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DEEPENING STUDENT THINKING ABOUT A TEXT:
EFFECTIVE CRITICAL LITERACY STRATEGIES IN THE ELEMENTARY
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 Education.

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ABSTRACT

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While at a critical crossroads of a social movement to end systemic racism, and with schools simultaneously pushing for cultural competency training and practices in the classroom, educators are being asked to take on the task of bringing diversified texts to students in the classroom and deepening student understanding of those texts. While there are many strategies for implementation, one research-based strategy is utilizing critical literacy strategies to expand student view and analysis of said diversified texts. This capstone explores deepened questioning strategies, critical literacy strategies, and frameworks for implementation as support for educators to help answer the research question, *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* Research concludes that teachers deepening their questioning practices, by utilizing critical literacy strategies as one choice, improves students comprehension and deepens student thinking about a text, and opens the door for deepened cultural competency practices in the classroom.

Dedication

To my amazing family, for supporting me every set of the way of writing this Capstone and pushing me to finish on days where it all felt impossible. Your loving encouragement and advice helped me every step of the way. I could not have done this without you.

To my coworkers, for encouraging me to always be my absolute best and pushing me to better myself for my students. I am thankful for your feedback, guidance and advice during such an important piece of my development as a teacher.

To my students, past, current and future for inspiring me to complete this work and better myself as a teacher. You are the purpose behind this important work. You will always have a large piece of my heart.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

I was ironically situated at the small group table in my classroom surrounded by five boys from my third grade classroom. In their hands, they held a copy of *The Lemonade War* by Jacqueline Davies.

A bit of background on the story: the two main characters, Evan and Jessie, are brother and sister. Evan is a fourth grader. Jessie? Well, she just found out that she is skipping third grade to join her brother Evan's fourth grade class. Why? Because Jessie is really good with numbers; math and science are her greatest strengths. Evan on the other hand? Not so much. He is social; great at making friends.

Cut back to the all boy book club in my third grade classroom. One boy spoke up. Internally, I was thrilled that he was willing to share his thinking! "Wait, Ms. Jordahl, this book is not very realistic. Boys are normally the ones who are good with numbers, and girls are the ones who like to make friends." Did your jaw drop to the floor? Mine did too. Dumbfounded, I quickly shut down the conversation, gave them their assigned pages for our next meeting, and gathered the class to prepare for recess.

Certainly not one of my proudest teacher moments. I was caught off guard. What was I supposed to do? How was I supposed to jump into that can of worms he just opened? We only had five minutes before recess anyway. If I had jumped into the conversation, it would not have been one of quality. All of these excuses ran through my head, as I quickly realized I have so many things to learn about teaching students to

process texts. Since I wanted to deepen their thinking, I committed to learning about questioning. Through studying questioning, I also needed to learn about a concept completely new to me: critical literacy. I needed to teach my students to become active in their reading process. They needed to learn to think critically about the texts they have in their hands. They needed to realize that the books they pick up were written by an author, who has a bias, who chooses what to include in the narratives they write or the research writing they publish. They needed to become independent thinkers, who take in information with a critical lens. But how was I going to take them there? That was the beginning of my personal journey, learning about critical literacy and deepening my students' thinking. As I reflected upon what kind of practices I want to instill in my students, I considered the following question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*

Personal Journey to Critical Literacy

I deeply remember that day in my own third grade classroom. In that moment, I realized how much reflecting I had to do on my own part as a teacher, so I could teach my students to do that same reflection in their own learning. When was I exposed as a student to thinking critically about the texts I held in my hands? Had I been exposed to that in my schooling as a student? Which of my teachers explicitly taught critical literacy well? Surely, I had experience with this before? Teachers are called to be reflective. Not only reflective in the lessons, but in thinking deeply about how their experiences shape teaching. This brought me to my eleventh-grade English class.

