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INCREASING DIVERSITY EXPOSURE IN RURAL, HOMOGENEOUS
ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS THROUGH PICTURE BOOKS

by

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

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Saint Paul, Minnesota

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

This capstone seeks to answer the question, *how can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books?* As a teacher in a small, rural town that is predominantly White, in a state that the United States Census Bureau (2019) reported to be eighty-nine percent White, I understand that students can lack knowledge and understanding of other cultures and people who are different than them in appearance, education, or life experiences. The importance of increasing diversity exposure has been shown to me every year during the last seven years I have taught second grade. Sometimes the comments about others can be curious where students are trying to understand more, and sometimes the comments from students perpetuate stereotypes or express disbelief.

Through this project, it is my hope that students gain a broader worldview that will benefit them whether they choose to continue to live in homogenous towns, or whether they choose to move elsewhere. Increased understanding will help students when they are consuming news media and help them develop empathy. Additionally, it is important for students to see diverse representation so all can see themselves represented and know that they matter, but also so they can see others represented and know that others matter as well.

As I want students to increase their experiences and knowledge of the myriad differences humans have, and also know the importance of cultivating readers, I

combined those two important topics, the details of which will be laid out in the following pages. Access to high-quality texts that represent students and their lives, as well as showing different perspectives will be done through creating text sets that can be used for read alouds or literature circles. These methods of delivery will be explained later in this paper.

It should be noted that this paper follows the recommendations of the American Psychological Association (APA) for racial and ethnic identities (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Black and White are capitalized throughout this paper and the term Black is used instead of African American because African American refers to people of African heritage. When appropriate, African American is used to convey Americans of African heritage. In this paper, the term Latinx is used as a gender-neutral term, as recommended by the American Psychological Association (n.d.). Native American is used in this paper, as opposed to American Indian, unless the category of the label was specifically American Indian. Indigenous Peoples are used to denote Indigenous Peoples who live in Canada.

Chapter One provides previous professional and personal experiences that led to the development of this question and capstone project. It also details the rationale on the importance of this topic. Culturally diverse literature has always been important, but this priority is at the forefront of many educators and members of the public currently, where it needs to stay to continue to be effective and benefit students. To conclude Chapter One, information on the Literature Review in Chapter Two is provided, as well as the project overview in Chapter Three, and the reflection in Chapter Four.

Professional Experience

Three years ago, I taught my first Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) student. As I examined my book selections that school year, I realized that I lacked recently published books that represented all students in the classroom. Not only were there few, if any, books that contained characters that looked like her and represented her culturally, she also lacked books that represented her family dynamics and socio-economic status. That was the first time I really analyzed my book selections through an equity-minded and culturally-affirming lens, other than lamenting the lack of quality and quantity. That was also the same year in which I attended a two-day professional development conference hosted by members of the Flathead Indian tribe and Montana's Office of Public Instruction (OPI) on the Flathead Indian Reservation. The goal of the professional development conference was to increase knowledge and understanding of incorporating Indian Education for All (IEFA) within the classroom setting. It is vital to ensure that texts used in the classrooms portray Native Americans accurately and avoid the "Indian maiden," "Indian brave," or worse, stereotypes. That conference reopened my eyes to critical literacy in the classroom through picture books and other texts. I had taken critical literacy courses as an undergraduate student, but in the beginning "survival" years of teaching had not made critical literacy a priority. Conducting this research brought critical literacy training back to the forefront of my mind.

After attending the professional development and researching recently published picture books, I was able to find books with characters that looked like my student and

represented BIPOC characters in a positive way and added them to my classroom library. I was also able to increase the number of books about Native Americans, including Native Americans who lived in Montana. Almost seven percent of people living in Montana report they are American Indian or Alaska Native, more than all other minority groups combined (United States Census Bureau, 2019). I went through my classroom library with a fresh perspective because I was energized and knew what was desired. It involved reviewing books about Native Americans and purging books that were outdated or reinforced negative stereotypes, as well as increasing the diversity of my classroom library. In increasing the diversity of my classroom library, I did what many teachers are familiar with: using personal funds instead of school funds to add books.

During one of the first read alouds where diverse books were consciously used, another student pointed out that the character in the story, Ada Twist in *Ada Twist, Scientist* looked like the student in class. While I was happy that the diversity of picture books had increased, I did not want this representation to be a sole occurrence and I also wanted to include books where the character's diversity was central to the story. One thing I was conscious of was if the character could be replaced by another character and if the story and message stay the same, which was true for *Ada Twist, Scientist*. I also wondered about what would happen when this child progressed to different grade levels and classroom teachers. How would future teachers react? Would teachers ignore that children need to see themselves represented in literature, or would classrooms have an amazing amount of books that represented all students?

Sadly, when talking with another teacher later that school year, a veteran teacher

and former administrator told me that it had never crossed her mind that the student did not see characters in books that looked like her. That comment combined with complaints from other experienced teachers that our reading and math programs had ethnic names our students had trouble pronouncing showed an inability to recognize the world outside our little town, which led me to understand that more education was needed amongst staff in order to demonstrate the importance of diverse texts and to benefit students. Simply including a culturally diverse name within programs does not represent a culturally diverse lens.

Culturally Diverse Literacy History

Historically, most of the characters in picture books are White. In 2017, National Public Radio reported that the Cooperative Children's Book Center stated that only 22 percent of children's books published in 2016 focused on people of color in a way where the main character was a person of color and their story was not interchangeable with others. According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), in 2019 there were almost 40 percent of people living in the United States who did not identify as White. That is an 18 percent disparity for our youth, assuming that the 22 percent of texts were quality representatives of people of color and did not contribute to negative stereotypes.

Unfortunately, the lack of representation in children's books is not a new awareness. In 1919, W.E.B. DuBois brought attention to the lack of representation, with his plans to publish a magazine called *The Brownies' Book* that was targeted towards allowing African American children to see themselves reflected in books (as cited in Meier, 2015).

The School Library Journal (2019) shared an infographic created by Dahlen and Huyck. This infographic shows the 2018 results of the Cooperative Children's Book Center. While diversity in children's books has increased since 1919, the percentage of White characters is still the largest percentage of representation in published books and was 50 percent in books published in 2018. Shockingly, the next largest category was Animals/Others, who were the characters in 27 percent of children's books."Others" can be considered vehicles or other inanimate objects. Clearly, much progress has yet to be made to increase the diversity of children's books.

Mirrors, Windows, and Doors

The number of White characters in children's books provides most Montana students a mirror, where they see others who are similar and look like them. In examining the metaphor of mirrors, windows, and doorways the International Literacy Association published a Literacy Leadership Brief in 2017 which gives further details on the three.

All students need texts that represent mirrors so that students see themselves reflected in texts, but also so students can gain further insight into themselves. The use of texts as a mirror can help develop empathy as students gain more understanding about the similarities between themselves and the characters in texts. A window provides experiences that a student has not had yet. When students gain experience with new situations through reading, they are developing understanding of the wider world, and better able to appreciate the diversity. Doors, often larger than mirrors or windows, represent hope. Students will be able to step through these doorways with the knowledge and experience gained from diverse texts and experience it for themselves (pp. 2-3).

