and to help them see their potential; this was hard in a country that has been affected a lot by wars in the last 50 years by the self-military units or guerrillas. How great it was for them to find hope and gain a vision in a classroom where some of them never thought they were going to learn. Many of these students were not able to enroll in a traditional college or sometimes even a high school because of the expense. Most students had to work in order to support their families. Right now, it makes me happy that the majority are learning a different language, attending private or public universities and some of them are studying abroad and as a professional. It was powerful bringing those experiences for our students can now and apply and change the way they think. They are now more open-minded to what it is happening outside the classroom and how to face issues around their communities and within their families. Students need to have discussion where they can analyze how other cultures work and letting them know about the importance of accepting differences but not criticizing because they do not look like our own culture. Teachers need to establish opportunities for students to listen to

others' perspectives and the use of critical literacy strategies will allow them to reflect and have a deeper understanding.

When I moved back to Minnesota in 2014, my experiences as a Spanish assistant proved to be valuable for me. With those experiences, I felt prepared to face the new rewards and challenges of being a classroom teacher. I needed to be more involved with the school operations, curriculum planning, community engagement, along with having meetings with parents and getting to know the students. On the other hand, I was also learning from cultures and languages being represented in the students who are also learning from a native Spanish speaker. We have wonderful conversations about my birth country, and we get to talk about the education, customs and things I do with my family both here in the United States and back home. They want to know more and more about Colombia as I want to know from their experience as being raised in multicultural families.

During my time as an educator in the US, it has surprised me that families mark the race of their children on school enrollment forms. This is a practice I was not familiar with in my experiences in the school system in Colombia. I consider it was an experience to learn from an educational system that has been trying to move forward with eliminating achievement disparities including more culturally proficient teaching practices.

It inspires me every day to go to work and greet students by speaking their native language or their second language. I can also bring topics for us to learn about their

cultures so that they feel represented in the classroom. I encourage students to bring their culture and background experiences to share with our classroom community. It is important to apply these learnings and live as a community where we do not criticize others because of the way they look or how they act. It is so important to encourage curiosity in making students more aware of the diverse cultures that we have in our classroom and what we can do to value those voices, needs and interests so they learn how to understand and be more critical when discussing social issues within our community.

Current Practices

Our district is working in an achievement integration plan for 2020 that wants to decrease achievement and discipline disparities between Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and White subgroups. Even though some teachers in the past have participated in trainings to include more culturally relevant teaching in our classroom, the district wants staff to have constant professional development opportunities to support our Pre k-12 students. They are encouraging culturally responsive activities as well as understanding more about the cultures that we have in our district. Stakeholders involvement is important for this plan since they want to connect parents who represent the same cultures to empower them in conversations regarding education and problematics that could be happening in the community. Another important thing is to integrate the community so that parents as active members of the community establish connections

with other parents in order to be part of cultural activities that they feel a connection with and they want to let others know about their culture as well.

There is also an equity committee in which teachers from the district talk about ways to keep bringing culturally responsive teaching in the classroom and ways to analyze what has been done over the last few years in terms of using activities that impact the students' culture and identity so that students feel more connected and engaged when learning new content and make it more relevant and authentic in the classroom.

Last year, I joined the equity committee we have in our building. There is a teacher from each grade level. We try to think about ideas that we can apply in our classrooms that support students' diverse identities and cultures. There is also a big component in our meeting about extracurricular activities such as: The Day of the Dead/ El Día de los Muertos, Spring Dance Festival, and the International Intern festival Fall-Winter. It is essential to be part of a team where we can have different perspectives when brainstorming on activities that best support teachers and the school community since we always finding ways to get our diverse school community engaged and active through their participation in these extracurricular events.

We want to provide culturally responsive teaching for teachers to use in their classrooms that support their teaching practices. Additionally, we are trying to create a book club where we get to study a book as a committee and then we can evaluate ideas and strategies for application. We meet once a month and we are always discussing how diversity and equity look in our school community and ways to support it. Long term, we

want to facilitate lesson plans for K-6 that include activities related to culturally relevant teaching with diverse books that can be used in each grade level.

During the four years I have been teaching in an elementary Spanish Immersion school, I have had the opportunity of having a diverse group of students in the classroom. As children get curious, they like to learn from others about their traditions they have in their families. I have noticed that students feel proud of talking about the language they are learning or the trips they have taken. They enjoy sharing about the culture where their parents and relatives are from. I consider it very meaningful as a teacher to learn from my own students who have a different point of view.

Linder (2006) stated that:

A critical approach to literacy instruction encourages readers to question authors' intents and to consider the purposes of their texts; to view how the texts attempt to shape readers' perceptions of themselves; and to examine issues related to gender, race, power, and social injustice.

This new information from other cultures around the world broadens my perspective in a way that I was not aware of. It motivates me to know more or have more discussions with them and encourage this cultural exchange.

Conclusion

My personal and professional experiences are strongly expressed in this chapter. I want to support my students in feeling comfortable and connected with the activities we do in our classroom. I also seek to highlight the importance of building a strong

community where we value each other's differences and learn from each other's background to see the world with different, stronger and broader lens.

Based on my research question: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* With the project I want to create, I seek to provide schoolwide teachers critical thinking and literacy strategies they can use with diverse literature in their classrooms. Teachers will have access to diverse literature books they can use during their language arts lessons or where they feel it could work according to the class context. Connect students with their own cultures will bring more motivation and engagement in all students and also the ones who are starting to learn from their peers and the cultures they represent. It would be great in the future to create activities with culturally relevant and diverse resources and learning outcomes for other grades at school, but this is my starting point. My goal is to be part of the changes we are thinking about for the years ahead so that we are providing both teachers and students with what they need to have cultural discussions in the classroom.

In Chapter Two, in the literature review, I will be exploring the definition of critical literacy and its approach. As we are going to be exploring the components of critical literacy and the strategies that can be used or adapted according to the students' grade level. I will also be including research on diversity and diverse literature that we can implement in our curriculum and how to connect it to the skills our twenty-first century learners need to have in a Spanish immersion classroom setting.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

I am currently a teacher in a district that has a very diverse student population. To enhance learning and deepen engagement, it is necessary that we implement strategies in the classroom that can help students develop critical thinking skills, have a different lens when analyzing not only a text but also media resources and take into account their voices, interests and cultural background. Being a second-grade teacher in a Spanish immersion school allows me to understand the cultures that my students represent in the classroom. I want teachers to realize the importance of embracing diversity at school, and provide them with tools and resources they can use on a daily basis to motivate and engage students with their learning. Using this approach allows them to see themselves reflected through the books they are reading or the strategies they are learning. This will also help students analyze the text with multiple perspectives by questioning themselves and the world in which we live.

As my learning process is evolving, and based on my observations through my teaching practice, I considered my research question to be: *How can diverse literature be used through critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* My goal in delving into this research and creating practical

applications is to support teachers and staff practices in our school; it will also support students on a learning path that will increase their critical skills. I believe students will comprehend the text in a deeper way rather than just understanding the words. They can expand their own thinking through activities they can use with diverse literature books and see themselves as contributing members of society.

The first section of this chapter, I will start describing the critical literacy theories and its definition. I will also include information about why is important to use critical literacy in the classroom and components such as: culturally responsive teaching, equity and diversity strengthens teaching and learning processes between students, peers, teachers and the school community. I will continue talking about inquiry and how its influence to make students think more critically. The next section will provide a definition of diverse literature and also important aspects of it that the school community needs to know in order to be included in the classrooms. Finally, I will mention the definition of immersion education and how it works together with authenticity, new literacies and how twenty-first century learners play an important role in the changing world now.