Indian Education for All

Indian Education for All (IEFA) has been a law in Montana since 1999 (Juneau, Fleming, & Foster, 2013). Through IEFA, support is provided for education personnel and students to learn about the rich history of Native Americans, and especially Native Americans living in Montana. The Montana Office of Public Instruction has created lessons and professional development to benefit educators and students. This exposure to Montana's Native Americans and Indian Reservations, as well as the history of tribes, is vital for students to understand more about the state they live in and the people who inhabit it.

The importance of exposure to Native Americans was illustrated two years ago in my classroom. I was reading a story about a Blackfeet boy's first powwow and a student who had moved to Montana that year asked, "Indians are real!?" in a shocked voice. That question demonstrated the importance of exposure to different cultures and the use of texts as a window. Further discussion opened my eyes to the fact that students did not see Native Americans as living in the present time as a result of their questioning of Native Americans driving trucks, as was illustrated within the text. Additionally, students in class seemed to consider anyone with darker skin to be Native American, which they showed by asking if a student in class was a Native American. The student they were wondering about has a Mexican American mother and Mexican maternal grandfather. It could be that students were using background knowledge to determine ethnicity based on skin color, or students may have been aware that Native Americans may have darker skin than European Americans, but less aware of all of the ethnicities that can be represented

by skin color. The question sparked a quality dialogue about how skin color does not necessarily represent ethnicity and led to future lessons where the location of Indian Reservations were examined to deepen understanding, alongside more books that represented Native Americans.

Conclusion

As a teacher, and as a human, I want to learn more about diversity, culturally diverse texts, and how to better educate students and others. During previous classes at Hamline University, I have felt uninformed on topics pertaining to BIPOC communities and populations due to lack of exposure and lack of making the effort to learn more about others. The International Literacy Association's *Top Takeaways From 2020 What's Hot in Literacy Report* listed "Providing access to high-quality diverse books and content" as the fifth most critical issue in literacy education, as selected by respondents. Thirty-six percent of respondents reported that is currently a top critical issue. Ninety-eight percent of respondents also listed literacy as a basic human right.

As a teacher, and as a student working toward a Masters of Arts in Literacy Education, literacy is at the forefront of my interactions with students and colleagues. Students deserve a quality education and literacy is a vital life skill. Teachers must work to include all students in their classroom, and while I currently may not have many BIPOC students, my students need to know about the greater world and its inhabitants in order to be responsible citizens. This will be done through text sets for read alouds or literature circles that focus on diversity.

The subsequent chapters of this capstone paper will look at a review of the

literature used for this project in Chapter Two, including the history of diversity within children's book publishing and discuss the theories of mirrors, windows, and doors.

Chapter Three contains an overview of the project and Chapter Four is a reflection on the project, as well as future research possibilities and limitations of this project as the question *how can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books?* is pursued.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The question of how *can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books* requires contemplation to answer. Like all questions posed for a Capstone Project or Capstone Thesis, there is no easy answer, but progress toward answering this question will be made through the research and writing of this paper. This project will benefit teachers who may have minimal experience with teaching in diverse situations and students in homogeneous classrooms through providing research on the importance of including diverse texts and the history of diversity in children's publishing.

The topics below will look at the history of diverse texts within children's book publishing through studies and analyses conducted over the last 55 years. Examining the research behind the importance of including diverse texts within a classroom will show the benefits of increasing text diversity. Simply incorporating texts within the classroom without discussion is not enough. Students must engage with the text and work to question others that they will read, which is why examining critical literacy and teaching students to be active learners is vital. This chapter will also look at different types of diversity to make sure that all students can see themselves represented within texts, whether through Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), differing abilities, Native Americans and Indian Education for All (IEFA), socioeconomic status, and/or LGBTQ+.

Finally, looking at how diverse texts can be implemented within the classroom through literature circles, read alouds, or text sets will close this chapter.

The History of the Lack of Diversity in Children's Books

The lack of diversity in children's books is not a new phenomenon. Studies and analyses done throughout the last 55 years have consistently shown a lack of representation of anyone other than Whites, which will be detailed below. Early studies focused on Black representation, but later studies have expanded to include the number of Latinx, American Indians/First Nations, and Asian Pacifics/Asian Pacific Americans, in addition to Africans/African Americans. As stated above in this paper, per the American Psychological Association (n.d.), Black will be used as a broader term than African American, unless there is African heritage mentioned. Some infographics even include animals/other, and show that animals and other non-human subjects, such as trucks, were more prevalent in children's texts than Latinx, American Indians/First Nations, and Asian Pacifics/Pacific Americans combined (SLJ Staff, 2019).

The All-White World of Children's Books in 1965

In 1965, Larrick wrote a piece for the *Saturday Review* where she reflected on the lack of representation in children's books. During a three year review of children's books published in 1962, 1963, and 1964, she found only 6.7 percent of these books contained one or more Black children (p. 64). The criteria to be listed as containing one or more Black children was insufficient. If illustrations included one or more Black children, then the book counted toward the 6.7 percent. Within these illustrations or characters, there was no criteria for quality. Larrick (1965) gave the books to four Black librarians to

review for quality relating to Black children and how they were represented. It is unknown whether Larrick asked for the feedback of librarians of different races, or if Larrick only asked Black librarians. The article only mentions Black librarians, so it might be assumed that the librarians were chosen because of their race since there is no mention of other races or professions, like White teachers, who would also be knowledgeable about children's books. There is also no mention of payment for these services, whether or not payment was made. There were some disagreements within the books, but overall the librarians rated 139 "excellent," while 13 were rated "objectionable" (p. 64). Some of these objectionable ratings were given to books that reinforce negative stereotypes about Blacks.

While this study was important, the low criteria for books to be counted as containing one or more Blacks did a disservice to all children reading these, and other, books. When representation is not equal, it can send a message that people are not worthy of being represented, creating an unequal amount of power or feelings of superiority to those who are represented within the pages. Culturally diverse texts need to show differences in language, race, culture, socioeconomic status, abilities, gender, and ethnicity, among other topics.

Blacks in the World of Children's Books in 1979

Larrick's study was replicated in 1979 and found that of the 4,775 children's books published in 1973, 1974, and 1975, there were only 689 books that reported one or more Blacks depicted in the story or through illustrations (Chall et al., 1979, p. 529). The 14.4 percent publishing rate is an increase, but the authors of the study reported that the

actual percentage could be different because in replicating Larrick's study, they only heard back from 51 children's book publishers and they acknowledged that there are more publishers that may not have been surveyed. It is also understood that this study only looked at Blacks and did not analyze for other minorities.

The Black Experience in Children's Literature in 1989

In 1989, the percentage of books that featured Blacks decreased to less than two percent, although the criteria was more stringent than Larrick's criteria in 1965 and the study replicated in 1979. Instead of only looking for the inclusion through words or illustrations, *The Black Experience in Children's Literature* required Blacks to be featured prominently or provide information about their lives, as students deserve to be exposed to. Between 1984 and 1988 there were 170 books who met this criteria. While a low number, it was an increase from the previous bibliography *The Black Experience in Children's Literature* which was published in 1984 (Bishop, 1990). The criteria of Blacks being featured prominently in texts emphasizes the importance of diversity and that researchers were moving beyond the bare minimum.

Updating classroom libraries and texts used within the classroom, even at the risk of forgoing a classic or old favorite, is a change that must be made. Gonzalez-Jensen and Sadler (1997) discussed that teachers continue to use books that no longer represent the demographics of their classroom, because some teachers continue reading their favorite stories to children. This is something that many educators and students have experienced. Another way to continue using some favorite stories is to share them with the objective of

learning from them, such as negative stereotypes that are included in the story, or examine the text through a critical literacy lens.

Educators are asked to transform and grow as new research and information is released, and curating new favorites is a part of that transformation. Seeking out different book lists, as opposed to mainstream organization and journal recommendations, is part of the work in increasing text diversity. Some school districts may offer explicit professional development on increasing text diversity, recognizing the effects of systemic racism, or other cultural nuances while other school districts may leave it up to the individual teachers to determine the professional development needed and how to access that. Other school districts may not see diversity as worthy of professional development and it is up to the individual teacher to seek out diversity resources outside of school. Another option within education is for pre-service teachers to participate in a class that conducts serious conversations about race, oftentimes the first times that White preservice teachers have had to confront their whiteness and race in education, which can be difficult for White teacher candidates to encounter (Matias, 2016).

The criteria for what constitutes inclusion and representation in children's books has changed throughout the years, but the improvement is still not adequate enough for all students to easily see themselves represented in books within the classroom. It should be noted again that early studies only looked at race, and primarily the representation of Blacks within the text. This leaves a host of diversities unexamined through research.

The Importance of Access to Diverse Texts

Reading and writing are vital life skills for students. Beyond reading and writing for academic purposes, it is important that students cultivate a love for these activities that stretches beyond the school day and their academic career. This section reviews the importance of students seeing themselves represented within texts through representations of Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), differing abilities, Native Americans and Indian Education for All (IEFA), socioeconomic status, and/or LGBTQ+ because “Children have the right to read texts that mirror their experiences and languages, provide windows into the lives of others, and open doors into our diverse world” according to the *Advocate for ILA’s Children’s Rights to Read* (International Literacy Association, 2018, p. 1).

An important aspect of reading is that it explains life to students as they are learning more about themselves and the world they inhabit. Students learn what is valued and what the world looks like beyond their community, as well as acceptable and appropriate behaviors. If certain demographics are not represented then it harms all readers. Bishop (1990) quoted Citron (1969) in explaining that students who do not see themselves represented in books receive the message that they are not valued in society, but if students see only themselves in texts, they receive the message that they are superior to others. Neither of those options are beneficial for students or society and inhibit growth for all.

Ngozi Adichie (TED, 2009) discusses the importance of multiple perspectives when telling the danger of a single story. For this example, she was a child living in

Nigeria, but all the books she read were British. When she started writing stories, her characters were all White, drank ginger beer (despite not knowing what ginger beer was), and played in the snow, despite never having seen it. Only by discovering authors who wrote books about Africa did she realize the power of a single story and how detrimental it can be to society.

Current demographics of public school educators include 76 percent female teachers and 24 percent male. Seventy-nine percent of teachers are White (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020), meaning that many students do not see themselves represented in education, which is another reason that diverse texts are vital for all. Educators need to have other perspectives and students need to understand that they are valued and have important contributions to make to society. Multiple perspectives and representation is beneficial for educators' and students' mental health.

Matias (2013) cites Ford and Grantham's (2003, p. 217) definition of deficit thinking as "when educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly" (p. 71). Deficit thinking means that White teachers may enter the classroom with negative stereotypes of the students they are teaching before they even meet their students. Teachers who read diverse texts before beginning teaching, and who do the difficult work of examining their biases that come with being White, before teaching BIPOC students may understand more about their students and challenges they have faced that White teachers have not.

Mirrors, Windows, and Doors

Along with the mental health of students being influenced by whether or not they see themselves represented, they need to have opportunities to see other societies and cultures. This is where the idea of mirrors, windows, and doors comes in. The concept of mirrors and windows was originally written about in 1988 by Style and republished in 1996, as well as subsequent years through different articles. Style wrote that mirrors and windows provide a balanced education that consists of knowledge of ourselves and others, and “clarification of the known and illumination of the unknown” (p. 5).

Mirroring experiences shows students that they are valued in society and they can make text connections with those experiences conveyed through texts to deepen comprehension. By using texts as a window where students can look into the lives of others, they can experience cultures that are different from theirs, which can improve empathy, as well as connections with others. But when texts are utilized as doors, they can step through those figurative doors to learn more about the other inhabitants of the world and experience situations that readers may never get to experience first-hand, or will experience later in their lives.

Lessard, Kogachi, and Juvonen (2018) examined friendships amongst adolescents in sixth grade and eighth grade, specifically looking at the long-term effects of classroom diversity and results of cross-ethnic friendships versus same-ethnic friendships. The study was conducted in classrooms described as diverse and contained many different ethnicities. Ultimately, it was discovered that seeing each other outside of school and communicating electronically had the best predictor of whether or not a friendship would

last those two years. “The results suggest that greater classroom cross-diversity promotes better quality and higher stability when friends’ visit one another’s homes” (p. 562). It can be wondered if earlier exposure to diversity through high-quality texts in elementary classes will give students windows, and eventually doors, into their classmate’s lives, decreasing the amount of differences noticed and increasing understanding that students in diverse classrooms have more in common with their classmates than they may initially think.

Indian Education for All

The Montana Office of Public Instruction finds the inclusion of Native Americans in the education of all Montana students so important that they included it in the English Language Arts standards for grades kindergarten - twelfth, in addition to the standard that students are reading diverse texts (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2011). In 2018, only one percent of children’s books published were about American Indians/First Nations people (SLJ Staff, 2019). Almost seven percent of people living in Montana report they are American Indian or Alaska Native, more than all other minority groups in Montana combined (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Of that one percent of books published about American Indians/First Nations people, it is unknown how many books are about American Indian tribes that have reservations in Montana, meaning some students might not see themselves represented, outside of publications from their American Indian tribes or Indian Education for All (IEFA) publications from the Montana Office of Public Instruction.

Educational Funding

This section examines funding and how the lack of funding presents difficulties for teachers and school districts. As with many topics education-related, funding can often be a difficult thing to come by. While *The Children's Right to Read* (International Literacy Association, 2018) stated "Children have the right to benefit from the financial and material resources of governments, agencies, and other organizations that support reading and reading instruction" (p. 21), educators know that funding can not always be relied upon by school districts and governments.

A Department of Education survey found that 94 percent of public school teachers paid for classroom supplies without being reimbursed during the 2014-2015 school year. Furthermore, the average amount spent by those teachers was \$479, although seven percent of teachers spend more than \$1,000 (Chokshi, 2018). When teachers are paying for classroom supplies out of pocket, they are having to choose their classroom priorities. Consumable items, or immediate needs, such as pencils, notebooks, or cleaning supplies might take priority over increasing the amount of diverse texts within classrooms. Even though the International Literacy Association (2018) said that children should have the right to choose what they read, that could be made more difficult when there are not a lot of high-quality, or recently published, literature options easily available to students. Classroom libraries that have a low stock of available books provide less choice in general and fewer choices of high-quality diverse texts, which does not support critical literacy efforts. Another consideration is if the available texts are recently published and represent progress or if the texts perpetuate stereotypes.

Critical Literacy

Teaching students to be critics of texts they read and to ask questions about a variety of topics may help students be critics of the world around them, as opposed to taking information in passively, where they accept new learnings without questioning. This section will look at ways teachers can incorporate critical literacy into everyday activities to increase students' understanding of social justice issues through questioning and discussing, as well as help students to become better critics of the information they take in.