Definition of Critical Literacy

According to McDaniel (2004), “Critical literacy transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one’s world” (p. 474). This is an important focus for teachers to cultivate in students since they need to be aware of social issues that are happening outside the

school. Sometimes they do not have the information to know about it until they are exposed to it, through interactions with peers. The resources teachers will use in literacy discussions can help broaden their own perspective when analyzing a particular topic. It will also make students more open to change their minds based on others' points of view and experiences. Every student in the classroom brings a whole new set of experiences that as teachers, we need to know. It is important to incorporate spaces, during students' learning, to understand and respect what each one brings as a background and how to apply this learning and become more critical through literacy practices.

Readers play an important role in their own learning because they are developing critical skills to interact with the text. They can further the author's purpose by questioning, analyzing, and reflecting about the topics that are being discussed in a text (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004) When I had the opportunity to read more about critical literacies during one of my master program courses, I could see myself using a different lens when working on and analyzing a text. It really connects the reader with the information it is presented. The challenge for the reader is to analyze the text in a different way where readers will have to think more about their personal experiences and how their experiences may differ from others. When they learn to make different connections/disconnections with what it is being read, their thinking broadens. Besides, when a reader changed his/her comfort zone and elevated their own thinking, using a reflective perspective, they will construct deeper thinking and understanding of the dynamics of the world and others reflecting on their own background. One study found

that “critiquing texts and social structures along intersections of inequality and injustice is important, but the action of reconstructing new ways of thinking and being is also a key element of critical literacy theories” (Sangster, Stone & Anderson 2013, p. 618).

Teachers will become more effective when they get to know their students, have a connection with them and have clear what it is happening in their family, social circle and also interactions at schools. That is the way to understand students’ way of seeing things, reflecting and their way to socialize with the community. Teachers need to understand students’ social issues and get informed when needed. Otherwise, it will be hard to request students to be more critical when educators do not understand their students’ own problems and backgrounds. Teachers need to see their students in a way there is empathy between each other. It benefits all when one feels valued, who they are and where they come from. It is not just the teacher's’ point of view but it is also about the students think and what they are facing in their lives as well. Thomas, Hall and Piazza (2010) found that “as teachers, we are always at risk of not being able to see and understand issues from our students' perspectives” (p. 93).

Critical literacy theory. Tracey and Morrow (2017) stated that “Critical Literacy Theory seeks to explain the ways in which education and literature shape people’s lives and the ways in which people can use education and literacy to reshape society” (p. 172). As educators, we need to guarantee that students are having access to text and other media resources that will help them to construct their knowledge when deconstructing the different components of analysis such as voices that are included in the text or the ones

that are not. On the other hand, students can infer what power relations are stronger in a text and also noticing how equity is represented in what they are reading and comparing to their real-life experiences and others as well. Using books or hypertexts that students can express different perspectives they have by using a critical lens to understand the text but how they can construct new meaning towards understanding others' points of view, voices and interests in a way they are going to be able to create a change in the society we are living in.

Critical literacy wants students to relate key information regarding the author and reader experiences in order to identify power relations represented and social injustices in cultures. By having a critical view, students can notice inequities that happen inside and outside school. This starts with developing a student's ability and confidence in asking questions, then taking in the information and separating fact from inference or potential. When a student can analyze and look at problems, while taking in various perspectives, they broaden the information they have acquired so they can start creating new perspectives and conceiving a whole new picture of the source they are analyzing in the classroom (Morgan, 1997). We are empowering students to be more active on what it is happening around them. Helping them to think and then problem solve with their peers helps them to learn to respect and value what others have to say or think to communicate in an effective way. Perception is reality not for many, but for all of us. If we can help students to learn there are 'many realities', then they can begin to see there may be multiple ways to solve a problem.

The principles of critical literacy. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2014) mentioned four principles of critical literacy:

- Critical literacy identifies problems that power can cause in a group of people and by being reflective there can be transformation and students can do something to change an issue.
- Critical literacy identifies a problem and goes beyond the basic analysis of it.
- Techniques that are used in critical literacy can be adjusted according to the context they are being practiced.
- Critical literacy helps students to find multiple perspectives according to their background experiences.

Keeping these principles in mind when incorporating them in our curriculum is essential because it represents a meaningful foundation to set up a strong relationship between the reader and the author. Besides, it helps the reader to have a different point of view and be more aware of decisions that they can make when analyzing texts and also discussions with other peers in the early ages.

Critical literacy strategies. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2014) stated that “critical literacy strategies-or starting points for teaching and learning-help readers to think about texts from a critical perspective” (p. 38). When using critical literacies in the classrooms, teachers need to guide students on explaining the strategies they are going to use when analyzing situations where power relations are present and understand the text by using a critical lens. Students need whole group activities where they can interact with

the text to provide their own perspective towards the topic. It is also important that they get to listen to others' perspectives, so they will not be only thinking about one solution to a problem, or one analysis of the text. By participating in large discussions, students will be aware that multiple perspectives are essential in these activities. Additionally, they get the opportunity to interact with other peers in pair activities or small groups to bring their own thoughts into discussion activities.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2014) mentioned critical literacy strategies that can be used with any text or discussion in the classroom:

1. Problem solving.
2. Patterned partner reading.
3. Bookmark technique.
4. Connection stems.
5. Say something.
6. The rest of the story.
7. Switching: gender, theme, setting, body-style, clothing, emotion. ethnic/race, language, relation/organization.
8. Alternative perspectives.
9. Mind and alternative Mind portraits.
10. Theme-based focus group. (pp. 41-52)

The importance of critical literacy in the classrooms. As I go back to analyze the different discussions, I have had with second graders, I feel amazed by all the information they have learned from a topic we are studying. Sometimes, this exploration starts from just a normal conversation that started with question. The previous knowledge students bring to the daily lessons are frequently based on the interactions they have with peers, adults at home and at school, books they have had access to, other media such as movies, documentaries or videos and having access to technology devices really expands their constant growing knowledge. After these interactions, students have already established their own biases; they have already had real-life experiences that include social issues and they have been able to deal with situations according to their background culture and their own identity.

Comber (2001) stated that:

The task for teachers is to help children to develop a meta-awareness and a meta-language for what they already know how to do and to assist them in applying these resources to the texts and situations of school life. (p. 2)

A teacher's role is to guide students in order to develop and practice critical skills by using books, articles, pictures, videos, and other media teachers can include in lessons or curricula.

Muise (2001) found that “the opportunity for conversation in a critical literacy curriculum is paramount” (p. 4). Students need spaces where they can analyze the resources they will have access to, make questions based on what they notice and what is

missing. From this, they can begin to determine how they could solve a problem. In this case, they need to think about a solution and talk about different perspectives. In a supported environment, students can dig in on why it is important to keep others' points of view in mind, and to see any biases or misconceptions they have according to the analysis of a topic or conversation theme.

When children are exposed to meaningful social experiences, they can make a change in the classroom using literacy skills such as reading, listening, speaking, or writing to express their opinion. Students learn that they have a voice, and a position in a discussion, and are eager to let their voices be heard. They build empathy towards others because they are learning the foundations of understanding others, and how to coexist in a community. The way students are going to represent their opinion will serve as a guide for teachers to plan on what to teach.

Furthermore, if students are provided these opportunities in the classroom, they will feel empowered. They will develop more critical thinking skills in situations that they will be facing on a daily basis. They will create a sense of confidence and leadership and it will bring a feeling of curiosity and exploration with their peers. Vasquez (2004) found "critical literacy does not necessarily involve taking a negative stance; rather, it means looking at an issue or topic in different ways, analyzing it, and hopefully being able to suggest possibilities for change or improvement" (p. 30). On the other hand, students need to feel they can do something to transform the community (social change)

and also understand others' identity. It is not enough to just analyze a problem, it is important to give students the capacity to believe they can be a part of the change.

Culturally responsive teaching. Walter (217) pointed out that “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (as cited in Gay, 2010, p. 31). The importance of making connections with students (getting to know them) is something that it should happen first so that we know what they need, who they are and how we can support them to make aspects of their cultural background meaningful to others so they have a voice and everyone can learn from others in a respectful way. Once teachers have established that connection, in our lesson planning or curriculum, we can include those needs and interests so that students feel more connected with the content we are teaching. They can then begin making connections with their background knowledge and also reinforcing the identity and seeing themselves as active participants in their own learning.