Seven principles of critical literacy from Cleovoulou and Beach (2019, p. 190) will be examined, which are:

- Encouraging student dialogue of critical issues through purposeful text and media selection
- Connecting text and media to students' lives through ongoing reflective practice
- Empowering student voice
- Use of open-ended questions to develop deeper connections
- Sharing multiple perspectives through knowledge building circles
- Use of misconceptions to guide the learning
- Affirming identities and encouraging advocacy

Information will also be drawn from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and how the author introduced critical literacy and theories related to critical literacy (1996). In the next section the seven principles and how they relate to critical literacy will be examined.

These seven principles came out of work that Cleovoulou and Beach (2019, p. 190) did with elementary teachers.

Seven Principles of Critical Literacy

Encouraging Student Dialogue of Critical Issues Through Purposeful Text and Media Selection. When educators purposefully choose texts for use in the classroom that connect text and media to students' lives they are preparing for quality dialogue (Cleovoulou & Beach, 2019). Being deliberate in text choices and providing multiple perspectives can help combat common misconceptions that students may have as a result of various media outlets. Educators can choose texts and media that directly apply to students' lives, further engaging students and showing the validity of their lives through representation through texts and media. Choosing culturally relevant texts may also encourage students who self-identify as a non-reader to engage and learn (Wood & Jocius, 2013).

Quast and Bazemore-Bertrand (2019) encouraged teachers to ask three critical questions to plan for student dialogue: “How is economic diversity reflected? What narratives are presented? How might the conversation be expanded” (p. 220)? While their first question relates to economic diversity, any type of diversity can be substituted to ensure an engaging dialogue.

Connecting Text and Media to Students' Lives Through Ongoing Reflective Practice. By connecting text and media to student interests, they may be more interested in the texts and better able to connect with the information provided. Students can make more connections if the topic is something they are interested in (Cleovoulou & Beach,

2019). Student interests and lives can be determined through discussions or interest inventories, where students answer questions about their interests and hobbies and how interested they are in certain topics. Interests and hobbies may shift over time so it is important to combine the teacher goals and student interests throughout the year

Empowering Student Voice. Allowing students to guide the questions and discussions by placing them at the center of the discussion gives students more ownership and interest in a social justice topic than if the teacher does all of the guiding, neglecting feedback from students (Cleovoulou & Beach 2019). Wood and Jocius (2013) suggested the use of a “thought wall” to increase student voice. By asking students to write what they learned from a new text and share it near the bookshelf, students share their learnings and can see what else students have learned, and possibly explore different books as a result of the thought wall. These thought walls can encourage the sharing of thoughts and opinions, without students being overly concerned with grammar and punctuation, leading to a more authentic sharing experience. Because students are reading their peers’ thoughts, they may be more likely to choose a book than if the book is recommended to them by a teacher or parent.

Use of Open-Ended Questions to Develop Deeper Connections. Moving beyond simple questions that can be answered with a “yes or no” is a vital part to improve comprehension and increase connections. Open ended questions that ask students what they think or how they know something will encourage deeper connections (Cleovoulou & Beach 2019). By asking students to sit and think deeply about a problem or a question they are further engaging with the text. Questions based on Bloom’s

Taxonomy may be useful for educators and students in order to develop deeper connections. The six pillars of Bloom's Taxonomy are: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (TeachThought Staff, 2020). Becoming familiar with these types of questions and utilizing them while teaching and engaging in discussion could benefit students' questioning and comprehension skills.

Sharing Multiple Perspectives Through Knowledge Building Circles.

Cleovoulou and Beach (2019, p. 190) After open-ended questions have been contemplated, students can have a discussion, or "critical conversation" (Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 667). Critical conversations are those in which peers examine and look at different perspectives, while helping each other to understand more and at the same time deepening their understanding through the multiple perspectives. By having multiple perspectives, students can refine their original perspective, as well as understanding reasoning behind different perspectives. Multiple perspectives also challenge the status quo and provide alternatives for students to see that characters are multi-faceted. It is important for all members of the group to share and be heard, as well as listening to others. Cleovoulou and Beach (2019) call these "knowledge building circles" (p. 192) and stress that these circles provide opportunities for all ideas to be shared and valued.

Use of Misconceptions to Guide the Learning. Addressing misconceptions helps students learn and further develop their ideas. By examining where misconception came from, students can be aware of others they may or may not have. This includes allowing students to unpack through "questioning, analyzing, and deconstructing" (Cleovoulou & Beach, 2019, p. 192). Framing misconceptions as an area for growth will

benefit students and can be applied to other areas of their lives as they learn new facts that challenge previous beliefs.

Affirming Identities and Encouraging Advocacy. At the end of a quality critical literacy lesson or activity, students are likely to have grown in their ideas and changed. Taking time to acknowledge the change is important. If the first six principles of critical literacy can be thought of as unpacking a social justice issue, the seventh principle can be thought of as packing it into something that makes sense so ideas and themes are connected and ready to be built upon in the future. Allowing students the opportunity to examine their growth and possible future benefits, such as advocating for others, will benefit students and others (Cleovoulou & Beach, 2019).

“Banking” Concept of Education

Paulo Freire (1996) is credited with the banking concept of education, which calls awareness to the need for critical literacy within schools. Within the banking concept of education, the teacher has all the knowledge and is “gifting” it to students, who are only allowed to be “receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p. 53). When the teacher is the one deciding what is important for students to know, and telling them what to know, students do not get to be active participants and are simply tasked with storing all of the knowledge deposits. As students work to store, or remember, all the deposits given to them, they lose the ability to question the knowledge they are receiving and remain passive through the course of their education. This passive acceptance and lack of questioning is the opposite of critical literacy and only continues to oppress.

Looking at the banking theory of education through the seven principles of critical literacy as detailed above shows that the two are at odds with each other. If teachers focus on the banking theory, or explore critical literacy minimally, then students will not successfully examine critical literacy throughout their lives, remaining oppressed or at the mercy of the oppressors. An educator who teaches through the banking theory of education does a disservice to students and future society as the oppressed (those who are on the receiving end of the banking theory) will lack important skills in questioning and examining what they are told and will not be taking part in the principles of critical literacy.

There is no student dialogue as a result of purposeful text and media selection, student voice is not empowered, open-ended questions and multiple perspectives are discouraged because it would go against the teacher as the knowledge gifter and encourage independent thought, which is not the goal in the banking theory of education. Any misconceptions would be immediately corrected by the teacher and students would be told what to think.

Questions to Ask Students

Teaching students to think critically can be as simple as asking them whose voice they hear in a story and whose voice or perception is missing from the story. To delve deeper though, more questions must be asked that relate to the text. Educators can ask about the author's point of view or what the author was trying to accomplish or convey by writing the text. Students can examine if the diversity seen in the book matches what they see in their daily lives. While the texts used in a lesson will be chosen for a specific

purpose, educators can ask students who the target audience of the text is and why students think that. This is an area where critical literacy and Bloom's Taxonomy should be incorporated.