Equity. Shepherd (2014) stated that:

In educational settings, this means that students are not (as a matter of protocol, at least) segregated on the basis of characteristics such as race/ethnicity or gender, but rather do their learning collectively in the same classrooms, ostensibly enjoying the same rights and subject to the same rules (p. 80)

Once we develop a relationship and begin to know our students and have established connections with them, we gain credibility and can provide equitable

outcomes for all learners in the classroom. At this point, we are supporting their needs and interest and also providing strategies for them to learn. Students then begin to practice critical literacy strategies by themselves which helps to improve their learning by taking into account each perspective. Since each student learns differently, teachers need to provide each student tools and strategies that provide the best instruction practices for them to learn in an effective manner.

Diversity. Adams, Bell and Griffin (2016) affirmed that:

Diversity refers to the differences among social groups such as ethnic heritage, class, age, gender, sexuality, ability, religion and nationality. These differences are reflected in historical experiences, language, cultural practices, and traditions that ought to be affirmed and respected” (p. 1)

Teachers need to create an environment where students can share their points of view and learn from others as well. Having the idea that everyone has a different opinion will reinforce the respect and value each one's thoughts in order to work as a team and construct knowledge. As I began my capstone discussion, I believe that is critical teachers to have the tools and skills to encourage critical thinking and discussion. It is also important to create an environment where students can explore different perspectives to identify potential solutions to problems.

In summary, the message of this literature review section is so powerful for my project because it provides teachers elements to consider when teaching critical literacy

in the classroom. It starts with taking into account students' needs and interests to scaffold their learning in the best way that works for each of our students.

The Power of Inquiry

Teachers should always reflect on the idea of providing an environment in where students can be able to develop thinking skills, engage with the text and how to make questions and think about what they are reading going beyond understanding the text in a literal way. Wilhelm (2007) found that “the inquiry process explores and addresses the real world problem articulated by the question” (p. 8) In critical literacy, the task of the reader is to deepen their thinking by questioning the situations that can require analysis using a different angle and based their conversation or analysis in a multiple perspective and also be ready to listen to others' ideas to see the world with critical lens that leads to reinforce the inquiry process. “Inquiry Learning was designed, first and foremost, to produce involved citizens capable of successfully participating in and contributing to a democratic society” (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 58) In the classroom, teachers need to play an active role in guiding students' thinking and acting as facilitators during the discussions. Before starting with a specific analysis, teachers will need to guide this inquiry process making emphasis on the deep understanding and critical questions they are going to make and what they need to get there. One study found that “Respecting students as independent learners who can choose relevant and important things to learn reduces the need for control mechanisms such as detentions” (Steinberg & Behrenbruch, 2012, p. 60).

Planning activities in which students are going to have personal connections with their experiences to the context they are exploring will be more authentic learning that will bring more levels of engagement and motivation in the classroom.

Coffman (2012) considered that:

Without student motivation, engagement will not happen and deep inquiry will not take place. When motivated, students are eager to learn, fascinated by their discoveries, and enjoy asking questions. (p.7)

Students will be leading their learning process since they will be interacting more with other peers and exchanging conversations according to the purpose of the lesson that should be mentioned at the beginning of the lesson and the critical literacy strategy they are going to use to guide their work. Wilhelm (2007) stated that “inquiry inducts students into a community of practice; they come to think and act more like people who work with the disciplines of math, science, social science, ethics, literature, philosophy, government” (p. 24). Making questions is a mental process that requires the learner to be in experiential situations where they are not just using one skill such as communication but when these interactions are happening, students need to be aware that they need to be good listeners, show respect for the other person, take turns, and find a way to solve problems as a team. According to Keene and Zimmerman (2017), “we must think of setting out on a quest to learn more, to better understand friends and family, to pursue passions and interests, to make sense of our worlds. Keene and Zimmerman” (p. 107).

Using clear expectations will allow students to talk about and discuss their questions and to let others be heard as well. Students will use reading, listening, speaking and writing to express their voices when working on critical questions that will involve a variety of realities happening in society to find way(s) they can make a difference to transform world problems. “Children are natural questioners. It is how they work to make sense of the complex world around them” (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 108).

We want to make sure we are building a meaningful context for students to be active leaders when guiding discussions around posing problems and also making changes in their way of thinking along the way when having such important interactions and time to reflect not just themselves but others.

Coffman (2012) said that:

As a teacher, you can develop inquiry skills in your students by helping them to develop a curiosity of the world around them and then to question and seek answers to help solve relevant problems. This is real-world application of functional skills required to succeed in the world today. And it is very much needed by our 21st-century learners. (p. 6)

Expressing students’ thinking in an authentic real-life situation, will also encourage collaborative work and relations with others in the community. This will enhance their ability to be part of a transformation and successfully make a change that will have started in the classroom as a way to honor, value and respect their interests, cultural background and needs.

Important components in the inquiry process. Wilhelm (2009) described this *reflectivity* as “being able to make meaning in and of particular situations by using your own values, habits, processes, and experiences” (p. 37). By incorporating inquiry in critical literacy, students will have a different view of their learning making it more meaningful because they will be connecting their own background experiences with the new information they acquire. Students will also appreciate the variety of perspectives peers are bringing into their discussions since everyone is talking from their own experiences.

Additionally, Wilhelm (2009) affirmed that *reflexivity* “means getting outside one’s own normal way of seeing and knowing, and then privileging the perspectives, values, experiences, processes, and history of others” (p. 37). For instance, students will analyze things differently in a way they will think deeper if they can identify relations of power, inequality and the voices that are not being represented but instead they have been left out in a text.

In this section, I have reviewed how important is that teachers create a climate where students develop critical thinking through activities in which they can also work as individuals. It is also important for them to learn to work as a group and have an active role when working collaboratively. This climate where they are going to be interacting with other peers is important as they will not only be developing critical thinking skills but also they will be working around communication, creativity, and collaboration. The task students are going to work on, need to reflect real-life situations that bring more

engagement and motivation to the students because they are making connections with prior knowledge but also with the new input they are getting through these discussions in the classroom.

Multiple perspectives. The process of using multiple perspectives to analyze a text, does not happen right away. In fact, it is a transition that comes from the teacher when selecting the right books and hypertexts to use with the students and also the strategies that are going to be implemented and they can be adapted according to a specific context. Students need to be exposed to these techniques to develop more critical skills by using books that reflect social issues regarding gender, race, ethnicity, class, political or social power and identifying the voices of those that are not being represented. Giroux (1987) stated “students need to understand the richness and strengths of other cultural traditions, other voices, particularly as these point to forms of self-empowerment and social empowerment” (p. 178) Empowered students will be more engaged on what they are learning because teachers have chosen the right books or resources for them to apply strategies in small groups or independently but it creates a close bound in terms of authenticity in the topics that are going to be discussed in class so it establishes a more meaningful experience for the reader.

If teachers want students to explore the multiple perspectives, Linder (2006) emphasizes that:

1. Critically examine the text to be presented to the students. Determine the perspective(s) presented in the text as well as those absent from the text.

2. Determine what, if any, supplementing will be necessary in order to provide the students with information about the absent perspective(s).
3. Select an appropriate activity or strategy. (p. 25)

When teachers assign activities that include critical analysis for their students, they need to support with other resources such as articles or other books, related to the discussion topics that further the points of view that are not represented or the ones that need more explanation. On the other hand, a teacher can provide any assistance if students need more guidance when getting familiar with strategies they are going to use to interpret a text. Sometimes students are not ready to work in a whole group or even in a small so it is important that students have the time to work by themselves when needed then they can socialize or join a small group and feel more prepared for a discussion. There might be strategies or activities that will involve whole group participation but it depends how the teacher wants to adapt the strategy according to the context, and also what the students need and where they are, in terms of learning and incorporating new strategies.

Diverse Literature

Since I was a child, I could devour all the books elementary teachers brought in the classroom. I had numerous books at home and most of them have the same theme princesses. They looked so pretty and the illustrations were good back in the 90's. Now, that I can think about with critical lens, I did not see myself reflected in any of those stories. They were entertaining and good stories to learn from but all of the princesses

and the background of the story was not related to who I was and my background as Colombian. I was not aware of how limiting that was until now that I understand the impact of how diversity broadens a person's thinking on potential; it really moves me.

Living in the United States for almost 5 years has made me more aware of all the diversity that it is represented all around: language, clothing, traditions, food, and breadth of cultural knowledge from others that I still need to learn. I feel comfortable when seeing diversity not just here in the U.S but when I have the chance to be outside the country and explore new countries. I believe diversity in thought is extremely important for this generation of students we are teaching. They need to appreciate, respect and value others' cultures. In the same way, I can see it now when getting to know new people no matter their race, gender, religion, disabilities, ethnicity, nationality, culture and socioeconomic background. "Great literature portrays the enormous diversity of our world, not only reflecting readers' own lives but introducing them to other experiences that enrich and enlarge their vision and understanding" (Wooten, Aimonette & Cullinan, 2018, p. 17).

Based on my teaching practice reflections, our school community is so diverse that I consider each one of the students should be represented in the literature we have access to. The definition of diverse literature given by Boyd, Causey & Galda (2015) pointed out that "in terms of literature, themes centered on race, ethnicity, culture, and languages are commonly considered important characteristics of diversity" (p. 379). As we have seen the world transformation in different aspects such as technology, media,

climate, education, tradition, we can start seeing more multiculturalism in the society because of the migration of people to new places to work, travel, study, leisure or settle in a community. Iwai (2015) affirmed that “each student is different from other students in many ways, such as culture, socioeconomic status, language, race, religion, gender, academic level, and geographic origin” (p. 82).

Moreover, teachers and librarians need to have quality resources for students where they can find stories of their cultures or communities are told. It is important to see a relation to their background and what they are reading at school. The stories that teachers select to include in their lessons or curriculums they do not need to stereotype a group of people because of just one story. Teachers want to prevent that to happen in order to avoid any judgments in students or creating thoughts of just one vision of a culture. If there is a culture represented in the text, there should be more stories to tell that students can have more information from it to discuss with others or even learn new things. “Given the fact that the majority of teachers will not reflect the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of the students they teach, teachers must be able to connect with a diverse student population with a wide array of difference and cultural wealth” (Osorio, 2018, p. 52). It is important to remember that schools will have different population of students, students then still need to get access to diverse literature so that they can learn from what it is happening around the world, how other people live according to traditions and customs and understand the issues of the world to have a better concept of the world.

Galda, Lian and Cullinan (2016) described that:

Considering culturally diverse literature

1. The book is an excellent piece of literature.
2. the book depicts diversity as an important but not gratuitous backdrop in a non-stereotyped manner.
3. The books explore a particular culture accurately, demonstrating diversity within as well as across cultures if appropriate, and avoiding stereotypes.
4. The book is a positive contribution to an understanding of the culture portrayed. (p. 35)

According to the context, teachers can adjust the content of the lessons and make adjustments that they consider essential in order to support students' needs and interests. Iwai (2015) found that "teachers need to understand differences among individuals and demonstrate that they care about all students. They also must respect all students by treating them fairly and teaching students to treat peers and others equally without biases or stereotyping" (p. 82). The resources that are going to be used in the classroom should reflect different perspectives of cultures, appreciate and value the diversity represented in it, educate students in identifying and address social issues and authentic resources that honor the people who belong to these cultures to show its uniqueness and how by analyzing them students can find similarities and things that are different. In general, "as readers, we all need literature to reflect and affirm our own lives and experiences" (Wooten, Aimonette & Cullinan, 2018, p. 5). The main point in these discussions is to

highlight that no matter our differences, we need to embrace what we have in common and respect each ones' differences and after all, we are still human beings living and learning from each ones' context and cultural experiences.

The school community needs to be informed about the implementation of diverse literature in the classrooms so that they know what teachers are working on with students and everyone can be on the same page.

Newell (2017) determined that:

Literature offers us the perfect opportunity to engage all students in analysis and reflection on the roles and opportunities of various members of our society. This will hopefully result in a richer, more just, and more authentic education for all children. (p. 99)

Educating learners of the twenty-first century requires that there is a strong connection with the content and diversity to prepare students for experiences they are going to have throughout their lives and the importance of working together for a better world and communities as actively engaged citizens that will reflect positive attitudes towards others. Wooten, Aimonette and Cullinan (2018) stated that “we are truly an immigrant nation—with all the richness, complexity, and tension it engenders—a fact that we should acknowledge and celebrate rather than fear and resist” (p. 4).

I have found a solid foundation for my project when reviewing this section because the literature students are going to have access to need to reflect the multiculturalism that is present in the classroom and the school community. If the context

is not diverse, it should represent how other cultures live so that students are aware of the different ways of living of others so that they can honor every single person by their cultural background in order to avoid stereotyping or misjudging in the students.

Gender. According to Giraldo and Colyar (2012), “gender is not something men and women are, but what they do. What it means to be female and male is socially agreed upon and reproduced by the participants of the transaction” (p. 26). The interactions human beings are exposed to are done in a social context which is vital for the development of each one's identity. Additionally, Duran argued (2006) that gender is something we do as we talk, act, read and write in ways that constitute us as masculine or feminine within social structures (as cited in Zimmerman and West, 1987) (p. 125).

Culture. Brown (1953) stated that “culture is defined as the class of responses of any hominid individual learned from any other hominid individual” (p. 215) Culture is based on traditions, religion, values, language that belong to a group and it shapes the identity of way of living of people inside a community.

Buzzelli, Cary and Johnson (2002) affirmed that:

Our understanding of culture comprises two fundamental components. First, we see culture as fundamentally a question of values— that is, of moral judgments.

We will assume axiomatically (rather than argue) that culture is primarily a closely interrelated set of moral standpoints, and that other trappings of culture— history, customs, celebrations, clothing, food, and so on — are only secondary

manifestations of the core values of the culture. Thus, culture is, above all else, a moral matter. (p. 81).

The culture that each one of our students represent in the classroom should be honored because as teachers we need to acknowledge the diversity that we have in our classrooms and offer equitable opportunities for all students.

Ethnicity. Bhopal (2013) emphasized that:

The word ethnicity derives from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning a nation. Ethnicity is a multi-faceted quality that refers to the group to which people belong, and/or are perceived to belong, as a result of certain shared characteristics, including geographical and ancestral origins, but particularly cultural traditions and languages. The characteristics that define ethnicity are not fixed or easily measured, so ethnicity is imprecise and fluid. Ethnicity differs from race, nationality, religion, and migrant status, sometimes in subtle ways, but may include facets of these other concepts (p. 441)

Ethnicity is the identity represented in cultural practices that a group of people have which traditions, customs, language, religion, clothing are different and unique to other social groups. The opportunities our students are getting in the classrooms to learn from others' identity will make broaden perspectives to analyze something with critical lens. Students are exposed to a diverse representation of cultures that will make them see the world with a different perspective as they are learning about the uniqueness of their

peers and also the teachers that will reflect cultural backgrounds that are unique to each person. These interactions are valuable in order to respect others' experiences and be open to interact with multiple perspectives and different ways to understand the world and its social issues and power relations.