While questioning in the beginning may provide lackluster responses or minimal discussion, the discussion will become richer over time as students gain comfort in engaging in critical literacy questions and making deeper connections. One thing that influences student comfort level is the teacher comfort level. Matias (2013) recommends that White teachers continually check in with themselves and question, "Am I emotionally committed to being a culturally responsive teacher even if it means learning about how I am repressing my understanding of race and whiteness merely because it makes me feel uncomfortable?" (pp. 78-79). This difficult question will help White teachers examine their teaching in order to benefit students. While students may increase their comfort level with questioning texts, it may be more difficult for some teachers. Teachers who identify as White will teach those who do not identify as White within their classrooms and need to work to understand barriers those students have. From the top down, the majority of teachers' experiences at college are through the lens of whiteness, which disrupts the power balance. Textbooks and articles used in college classes, college administration, and teacher educators are primarily White and they are teaching teachers who are also White and who will take that experience with them into the classroom when they begin teaching (Matias, 2016). The experiences that teachers have in college last far longer than the time they were in college and now there are White teachers teaching students of color and the White teachers lack awareness and

understanding of their students' experiences. While teachers ask questions of their students to deepen connection between the student and their reading, teachers also need to question the lens through which they are viewing education. The questions posed through critical literacy will benefit students as they examine the text sets that were created for this project and provide beginning discussions.

Diverse Texts

Diversity is a vital part of our society and is deeper than a group of people who look different than the majority does, or who have different identities or life experiences. This section will discuss the importance of making sure all are represented within easily accessible texts: Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), socioeconomic status, Native Americans and Indian Education for All (IEFA), and LGBTQ+ that are appropriate for early elementary-aged students.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) has been tracking the diversity (or lack of) in children's books since 1985 in various forms. The CCBC (2019) describes itself as "Data on books by and about people of color and from First/Native Nations published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison" (<https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/about/>).

The information in this section supports the International Literacy Association's *The Case for Children's Rights to Read* number three: "Children have the right to read texts that mirror their experiences and languages, provide windows into the lives of others, and open doors into our diverse world" (2019, p. 10). Mirrors, windows, and

doors were discussed earlier in this chapter and are revisited because of their importance to our students in developing critical literacy.

Bringing the World Into the Classroom

Often, events on the news can seem foreign, far away, or irrelevant to students' lives. One example may be children with refugee backgrounds who are fleeing a place no longer safe to inhabit, journeying to a new country, and making a new life. This can be foreign to students who have lived their lives in one home or community.

Some of these children may settle in the United States and begin attending schools, bringing the events of distant places directly to students, and further showing the importance of texts acting like mirrors, windows, and doors, whether or not students will be in class with a student with a refugee background. Ward and Warren (2020) suggested incorporating texts about people with refugee backgrounds in order to provide a window or door for students. Educators must acknowledge not only the difficulties of their journeys, but also the uniqueness of the characters and commonalities students have. Refugee background, a term used by Ward and Warren (2020) shows that, "...being a refugee is only one aspect of a student's experience and does not encapsulate the entirety of their complex identity" (p. 405). This brings the children with refugee backgrounds beyond the lives of their perilous journey and shows they are more than their past experiences.

Socioeconomic Representation Within Texts

Broadening the variety of books that address economics can expose students to different worlds, as well as normalize the world they currently inhabit. As many of

students' role models may have also lived in poverty, exposing students to different views can provide hope and the understanding that they are not alone in their experiences.

Quast and Bazemore-Bertrand (2019) drew attention to the fact that instructional interactions rarely reflect the knowledge that students who are classified as lower-income have and their experiences. As recent remote learning experiences have shown the United States, there is a large amount of economic diversity amongst students which affected lower-income families disproportionately as consistent internet access and access to a tablet or laptop became vital for students and educators to make regular contact. The access to a caregiver at home who could help students log into online classes was also an issue for many students. Educators must understand the economic diversity of their students and the effects it has on their daily lives. Economic diversity is the “acknowledgment and understanding of the practices and experiences of people from various socioeconomic statuses (e.g., poor, near poor, middle class, upper class)” (Quast & Bazemore-Bertrand, 2019, p. 220).

Enduring Themes of Black Literature

While the prevalence of Black characters has increased throughout the years, it is still lacking. One thing that has not changed however, is the importance of specific themes in Black literature for students. Warm and loving family relationships were a theme that was apparent in texts for both older and younger students. Additionally, texts for older students included themes such as a sense of community among Blacks and other

communities; history, heritage, and culture; and the ability to survive both physically and psychologically in the face of overwhelming odds (Bishop, 1990).

Just like it is important for educators to be aware of economic diversity among their students, it is important for Black students to continue reading these themes, especially in the current climate. These themes continue to prevail in students' lives and must be recognized by educators.

Implementation of Diverse Texts Within the Classroom

This section will review how to implement and increase the diversity awareness of texts within an elementary classroom. Different implementation strategies such as literature circles, text sets, and read alouds will be discussed, as well as options for implementing, continuing, or improving current instructional practices. Literature circles will be highlighted in section one, where books are curated around a central theme, but heterogeneous groups of students are reading different texts. Text sets will be explored in section two, where texts around a specific topic are compiled. Read alouds are exactly what they sound like - a person reads aloud a book to a group or the class. Read alouds provide a space for students to take in the information while expending a minimum amount of effort or using their decoding abilities. Students are able to listen to the story and focus more on comprehending what is being read than decoding words within the story.

Literature Circles

Literature circles are “a collaborative and student-centered reading strategy” (Fink, n.d.). Students are reading the same text as their small group and then engaging in

student-centered inquiry through discussion groups. An important aspect of the student-centered inquiry is that students have roles within their group. While the roles may vary, the general make-up includes a Discussion Director, a Literary Luminary, a Vocabulary Enricher, and a Checker.

The Discussion Director creates questions related to the text to spark discussion amongst the group, which contributes to the student-centered inquiry aspect. The Literary Luminary chooses sections that highlight language or quality dialogue to share with the group. Some reasons that a section or passage might be shared is because it was well-written or funny, contains figurative language, or describes a character well. The Vocabulary Enricher selects words from the text that may be new or unfamiliar. It is their job to find the word's definition and present it to their peers in a way that makes sense and allows for further understanding. The word could also be an entertaining word. Finally, the Checker looks at conversation participation and assignment progress. This person also monitors the conversation to make sure it stays on topic and that all students are participating, which avoids the conversation being dominated by one or two people (Fink, n.d.). While there may be some variety within the roles educators choose to utilize within their literature circles, the final goal is still the same - to allow students to read a text with a group that allows them to collaborate and work together to question and understand deeper.

An important part of literature circles are the discussions that take place, which is why it is vital for students to learn how to participate in a discussion. This connects with critical literacy questioning so that students can easily adapt the questions to meet the

needs of their group and/or text. By modeling and actively encouraging discussions then students will be better able to emulate them within their groups.

If “enhanced degrees of gender equality and understanding” (Lin, 2004, p. 24) were found to be a benefit of literature circles, then it makes sense for that equality and understanding to be extended to a variety of other diversities. Two other benefits of literature circles are stronger reader-text relationships and improved classroom climates (Lin, 2004, p. 24).

Another benefit of literature circles applies to English Language Learners (ELL) students and reluctant readers. After utilizing literature circles first as a whole class to model expectations and then in small groups, Carrison and Ernst-Slavit (2005) found that confidence, enthusiasm for reading, oral communication, participation across all areas during the school day, and reading comprehension increased for all students, but ELL students showed the biggest growth. This increase in important aspects of the school day shows the importance of literature circles. When literature circles can utilize diverse texts that span children’s experiences and knowledge, as well as moving beyond that to help students be aware of the many perspectives of life, then all students will benefit from literature circles. Discussions based on experiences, reactions, and thoughts relating to the book mean all students are able to contribute, as opposed to discussions that are based upon knowledge gained from texts.

Read Alouds in the Classroom

Read alouds are powerful choices within the classroom. Are the read alouds going to affirm students’ identities or cast negative stereotypes? Are they going to reinforce the

known, whether negative or positive, or open students' minds to other worlds that they have yet to experience? While the read aloud is one choice, the questions to ask afterwards are another choice. This is where teachers engage with critical literacy questioning to ensure that the read aloud stories are not lost. Read alouds have the ability to balance awareness of society and expectations with diversity and provide students with a mirror, window, or door.

The temptation to use a favorite or familiar text for a read aloud can be strong, for many reasons. It is important to look at the diversity within the classroom and use read alouds to respond to that. If there is a high rate of one race, ethnicity, or other identity within a classroom then it is important to choose books that are representative of that. Conversely, if there is an identity that is lacking or not apparent within the classroom, it is also important to choose texts that represent that in order to help students learn more. These ideas support the mirrors, windows, and doors theory that was discussed earlier.

Going beyond getting recommendations from parents and librarians to increase the diversity of read aloud texts within the classroom, Gonzalez-Jensen and Sadler (1997) provided recommendations for educators looking to increase the diversity of read alouds within their classroom. Two of those recommendations are “Teachers and librarians can obtain diverse book lists from a variety of sources. Teachers can develop a balance in read aloud extension activities so that reader response activities include the language backgrounds of students, enhancing students’ cultural identity and imaginations” (p. 31).

There are a myriad of booklist recommendations available now that represent diversity within the classroom. It is important for educators to utilize a variety of these

book lists in order to increase the diversity of read alouds. Additionally, extending beyond the read aloud and asking questions that engage in critical literacy are important. Going beyond spending fifteen to twenty minutes reading a text to students helps students engage deeper within the text and take in the themes of the text more than would happen within a brief period of time. This is another way to support mirrors, windows, and doors.

Text Sets for Diversity

The final method for implementation within the classroom that will be discussed are text sets. Text sets are a group of books that have similarities. They may have the same author, theme, be set in the same time period, or be the same genre.

One book list that provides text sets around themes of diversity is the Notable Books for a Global Society (NBGS). The NBGS created some text sets to “provide [students] with the opportunity to see [themselves], [their] cultures, and the universal issues that [students] experience reflected back” (2003, p. 390).

Text sets can be used to curate selections for literature circles or classroom read alouds since they are organized around a specific theme. An educator can come up with a theme for a text set and look for book list recommendations to help compile the text set or use their previous knowledge. A combination of both of these would be good to ensure that favorite texts are not being selected, even though they may not meet the needs of the text set or theme. This will also ensure that newer books are being published that do a better job of representing students and their lives.

Summary

This chapter looked at the literature behind the question of *how can educators*

increase diversity in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books. The history of publishing diverse children's texts was discussed, as well as the importance of engaging in critical literacy. The different types of diversity were also discussed, in order for all students to see themselves represented. Several ideas for implementing diverse texts within the classroom were examined.

The Literature Review demonstrated the importance of increasing the diversity of texts for all students, since text diversity has historically been lacking and students do not always see themselves represented in available texts. Once students are engaged in diverse texts, critical literacy can take a more prominent role and assist students in examining what they are reading to deepen understanding.

Chapter Three will examine this Capstone Project in order to detail the setting of where this project will take place, as well as the demographics. Research framework from Wiggin and McTighe (2011), called Understanding by Design, will be explained. Finally, Chapter Three will provide a project description, the rationale for the final project, and a timeline for the project.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Overview, Design, and Timeline

Introduction

Chapter Two looked at the research behind the importance of increasing diverse texts within classrooms and asked *how can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books?* Other topics that relate to increasing diversity exposure in rural, homogenous schools were detailed in Chapter Two. Those topics included the history of diverse texts within children's book publishing, the importance of including diverse texts within a classroom, incorporating critical literacy practices in the classroom, different types of texts to include within a classroom so all students are represented, as well as methods for implementation. The historical lack of representation within children's books means that not everyone can see themselves within texts, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Conversely, only seeing yourself represented within texts can lead to an inflated sense of self-importance because you see yourself so frequently. Neither of these options lead to a positive sense of self for children. By seeing all represented within texts, students will gain a broader worldview and increased understanding when consuming news media, which will help them develop empathy.

Chapter Three will provide an overview of the project and examine the setting and demographics of where this project will be implemented. Understanding by Design, the research framework by Wiggins and McTighe (2011), will be utilized in order to plan.

Chapter Three will also discuss the project description, the rationale for the culminating project, as well as a timeline for this project.

Rationale for Culminating Project

This project will be shared with educators through book recommendations and a brief description of each text, as well as recommendations for implementing. Books will be identified by the types of diversity they represent. Suggestions for read alouds and literature circles will be released in the final project presentation.

Educators have many time requirements as part of their job. By collecting resources and placing them in specific categories, educators will be able to spend less time researching diverse texts and be able to spend more time implementing the text sets and developing high-quality critical literacy questions, in addition to the questions and activities included in the project. It is important for students to know about the world around them outside of their community, as well as recognize social justices and injustices.

Overview of the Project

This Capstone Project will look at text sets for educators to increase students' exposure to diversity in ways that support English Language Arts programming. The intended audience for this project is elementary teachers who teach in schools that lack diversity, lack a diverse classroom library, or lack a diverse school library. Defining lack of diversity can come in many ways, depending on the setting. The students and staff may be primarily one race, one gender, have similar abilities, or have limited socioeconomic diversity. The texts listed can be used in middle and high schools as well,

as picture texts can be used throughout all grades, but elementary schools will be the focus of this Capstone Project.

Methods of literature circles and read alouds will be utilized through text sets developed around a common theme. These text sets will list book recommendations, as well as a brief description of the book, in order to guide educators to choose the books that would be most beneficial in their classrooms. Understanding by Design (UdB) will be used to create the curriculum for this project and will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

Project Description

Almost forty high-quality, diverse texts in nine categories are included in this Capstone Project. The categories included are: Abilities, Socioeconomic, LGBTQ+, Montana Indian Education for All, Indian Education for All, Black (Present Day), International, Immigration, and Latinx. These texts will be arranged around recommended read alouds and contain questions designed to spark discussion through critical literacy practices. The texts will also be grouped into similar themes with a variety of reading abilities, which will allow educators to implement literature circles with the class. The literature circles will allow small groups to read the same text and have a student-led discussion around themes, questions, and ideas that students had during the reading. Students may also learn about different viewpoints from their own, while having group members that also have different viewpoints. This will require students to have an open mind while reading and discussing the text. Literature circles will also help foster a sense of community as the discussions are primarily student-led

and students are invested in the process.

It is important to note that diversity is more than race. Diversity also encompasses gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, abilities, and culture.. The texts selected as part of the recommended book lists will represent a wide range of people and some identities that students may not have considered.

Audience

This audience of elementary teachers was determined because it is important for all students to have exposure to lives and experiences that are different than theirs, as well as see themselves represented in texts. The only way for an educator to guarantee that diversity exposure is happening is to implement it in their classroom. Educators are busy and have many demands on their time. A central list of book recommendations may decrease the amount of time they need to dedicate in order to use texts to increase diversity exposure. Decreased time searching could mean that more time is spent developing questions or understanding the texts before presenting them to students.