Social Justice. “Social justice requires confronting the ideological frameworks, historical legacies, and institutional patterns and practices that structure social relations unequally so that some groups are advantaged at the expense of other groups that are marginalized” (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2016, p. 4). We want students to have critical thinking skills to identify situations in which they feel others are not being treated with respect and being valued. This often occurs in a culture because of a group who is using more power to silence another group of people and they are not being fair to others. Social Justice can teach students to broaden their perspectives and have discussions where they can see how others feel when they are being marginalized and there is no other point of view that need to be considered. It also gives them a voice to speak out against injustice. Adams, Bell and Griffin (2016) explained that social justice “in education is to enable individuals to develop critical analysis tools necessary to understand the structural features of oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems” (p. 4)

In this part, I found important elements that I need to keep in mind when choosing the books I want to include in my project. I want to value and respect each one of my students by bringing to the classroom books that they feel represented and they have a

connection with the content of it and also to let them know about other cultures around the world that they need to know in order to value their differences and also things they look the same in our own cultures. This is so important because it is creating a climate of multiple perspectives and having a different lens when analyzing diverse literature.

Immersion Education

Hammerly (1987) affirmed that “the immersion approach involves exposing students to instruction through the target language, and communicative interaction in it, for many years, 100 percent of the school day during the first two or three years” (p. 395). In my school, we do not use English during our instruction in grades K-2. In third grade, students take English class as part of the specials and they can learn more about grammar, and also work on book analysis. It is only 45 minutes a day they are exposed to English instruction. In grades fifth and sixth, there is a balance with the English and Spanish. By second grade, students will be able to use the language in a social proficient way. Then, after year 3, they will be building more academic language during the instruction they get every day.

Baker and MacIntyre (2003) said that “immersion programs offer increased frequency of communication in the second language and, thus, enhance the linguistic outcomes of immersion students” (p. 68)

When reflecting on the importance of working in an immersion school, I can see my teaching practices including more critical situations where students can learn from others and have a sense of community. I consider important the value of having a diverse

class where everyone has incredible cultural backgrounds that others need to know more about their identities and also we can learn from each other and where we come from and things that make each one of us unique. Through empathy and recognizing the other as a unique person, teachers can strengthen respect, sense of community and collaboration between each other. If they can see multiculturalism in the classroom, they will be open-minded and ready to listen and respect others' perspectives. Fortune stated (n.d) "by being able to communicate with a much wider range of people from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Knowledge of other languages enriches travel experiences and allows people to experience other societies and cultures more meaningfully" (para. 18).

Twenty-first century learners. The new generation of students we get every day is characterized for using the information and communications technology (ICT). This occurs in their daily activities at school and also when they go somewhere or when they interact with others. It really strengthens the social context in which they were born and makes them shape their identity. (Fernandes, 2014 as cited in Seely-Brown, 2004). These students really demand that teacher open spaces for them to interact with the information and using digital literacies in the classrooms. Some schools have access to 1:1 iPads or any other device that allows them to interact and make more meaningful the information while developing skills such as creativity, communication, critical thinking and collaboration and the reinforcement of these skills in the classroom on a daily basis will allow students to bring this to real-life experiences and social ones that they will

encounter in the future and will make them more aware of the changing world we are living in and they will bring the tools they need to face it when working on developing a product, social life and academics.

Authenticity. Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall and Tower (2006) found that “students learn language not in abstract, decontextualized terms but in application, in a context that language is really for” (p. 345). Besides the 4C’s skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity), we want in the twenty-first century learner to be able to use the information in real-context so that they can interact with the information in a relevant and meaningful way. Students work on projects that will expose them to critical experiences where they interact with other peers creating a product that will include others’ perspective and the use of new literacies that supports reading, writing, listening and speaking instruction in the classroom. We want students to lead their learning process so it is important that teacher will design activities where students can interact and have ‘hands-on’ during the whole process. Students work on problem-solving if there is a conflict in their group or a strategy that it is not working and how to find ways to make it work instead of getting frustrating and use critical skills to come up with a new strategy to use. According to Whitney (2017), “it means not only doing work that is authentic but also finding ways to do the work together in which we can be ourselves” (p. 20).

Students take ownership of their own learning so that others can evaluate and provide effective feedback as being part of the audience which allows them to hear a different perspective of what they have been working on. The authentic learning

experience is helping them grow in terms of interacting with others and being open to mistakes and comments even if they do not agree with, they need to construct the social context where these interactions are having place and including the academics to be student-centered using accountable talk to have a purpose in the discussions so all the voices are being heard.

New Literacies. “The idea of "new literacies" focuses on ways in which meaning-making practices are evolving under contemporary conditions that include, but are in no way limited to, technological changes associated with the rise and proliferation of digital electronics” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014, p. 97) Students need to use the literacy skills in a new way that includes technology resources so it is more engaging, authentic and meaningful in a social context through the interaction with others by using apps, blogs, videos, etc, the learning will be collaborative.

The opportunity we are providing for our students to expand and make their learning more meaningful provides skills for them to understand how the world is in constant change and how it is important to appreciate and value others’ cultures because in authentic contexts, students will be exposed to people from all over so they need to be able to respect others’ opinions and use their skills to construct social knowledge. Students need to be aware of the tools they can use to support their skills development and have the tools they need to be successful both academic, social and as human beings.

In the last section, I made a lot of connections regarding my teaching practice as a Spanish immersion teacher. I need to remember that twenty-first century learners have

different needs and each one of them learns in a different way because they are unique and some of them need more support than others. New literacies, and broadened social representations provide a huge range of possibilities for students to develop their literacy skills in a way that fits them and they feel more confident. Besides, having authentic learning experiences for students will reinforce the engagement and the motivation they have in the discussions or activities teachers plan for the class and also the connection with their previous experience to something authentic that makes them work on problem-solving and find new ways strategies for their own learning and learn from others' perspectives.

Conclusion

This literature review helped me to become more familiar with critical literacy strategies that teachers can use in their classrooms to make the reading more meaningful and the vision of the world students have and how it can be expanded through multiple perspectives of a text, media tool or other resource they analyze. The use of diverse literature represents others' cultural experiences and a new way to discover the traditions of the communities that are represented in our school community so teachers need to be thoughtful when including these books in their curriculum. This is an important component for the creation of the blog. Teachers will find books they can use to have critical discussions and have a different perspective of the world around us.

In Chapter three, I will describe the project I will develop to keep working on the research question: *How can diverse literature be used through critical literacy strategies*

to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms? Based on the literature review, I gained a lot of new information that will be important to use when working on the blog.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Working at a Spanish Immersion school, it has made me realize the importance of creating an environment where students' cultural backgrounds and identities are represented in the classrooms and the school community. The research question that I want to examine is: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* To respond to this question, I settle on creating a blog that allows teachers and students to use critical literacy strategies with diverse literature that will reflect students' culture. Students need to be motivated in their learning because they can see themselves represented in the resources they are having access to it and analyzing as well. Teachers need to highlight in the teaching practices the importance of honoring, respecting and valuing different perspectives and traditions each one has in their daily life.

Twenty-first century learners are exposed to broad opportunities to create, collaborate, communicate and through these interactions with other peers think more critically about situations that involves having a different lens when analyzing texts or media. By using these resources and teaching students critical literacy strategies, they can reflect on what they are learning in situations in which it shows a context that students can feel represented. It provides an opportunity for others to learn something new from the world as active members of the community. Additionally, it is a way for students to

be engaged with the lessons and leading not just their learning but discussions they can have with others and feel their thoughts are respected and listened.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 3 describes the school setting and demographics where the project is implemented. Next, it describes the purpose, components and the framework of creating a blog for the benefit of both students and teachers when implementing it as it supports diversity and equity in the classroom. It also provides a timeline that outline the process of creating the blog until the presentation of the final product school-wide. Finally, it includes the rationale so that the purpose of the blog is clear for teachers when using it in the unit lessons.

Project Description

According to Hong (2008) “blogs engage people in knowledge sharing and reflection, and they often attract a large readership. Instead of providing static information, blogs allow users and readers to respond, to create, and to connect” (p. 34). As the information is always evolving in the way we preserve it, it is important that educators see blogs as a way to interact with other colleagues by sharing strategies, tools and other resources. Leigh (2018) found that “when used inside a blogging platform, reflections become public, either by allowing full public access to them or by sharing within a community specific to the participating educators” (p.27). By doing that, it enriches the teaching instruction and it can be seen as a collaborative tool that allows to gather resources and essential information that will benefit both students and teachers.

Besides, we are creating a connection with the information so our students can take ownership of it and as teachers as a way to connect with other teachers and create new ways to keep resources alive and available when need it.

The blog provides information about the definition of critical literacy, multiple perspectives, inquiry and its importance in education. Besides, it has a detailed description of critical literacy strategies that teachers can use with the diverse literature book list that teachers will have access through the blog and it can be used to support their unit lessons. The book list has the title of the book, a description of the books. In order for teachers to know more about the book, I include a book trailer or an interview with the author providing highlights from the story.

Purpose

The purpose of creating a blog that supports teachers and students is to include each students' cultural backgrounds to make their learning more meaningful so that they have connections with the information they are analyzing. Besides, developing skills such as critical thinking allowed students to understand new points of view and work on problem-solving. Since these discussions are happening in the classroom, teachers need to have resources that are relevant to students to motivate and engage them in the lessons and that why it is important to have authentic learning experience in which they are going to be exposed to real-life problems through diverse literature. This learning process needs to be meaningful to students so they will reflect more on the current situations others are dealing with and learn to listen to others ideas or thoughts and solve problems by

themselves or with other peers. Having this blog, it allows teachers to find books that students in their classrooms can feel represented and identified aspects of their cultures. Blogging is an interactive way for teachers to have access to these resources since it is a platform in which they can also comment and reflect based on their own teaching practices and other recommendations they can suggest to include in the blog such as strategies or more books so that we enlarge our book resources from what other teachers have done in their classrooms. The accessibility for teachers is clear and efficient for them to navigate it without any problems and they can have access to any of the resources I include in the blog from any device we have in our school (laptop or iPad).

Rationale

The idea of having this blog is that teachers are aware of the diversity that it is represented in the students not only around our school but also district-wide. As we are teaching a second language, teachers need to include activities which students get to talk about other cultures and value differences. Having a strong cultural background is essential for our students because they come from all over or sometimes they were born here in the U.S but their relatives are from somewhere else and that is when they are being part of the construction of their cultural identity.

Besides, in the classroom they need to find connections that reflect traditions, language, clothing, food when reading books that they feel represented and it is a great opportunity for other students to get to know others and honor who they are and bringing to them a new vision of the world and its problematics as well. A blog helps teachers to

have the resources they need to keep reinforcing cultural background and experiences students bring to the classroom every day. Teachers can choose the critical literacy strategies they are going to implement in the classroom and choose the diverse literature books that are going to be listed in the blog but it is optional for them to use them as they preferred and most important what works for their group of students. Teachers are also learning how to have a different lens and listening to different perspectives but the main goal is to teach students to be more critical when analyzing problematics that are happening in the society and how to use problem- solving to find a way to make a difference in society as citizens. Any other resources can be added if needed to support the critical literacy teaching in the classroom.

Setting

The blog is implemented in a suburban elementary Spanish immersion school in the Midwest. It is a K-6 elementary Spanish immersion school with a 90/10 program (full immersion) which means that grades K-2, teachers do not use English during the school day. In grade 3, students have English language arts and reading as specials. In fifth and sixth grade, there is a balance in English and Spanish to have an even distribution of both languages. The school population is approximately 830 students, and its demographic consists of 74.7% White students, 13.7% Hispanic, 3.4% Asian, 2.0% Black or African American and 6.1% two or more races, with about 7.2% of its students qualifying for free and reduced lunches (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Students described above are going to benefit from the blog as teachers are including diverse books that will

make reference to different cultures and create a broader perspective for other students to learn from others and learn to analyze the world respecting others' perspectives.

Audience

School-wide teachers are participants as they are going to have access to the blog and they can implement it according to unit lessons. Based on the diverse literature books that are listed in the blog, teachers decide the ones they are going to use according to their class population and also the critical strategies they are going to teach students along these books. Students in our school are active participants when they are analyzing the topics of the books and the critical literacy strategies students are going to be familiar with and learn how to use them but also teachers can decide on the ones they find in the blog or the ones that the teacher decides to use according to the class context that can be used in groups or individually.

Framework

In the blog framework, I include the definition of critical literacy, the importance of implementing critical literacy discussions in the classroom since I do not know if some teachers are familiar with it or not so it is a good access point of information for them to know more about it and start using it more in their unit lessons.

According to McDaniel (2004), "Critical literacy transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world" (p. 474) The main reason that I consider when thinking about creating this project is the importance for students in our schools that they feel

represented in the literature they are having access everyday. In addition, it supports their cultural background and also their identity as students, citizens and human beings.

Another important component is critical literacy strategies that teachers can use according to the diverse literature books that are going to be used along with them. Teachers have access to a detailed description of the strategies including the purpose and the steps they need to take when teaching them when using a text to foster analysis and critical thinking in the students.

The definition of diverse literature given by Boyd, Causey and Galda (2015) pointed out that “in terms of literature, themes centered on race, ethnicity, culture, and languages are commonly considered important characteristics of diversity” (p. 379) Since our district has an important diverse population, it is necessary that students are aware of the different cultures that are represented or not in the classrooms so that they can value, appreciate and respect their differences.

Ciampa and Gallagher (2015) found in their research about how blogging support teacher collaboration:

Blog as a tool for facilitating the sharing of knowledge and networking among colleagues, providing an atmosphere of equal voice and self-reflection, and providing time for teachers during the professional learning sessions to reflect and engage in online dialogue (p.14) If teachers can have this interaction to a blog, it becomes a tool in which teachers can also share resources and practices they do in their classrooms. It is important with blogging that everyone's voices

are being heard, teachers can also feel they are participating in this collaborative process and reach teachers no matter the grade level. This tool invites and involves teachers as active participants and developers of their own knowledge through reflection of others' experiences and resources.

As a future plan, I want to include a list of links teachers can use to find more diverse literature books if they are thinking about using a particular one but letting them know that there are great websites they can access and find the resources they need to support their lessons but I want teachers to have easy access to this information and also the blog to help them when they need to find a resource that will support their cultural discussions in the classroom and the most important that those resources they are going to use reflect real-life experiences for students.

Timeline and assessment

During the summer of 2019, I collect the resources I am going to include such as Critical literacy theory, principles, and strategies in the blog. In the fall of 2019, I finish including resources in the blog so that I socialize the blog during a staff meeting and talk about the purpose of the blog and how they can use it in their unit lessons. I plan on creating a survey to get input or feedback on ways that the blog can be improved or areas teachers might consider important when implementing it. This feedback provides important information of things to be included or areas of improvement as it is such an important tool school-wide.

The implementation is on January 2020 and teachers can decide the way to implement it according to their classroom context since all of the groups bring different needs, interests and also different cultures that students represent every year. Once the implementation is in place, I ask teachers to provide continuous feedback regarding how effective, supportive and helpful the blog can be for them as a resource tool that supports language arts curriculum. They can also make comments in the blog according to their experience when using the blog, implementing the resources that they can have access to it and also how useful it is to work with this blog and if there is still something that can be changed to keep reinforcing this tool that helps teachers to build a strong foundation in critical literacy when using diverse literature books.