Earlier exposure, such as students in elementary school, may be more effective than older ages, especially if the exposure is consistent. Students in elementary grades are still learning about their world in order to make sense and form opinions. By normalizing and celebrating differences amongst people, it is my hope that students will be more welcoming and empathetic to others who have different life experiences, be more understanding of news articles that talk about social injustices, and work toward social justice for all. Additionally, making an extensive list could increase the frequency of

these books being shared with students, which further leads to normalizing and allows more students to see themselves represented in texts, or to see others represented.

Community and State Setting

The classroom is located in a rural school in Montana that has about 90 students enrolled in grades kindergarten through sixth grade. The town has fewer than 1,000 residents and was a historic mining and agriculture town. In the last twenty years, the town has transitioned from mining and agriculture to agriculture and tourism.

In addition to the lack of diversity with the community and school district, Montana residents are eighty-nine percent White. The next largest racial group is American Indian or Alaska Native, which is almost seven percent of Montanans (United States Census Bureau, 2019), and is more than all other racial groups combined. Montana is home to seven Native American reservations, and one state recognized Native American tribe that does not have a dedicated land area (Montana Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, n.d.).

Classroom Setting

The elementary school is separate from the middle and high school, but the building is located nearby and elementary students are in the high school for some classes, such as Counseling, Band, and Library. All of the grade levels within the elementary school are single classrooms, meaning there are no colleagues who are currently teaching the same grade level in the school district to collaborate with. This can lead to some difficulty with creating projects and getting feedback from colleagues who are intimately familiar with the appropriate levels of development within each classroom.

There are fourteen second grade students in the 2020-2021 school year. Seven are females and seven are males. Thirteen students are White and one student is Latinx. Most of the students have been together since kindergarten, but there are two new students during this school year. Over ninety percent of students in the elementary are White and about half qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. This school is a Title 1 school and has an average class size of twelve students.

The elementary staff is all White, with one male elementary teacher. Students also have a male counselor, a male k-12 PE teacher, and a male administrator, but otherwise the teaching faculty is female. The elementary staff has been teaching together for more than five years. Recently the school applied for, and received, a five year Literacy Grant which created a Literacy Coach position, as well as hiring one paraprofessional to assist with literacy instruction and a paraprofessional to assist with math instruction. The Literacy Coach has been a member of the middle and high school teaching staff for over ten years and is familiar to the elementary teachers. The paraprofessionals funded by the Literacy Grant are new to the school district.

This project will involve collaboration with the Literacy Coach, as the Literacy Coach has extensive knowledge and resources for teaching Indian Education for All (IEFA), which is required through Montana English Language Arts state standards.

Research Framework

The theory of literature as mirrors, windows, and doors (Style, 1996; International Literacy Association, 2017) will be used to demonstrate how multiple viewpoints can be used to benefit and enrich students' lives and experiences. Another framework for this

project is Understanding by Design (UdB). Wiggins and McTighe (2011) stated that an effective curriculum, such as this project, is best planned backward for ideal results (p. 4). This is done through a three step process: Desired result, evidence, and learning plan, which make up the core of UdB.

Researchers (Bishop, 1990; Dwyer, 2019) have shown the importance of students seeing themselves represented in easily accessible texts, as well as seeing viewpoints that are different from the readers' normal culture. This is frequently referred to as mirrors, windows, and doors. This concept has been discussed previously in this paper, but a review will be provided.

Mirrors are when a student reads a text and the student sees themselves represented in the text through words or pictures, showing students that they matter simply by being represented. A window is when a student can look into the lives of others and learn more about experiences that are different from their lives. Doors are the final step, when a student learns more about experiences different from theirs, but then steps through that door to learn beyond the text, or to take part in social justice causes (International Literacy Association, 2017).

Understanding by Design

Wiggins and McTighe (2011, p. 8) stated that the three stages of UdB are:

- Determine what the desired results are.
- Determine acceptable evidence.
- Plan learning instruction and experiences accordingly.

The first stage of UdB is to determine what the desired results are. This is done by looking at long-term goals that the educator has for students, determining the meanings students should be making, identifying essential questions that should continue to be asked by students, deciding the knowledge and skills that should be acquired, and looking at the established goals or standards that are targeted (Wiggins & McTighe, p. 8).

The second stage of UdB is to determine acceptable evidence. This is the stage where assessments are created to assess learning beyond surface-level understanding. Educators must ask themselves what performances and products will show evidence of meaning-making and transfer, how to assess criteria based on Stage One results, what additional evidence will be collected, and finally, if the assessments align to Stage One results (Wiggins & McTighe, p. 8).

The third stage of UdB is to plan learning instruction and experiences accordingly. This is where activities, experiences, and lessons that will lead to achievement of the desired results and success at assessments are examined. Additionally, educators must look at whether or not the learning plan will help students achieve transfer, meaning, and acquisition with increasing independence. Another way to think of increasing independence is through scaffolding, where the educator helps the student build a strong base and the student gradually becomes more independent even though the tasks become more difficult. The educator also has to look at how progress will be monitored and how the unit will be sequenced (Wiggins & McTighe, p. 8).

By utilizing UdB the end goals will be better realized and the process will be able to connect with other big processes that students need to know. Any activities associated

with these lessons will be well thought out and avoid the “busy work” or activities disconnected from the end goal. While Wiggins and McTighe (2011) stated that oftentimes secondary and collegiate levels can encounter content coverage without delving into meanings and understandings it should be noted that this could also happen here, simply by reading a text and then moving beyond it without taking the time to fully understand the concept and understand it enough to connect to other concepts.

Utilizing key components of UdB means that students will begin with a lesson that has an attention grabber, such as a “hook.” Throughout each of the individual lessons the students will know the expectations through clear models or exemplars and learning goals. Instead of utilizing Freire’s Banking Theory, where the teacher deposits the knowledge into students, teachers will be facilitators or coaches. This lends students and teachers to learn together and for students to understand the learning process better and make more meaning out of what they are learning. The learning activities are experiential and allow for student differences. When assessing students, the assessments are based on known standards, utilize real-world applications, provide prompt feedback, and students are also expected to self-assess in order for future growth. Throughout the unit the lessons are engaging and interactive, while allowing for individual progress or reflection as needed (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Timeline for Implementation

This project will take place in the 2020 - 2021 school year, and subsequent school years after that. It should be noted that this is being implemented in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is requiring extra work and planning from districts, above

and beyond the normal stresses of teaching. The school district where this will first be implemented was primarily in-person learning as of this writing, although most classes in the elementary have one or more students who are fully remote. This project can be implemented in person or remotely, however the discussions would best be implemented synchronously via remote learning to deepen understanding and utilize critical literacy skills.

Summary

Chapter Three discussed a project overview, who the intended audience is, the research framework, the reasoning behind choosing Understanding by Design, the community, state, and school setting, which included demographics for the school and state that demonstrated the lack of diversity, the project description, rationale for culminating project, and the timeline for this project.

Chapter Four will reflect on this Capstone Project and discuss the results of the question *can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books* throughout this Capstone Project, as well as reflections on the project. The reflections will include major learnings, how the Literature Review contributed to this project, the implications and limitations of this project, future research possibilities in conjunction with the project, how the results will be communicated to teachers, as well as the benefit to the teaching profession.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

This paper has examined *how can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books* and was brought about by the awareness that students in my second grade classes lacked awareness about other cultures and people who had different life experiences than they had experienced.