Conclusion

Chapter three discusses the purpose of creating a blog and how it supports the teaching and learning practice in an elementary Spanish immersion school. The setting where the project is implemented is described. The audience shows that not only teachers but also students are going to benefit from the resources that are included in the blog. I also mention the blog timeline and its framework as it is important to have a clear view of what it has for teachers and students, how to use it and also when it is implemented school-wide. Finally, I explain the rationale of the blog and how essential it is for teachers to implement it in the classroom as it supports students' motivation and engagement in the lessons as they are sharing their cultural background and their points of view but also learning from others and how to value and respect others opinions and

background experiences they have as part of their identities that can be respected by others. Chapter four includes the results of the blog socialization for teachers and its implementation in the classroom in order to answer my research question: *How can diverse literature be used through critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?*

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

Our world is constantly evolving and we gain opportunities to meet new people, cultures and traditions. Our background knowledge is expanding because of all of the interactions we have with others. These interactions can be through videos, social media, trips, pictures, but mostly are happening in our society, and most specifically in our school communities with students whose families have migrated to the United States for better opportunities in their lives. There are also teachers who are pursuing new experiences in their professional backgrounds. Students and teachers from all over the world can be found in our schools, and that is when connecting with others is really meaningful. To be open minded to learn from who they are, and what we do but also what we have in common, no matter the language we speak or culture we belong to. We are building a strong community with lots of experiences that are possible when we interact with others, and we have a different lens to honor their identities.

Through my daily teaching practice, I appreciate when I have the opportunity to interact with students who come from different cultures, and learn more about them and what they do with their families to keep traditions going. Working on my capstone project I feel that I wanted to advocate for my students and the cultures that are represented in my classroom. There is a need to offer opportunities for them to feel honored and also for their peers to learn more about them and other cultures that are not

in the classroom. This is as a way to get to know more about how other cultures are and what they can learn from them. Working on my capstone project, it led me to answer my research question: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?*

Based on this experience, it is important to have diverse literature books in our classrooms that are relevant for our students to offer opportunities in which they have connections with the characters, the setting, a celebration or tradition mentioned in the book. Besides, it can offer a view to other students of what the world is about and how they can be more critical readers when they are exposed to this kind of literature.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One explained how my cultural background and professional experience was relevant to generate my research question. Chapter Two, explored the literature review regarding critical literacy and diverse literature books that support equitable outcomes for students in our school community. Chapter Three, explained the importance of creating a blog, and how teachers and students benefit from being exposed and interact with diverse literature books. The blog allows the opportunity to have discussions around inequities in our world, different ways of living, things that are similar to what we do or have in our daily lives, and how to have a critical lens when reading and exploring books.

In Chapter Four, I will include the findings from exploring the literature review, the process around the creation of the blog, my experience as a learner and writer when developing this capstone, and how powerful and relevant it was to answer my research

question: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* I will also describe the impact and limitations of this project will have for educators and students and future plans to keep the blog evolving and being a constant reference tool for educators in our school community that will support their teaching practices in their classrooms.

Learning Experience

My experience as a writer during this capstone process helped me develop an organized plan when starting to think about ideas I wanted to include when writing each chapter. For me, it is hard to start writing an academic paper. Having a capstone workbook through the resources Hamline offered during the Capstone Project classes allowed me to have a better view of what I needed to focus on. Another thing I consider important was not to write the whole paper in one semester, but it was given in a way that I could focus on each component of the paper. I think focusing on one chapter at a time provided an opportunity to enjoy writing the capstone as it can be a tedious process. I have to admit that always starting the first lines of each chapter was not an easy task to do, but something that helped me was to know each component in each chapter. I feel this plan made me grow as a writer in a way that I could be more organized with my thoughts, and make the information more relevant for the reader.

I think one of the biggest challenges for me was to write my capstone paper in English which is my second language. It can be difficult to translate your thoughts in the same way you are doing it in your first language, in my case Spanish, and then the main

idea of a paragraph or what I wanted to communicate may not make sense. I found the support of colleagues who helped me edit my grammar, spelling and making sure everything made sense for the reader as well. In this writing process, feedback from peers and professors was such a powerful guide to feel confident in getting suggestions and learn from them.

Another resource I used was the Hamline Writing Center. I obtained great ideas from the people who helped me edit my capstone. They went above and beyond in this process, and I got great tips when I revised my own writing and other strategies that I can use for editing. I did a lot of reading my paper aloud so I could identify things that needed to be modified or added. Besides, using a visual concept map was pretty effective for me. When working on Chapter Two, I had so many topics I wanted to include in my capstone paper, but prioritizing the main topics and creating subtopics really helped me to stay on task. I printed the visual concept map, and I kept editing the order of each subtopic and how to relate it to specific areas of information that I wanted to cover in my capstone paper. When I was finding resources for my literature review, I knew the topic was going to be meaningful for myself as I connected a lot of ideas with my personal and professional background. I just developed a passion about this topic, and it was an enjoyable process reading the articles, books and other resources used to consolidate the literature review. As I was collecting resources, I was constantly reflecting in all the new learning built in this process, and how it was going to support my research question which led me to acquire skills as a researcher and as a writer.

Furthermore, reflecting more on how students learn how to write and read in a second language made me be more thoughtful in what I wanted to develop as a capstone project. Reflecting on critical literacies was another way to be in my students' shoes, and create a resource that could provide what they need in order to support their interests, identities and personal backgrounds.

Lastly, creating a blog was a new experience. I feel with technology I can explore it by myself, and be more autonomous in my learning. I found it really productive as I was exploring the blog tools. There were times when things didn't work out well because of formatting or I was not doing it in the right way, but it was all about practice and self exploration at the beginning of this process. Then, some colleagues provided some guidance and feedback in what could work when adding content to the blog. During the drafting process, I also obtained feedback from peers and that was something that made me feel proud of what I was doing. I took the feedback as a way to learn and have a different perspective of how others see what I am doing and that really helped me a lot to improve my job as a blog creator. I developed more confidence in myself because the project was purposeful. Others were seeing the impact it is going to have for the school community and the benefits educators from my school can get from it as well.

Revisiting the literature review

Consolidating my research question: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* allowed me to focus on how critical literacy was going to be a main topic to reflect on the way we see our students, but also a way to understand them because we need to know who they are along with their backgrounds so that we can support their needs and find resources that are going to be meaningful for their learning process.

Thomas, Hall and Piazza (2010) explained that teachers sometimes do not understand their students' background because they are not familiar with their issues and the way they live in and that is when teachers make assumptions or judgements because they are having certain behavior patterns or it does not go the way the teacher see others interacting in the classroom. Thinking more critically helps teachers to learn from their students' cultural backgrounds and identities. Teachers are able to understand and offer help when they need knowing their needs and interests but mostly creating a strong relationship of caring and respect for our students who grew up speaking a different language, practicing different traditions than ours. McDaniel (2004) said that when thinking critically, we start reflecting on what it is happening around us. By having a critical lens, we can transform our thoughts in order to understand situations that happen to others. As teachers those identities represented in the classrooms and the school community need to be understood and honored so that students learn from each other and the instruction is equally relevant to everyone. In addition, it is also a way for others to

learn from their peers and teachers can change some assumptions they have created based on how someone looks, talks, socializes with others, or how they do not know information about the cultures represented in the classroom.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2014) stated that the use of critical literacy strategies in the classroom will help students to develop a deeper understanding of what they are reading using a critical view to analyze texts. In our classrooms, we are not only teaching content, but we are teaching culture and the cultures that are or are not represented in our classrooms. In a Spanish immersion school this is important because the focus cannot be on the grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, but how we expand our vision of the world when we analyze a story more in detail using a critical view.

The literature review on diverse literature provides a reflection on the books we are using in our classrooms in a way that they need to show, and talk about the diversity of our society and the world. (Wooten, Aimonette & Cullinan, 2018) explained that students need to be exposed to this literature to be more reflective of their own experiences compared to what others are facing in a different culture, and how it provides a whole new perspective of how they see the world and understand social inequities. This literature will expand the vision of the world in a critical way for students as they will start seeing things under a critical perspective. Our mission as educators is to bring diverse literature to our teaching, so that students will make connections between the cultures mentioned in the books and the situations the characters are facing in order to learn and understand others' backgrounds. (Osorio, 2018).

As I was thinking about what platform to use for my project, I thought blogging was going to be a great digital resource for teachers to have the information they need regarding diverse books they can use in their curriculums. It was a good way to have critical literacy strategies to work with the books I wanted to include in the book. The idea of a blog for educators seemed more effective according to the explanation of Hong (2008) blogging allows people to share resources for others to have access, and create a strong, close and powerful community. By having this bond, teachers can share their own practices, resources and also reflect on what they do in the classroom, but mostly effective feedback on what works well and what does not. Blogging can be understood as a way to keep community connected with useful information for everyone based on reflections on daily practices.

The literature review around critical literacy, diverse literature and the creation of a blog was the foundation for what I wanted to achieve in my project, and its purpose for the school community. It also helped me to reflect on the implications and limitations of this project.

Implications

The creation of the blog will allow teachers to find more diverse literature books to be included in their curricula as well as the use of critical literacy strategies that go along with these books. Having this digital resource will create an impact for administrators and other teachers or staff members who are not familiar with diverse literature or critical literacy. It would be a good starting point to start organizing PD days

for teachers to become more familiar with these topics so the blog will make more sense for teachers or staff members who are new into this. Additionally, teachers want to know more about the research behind it including how to implement it in the classroom.

What I also want with the blog is for teachers to learn more from the book list I created and what books will support the diversity in their classrooms as each book list has a summary of the story and a book trailer or the author talking about the book. It would be important to know the books that could be used in each classroom. Besides, last May, the equity committee at our school organized a book tasting with diverse literature books that teachers could get for each class, and implement them in their units/curriculums. I took some of the books from the list we were provided from the book tasting, and I included those when creating the blog, so it will be nice for teachers to have a tool like the blog that supports teaching diverse literature that reflects diversity and social issues. On the other hand, since the blog has a survey section, I want teachers to provide feedback on areas that they feel it would support their classrooms, or things needed to be modified or included in the blog to become this tool more powerful school-wide.

Limitations

When I first started to think about creating a digital tool such as a blog, I wanted to incorporate a lesson with each book for teachers to use, but what I did was to put together a book list of diverse literature books. Teachers can access the critical literacy strategies document I created so they can use any strategy they feel it fits with the discussion topic or what it works best for their class context. I did not want teachers to

feel that they needed to use a specific strategy or a specific lesson with the book. Instead, I decided not to include this information in the book list because it was going to be too limited for teachers and I did not want them to see the resource to work in that way.

Additionally, finding some of the books can be a limitation for teachers. What I tried to do with the diverse literature book list was first to include books that were brought during the book tasting that I had the chance to look over and see if they were going to support discussions in the classroom about diversity and social issues. I also included others that I know teachers are buying and they are using those in their classrooms so at least someone will have them. Since the equity committee in our school had a grant to buy ten diverse literature books per class, the other books that I included in the book list might take a year to be ordered since the budget was already used. We will need to see what books each teacher has and start thinking about ideas about how we can rotate the books. With the grant, what they wanted was that each teacher will have a set of ten books, but we can also share the books we have with other grade levels so it will support that part. I know teachers like to spend their own money for school supplies and some of them do not mind buying the books mentioned in the book list. Something that can be discussed in the equity committee would be asking for another grant and see if we can get the books that are recommended in the blog but nobody has it. In this way, teachers are not spending their own money trying to buy the books.

I also included some books and read alouds that can be found in a digital version, but the idea is to have the printed version and have extra copies in our library for our

students as a diverse literature section. It would be a good opportunity to talk with the librarians at our school, and see how many of the books mentioned in the blog are accessible for teachers to check out so that could be effective for everyone while we get more books for teachers to have in their classrooms.

Finally, I wanted to include more information about the implementation of the blog in my school but based on my timeline, it will happen around January 2020.

Future plans

As I was collecting research sources to support my literature review, I found that a lot of research has been done not only in the United States but also worldwide. There are a wide variety of websites that offer diverse literature resources.

Besides, when I think about the blog as a long term digital tool, I think it would be ideal to organize the book list by grade levels, so that teachers know where to find what will work in the classroom. I hope to see what teachers say about this based on the survey they will take when they explore the blog. I want teachers to be part of the expanding process of the blog, and also suggest new ideas for keeping the blog alive and meaningful to our practices in the classroom.

Moreover, something we talked about with the equity committee was to create lessons with diverse literature books. This was an idea we got last year, but I envisioned the blog to have lesson plans with each book and include critical literacy strategies that can go along with the lesson plan. I want teachers to have a foundation on how to start, but it is up to everyone to modify in the way they think it will benefit their students. I

consider it is important to have a lesson that will support those class discussions based on the books chosen from the blog list.

Another category I was thinking about having in the blog would be a spreadsheet with books teachers already have so that we can know who has certain books around the school, and we can borrow them for our lessons. I think it saves time for teachers to consult the database of diverse literature books we have in our classrooms and have easy access to them to support our lessons. I know the books each teacher ordered during the book tasting will have a barcode so librarians know who has them, but I think having access to the list from the blog is convenient for teachers when they need these books. Before the book tasting, we tried to have a spreadsheet filled out, but it was not very successful. Hopefully with the blog and the resources teachers can find in it, it would make more sense about the purpose of it all.

Communicating results

I will share the blog with teachers and staff members from our school during our next staff meeting that will be held on December 2019. I will have fifteen minutes to present my project with the staff. During this presentation, staff members and teachers will have instructions on how to use the blog and the purpose I had in mind when creating this digital tool; it will become a relevant resource on a daily basis. Hopefully I get some feedback based on this presentation, so it will keep supporting the long term vision of what I want to achieve with this project. After I start receiving feedback based on the survey, teachers will have access to in the blog, and I will be communicating about

changes that are going to be done for the blog such as including different categories, strategies, resources, videos, etc. It is important that teachers get those updates on how the blog will be changing so that they can also provide their opinion. The implementation will happen in January 2020 which is when we will be getting the books we ordered from the grant in the equity committee.

Benefit to the profession

This digital resource will support teachers schoolwide as all of them will have access to the resources they will find there. A benefit will be for all of us as we need to talk about social issues that are happening in the society. It could be that our students are not facing any of them. We need to make sure they are aware and understand that others have different experiences. Students and teachers need to learn to not to make assumptions, but think beyond the text and put themselves in someone else's situation and express how inequities work and what we can do at schools to make everyone feel safe, honored, respected and valued.

Another benefit is that I wanted to support teachers to find resources that are accessible so that they are not spending extra time trying to find what they need. I wanted to create a digital tool that will help teachers as a guide when thinking about their students' cultural background, and make them feel represented in the books they have in the classrooms.

Conclusion

In Chapter Four, I described my experience as a researcher and writer, and how it made me feel more confident when getting feedback from peers. This feedback helped to support the creation of the blog. In the literature review, I reflected on the main points I found during the research and how it was a strong foundation for the project and what I want it to achieve with its implementation next year. Then, I described the implications and limitations that I could notice when planning this project and how it made me think about what I want in the future to incorporate in the blog based on the feedback I get from teachers and staff members in our school.

In the last section of Chapter Four, I shared how the project is going to be presented at our school and how the school community will benefit by using and incorporating this digital tool in their reading curriculums.

As a learner, my research question: *How can diverse literature be used along with critical literacy strategies to support diversity and equity in Spanish immersion classrooms?* led me to find new passions about critical literacy and diverse literature. I could not choose something that is so relate it with my background and my students as well. I want students to feel represented and for other students to provide opportunities in which they reflect about how other cultures' ways of living are, and how we can learn from everyone and bring that information to our classrooms. It is essential that book discussions go beyond about comprehending the story. It needs to analyze more critically

what it is happening in the book and what connections students can make with their social/cultural experiences of themselves or other people.

I also consider that the creation of a blog will make educators work collaboratively and it will bring a space for all of us to reflect on areas we need to support our students. I will allow to have a closer network of educators as we are going to be constantly reflecting on our teaching practices and learning from everyone's experiences. When we share with others and receive feedback, it is when we do most of our learning. These discussions around social issues should be happening more often and we need to be ready to bring these in our classrooms and guide our students to understand each others' experiences so that it will make this world a better place for everyone.

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