This fourth and final chapter of this Capstone Project will reflect on what was learned throughout the research and development of this project, how the literature review contributed to findings, the implications of the project, as well as the limitations and implications of the project, future research project possibilities, how the results will be communicated, and the benefits this project will bring to the teaching profession.

Major Learnings

A major learning that I have realized since beginning this project is the dearth of diverse children's literature. One of the first studies on the representation of Blacks in children's literature was published in 1965 by Larrick which found that of the children's books they examined in 1962, 1963, and 1964, only 6.7% of children's books contained Black characters (*Saturday Review*, p. 64). The number has been increasing since then, and the Cooperative Children's Book Center started tracking books by or about Blacks in 1985 before beginning to track books by or about Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) in 1994 through present day (Cooperative Children's Book Center, n.d.) but it is still lacking. The Cooperative Children's Book Center reported that 53% of children's

books published in 2019 were by authors of, or about characters of, Black/African, Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Pacific Islander, or Arab nationality. It should be noted that 4,035 books were received in 2019 and 2,144 of those books fall in that category. It is unknown how many of those books could overlap. An author of Indigenous descent may have written a book about Indigenous characters, which would cause that book to be in two categories (Cooperative Children's Book Center, October 27, 2020). Once people begin looking for books then there are many quality options available, but if teachers are not looking for those books then they may miss out, meaning their students might not get to experience them.

Another major learning was the importance of mirrors, windows, and doors within children's literature. This was a concept I was familiar with before embarking on this project, but I was unaware of the importance of it and how easy it is to include books that represent these opportunities. Mirrors, windows, and doors was something I returned to constantly when selecting books by asking who could see themselves represented within the story and how would this story benefit someone who had not had this experience.

Critical literacy was revisited during the research from this project, which has led to an increase in questioning and discussing books with students. Students are now examining who is in the story and who is not in the story, and the importance of that. The skills that students develop now in regards to critical literacy will benefit them as they grow older and begin to understand the world around them and how it is unfair for a large

population of people. Students will be able to use their knowledge and experience to improve their surroundings and benefit others.

Revisiting the Literature Review

One of the biggest contributions to the Literature Review was the work on mirrors, windows, and doors (Style, 1996; International Literacy Association, 2017). The concept of mirrors, windows, and doors is when students can see themselves represented in the story (mirrors), when they can see into a world or culture that is different than theirs (windows), or when students can use what they have learned to step into a world or culture that is different than theirs (doors). This theory was especially helpful as I identified diversity and book selections and asked myself what I would like students to know and take away from this project and what I want them to be exposed to. Happily, it was possible to find a myriad of recently published children's books that can be added to home, classroom, or school libraries to enhance the current library. While I was specifically searching for books that represented diversity, there were many resources available that had book lists or recommendations. This gave me hope that others who are searching for diverse children's books will have these same findings and be able to increase their selections easily.

Implications of Project

This project supports the Montana Reading Standard for Literature 2.2 that students "Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, including American Indian stories, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral" (Montana Office of Public Instruction, p. 5). Indian Education for All (IEFA) is an important part of

Montana curricula, but diversity needs to extend beyond IEFA to include other cultures and experiences. One could argue that it is even more important in rural schools because students may not see many others who look like them and it is important for students to have positive role models and see themselves represented within texts. When schools are looking at adding more books to classroom libraries or the school library, diversity must be included in the thought process. If students are enjoying a series of books, there is probably a similar series that contains diverse characters. It is easier to find quality diverse texts than it was in the past and schools and teachers need to consider adding more to their libraries.

This project will benefit students who are able to be exposed to diverse texts in the classroom in that some students may see themselves represented, but all students will learn more about the world around them and the people who inhabit the world. Ultimately, it is my hope that students are more inclusive and empathetic of others after reading the books in these text sets.

Limitations of Project

One of the major limiting factors to this project is a lack of funding. As previously discussed, teachers spent an average of \$479 on their classrooms in 2014-2015 without being reimbursed (Chokshi, 2018). Access to these books is also dependent on school budgets for classroom and school libraries. The books used for this project were a mixture of books that I already had, books that were purchased for this project, books borrowed from the Montana Office of Public Education Indian Education for All department, and books borrowed from the public library. This was not a project that I

could have successfully completed in my first few years of teaching, and was funded by working summer jobs.

Another limitation of this project is individual desire to learn more about diversity and address it, or the lack of, in classrooms. During this project I questioned the validity of any research conducted or results found because as a White teacher, I have different experiences than my students, even though the majority of students I have taught identify as White. I've always lived in predominantly White communities and lack awareness of the myriad ways systemic racism affects students and their families.

Across the United States, and beyond, we are in a period of reckoning. Some have embraced the changes and forward progress for racial equality, while others have denounced all efforts and are actively fighting against the hard work required. To best serve our students educators need to understand more about our students and how their lives have been affected by racism. If teachers do not feel the lack of diversity is important, then they will continue to teach with the same texts as they always have and representation will not improve. One of the challenges of this project was concern over misrepresenting someone or something and being unaware of this history and how it affects students. Sharing these struggles with students will help them understand that adults are also making the effort to know and that our knowledge is always changing and growing.

Future Research

A future research project could be developing professional development sessions centered around examining implicit biases that teachers have, or examining how systemic

racism affects the lives of students inside and outside of the classroom. Another future research project could examine mental health, self-acceptance, or feelings of belonging amongst Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) students who are exposed to diverse literature compared to those who see literature that primarily focuses on White students.

Communication of Results

The results of this project will be shared at a District Literacy Team meeting which consists of nine teachers from elementary, junior high, and high school, the Librarian, Literacy Coach, Literacy Grant Consultant, and k-12 Principal/Superintendent. After the initial sharing with that group, I will then share my project at an elementary staff meeting and follow up with elementary teachers through individual communications and high school teachers who expressed a desire to learn more. This project will be presented through sharing the text sets with teachers, as well as showing some texts from the project so teachers can learn more about the text and ways they could incorporate it into their classrooms.

Benefit to Profession

This project benefits the teaching profession because 79% of educators are White and 76% are female (Institute of Education Sciences, 2020) which does not represent the demographic of students across the United States or in our classrooms. As discussed earlier in this chapter, not all teachers have thought about the benefits of including diverse texts within their classroom for students to read. By communicating these results with the teachers I work with, they may begin to think more about the ways that only

showing one demographic can be detrimental to all students and seek to improve exposure.

This project was personally beneficial because I discovered many new books and I learned more about the history of the lack of diversity. As a White teacher, many articles raised questions and increased understanding about the importance of diversity and making sure that students get more than a one-sided story, as Ngozi Adichie (TED, 2009) discussed in her TED talk. New websites or book list options were helpful for identifying new books and I will continue to use the resources in the future.

Conclusion/Summary

This chapter reflected on the journey of this Capstone Project and the major learnings. This chapter also reflected on the contributions that the Literature Review made toward this project, the implications that this project has for students and teachers, the limitations that this project contains, options for future research possibilities, how the results of this project will be communicated and the benefits this project has for the teaching profession and students.

This Capstone Project sought to answer the question *how can educators increase diversity exposure in rural, homogeneous elementary classrooms using picture books.*

Through research and discussions with bookstore owners, librarians, and diversity trainers, a series of text sets were generated in order to highlight picture books for children on topics of abilities, socioeconomic status, LGBTQ+, Montana Indian Education for All, Indian Education for All, Black (Present Day), International, and Latinx.

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