Literacy never grabbed my heart until I was sixteen years old. I have clear memories of walking into a windowless cramped classroom filled with tables facing a stark white board lining the whole front wall of the classroom. Up until this point, I had very easily slid through my literacy learning as a high school student. Achieving high grades was not a challenge for me, nor did I have to work very hard. However, word was that our teacher was challenging. He was known to see right through his students' shallow answers. Reflecting back on this, he was simply pushing his students to deepen their understanding of texts. He was not willing to take the easy answer. Working through *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Catcher and the Rye*, and *The Things They Carried*, the teacher had a tall order. That teacher taught his students to deeply study the authors of each of those texts and analyze the decisions they made in each word they chose to add in their novels. We did not read these books from our perspectives alone, because many of us had no background knowledge on the themes present in these books. Rather, we flipped our thinking around and studied the time periods they were written, questioned the decisions the authors made, and researched how perspectives changed from the time the books were first released to how they are accepted or perhaps not accepted now. Little did I know, this was my first memory utilizing critical literacy strategies.

While attending college and starting my first few years of teaching, I put critical literacy on the back burner. I spent those years learning the basics of teaching and teaching literacy. A couple of years in, I was yearning to better myself as a teacher. I wanted to take my students further and deepen their understanding of texts and how to

process them. I made the step to pursue my master's in literacy education. However, when I registered, many of the summer courses were already filled, so I decided to take the first and only open classes that I could knock off my list of required courses. It was a course titled Critical Literacy. It was during this class that I fell in love with the idea of pushing students further beyond the typical, shallow level. We must push students to be active in their reading and comprehension.

Professional Journey to Critical Literacy

At the start of my career, I accepted a teaching position at a school where well over half of the student population were students of color. During those years, I greatly grew my passion for learning about cultures and people who were different from me, and even more importantly, different from the other students in my classroom. We learned to value acceptance through exposure to people who look different from us. My students began asking me to collect books with diverse authors and antagonists who looked like them, lived like them, and learned like them. I hunted for books with characters who looked like my students. All of them. However, finding quality literature that did not perpetuate the "struggle story" or simply only feature people of color who were overcoming challenges proved to be difficult for me. I began to yearn for strategies to widen our thinking when unpacking texts, as well as where and how to find good quality literature. My students needed to see themselves in the texts and characters that they were exposed to.

Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) work documents well the reasoning behind why it is important that students see themselves in the literature they encounter, as well as begin to think critically about experiences that do not mirror their own. She says:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of words that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. 1)

After a few years, I had the opportunity to move to a new school with a very different population. Eighty-nine percent of the students were white (Niche, 2020), providing the teachers with the challenge to bring diversity to the students in our community. Not only that, but it was a very affluent district. Within the school district, only about 6.9% of students are on free or reduced lunch, the median household income is \$159,028, and the median home value is \$680,100 (Niche, 2020). Knowing these statistics, I began to realize these students were surrounded by peers who for the most part also looked like and lived like them. The texts in my library resonated with them and mirrored their own perspectives and lives. These students had the opposite problem. They needed exposure to characters who did not always look or live like them. The

responsibility began weighing on me to provide my students with perspectives outside of the bubble they had grown up with -- both with the texts I provide and the questioning strategies I implement.

As I began reflecting on how to best serve my students, the school district where I work launched a professional development series on cultural competency. The reasoning behind the work? Professionals within the school district began to interview graduates of our schools who reported back that they did not feel adequately prepared to enter the world as educated, well-rounded individuals. The district had not done a fair job preparing them for the diversity, in all aspects, that they would encounter out in the world. My colleagues and I began to reflect upon the work that needed to be done within the district and in our own classrooms.

At the intersection of all of this work, a few miles from home in Minneapolis, a nationwide movement began all across the United States to end systemic racism in the summer of 2020. People took to the streets in protest demanding reform. These events began to lift the veil and cause me to question how I, as a white, female educator, could fairly give my students opportunities beyond their neighborhood. My mind began to race with questions: How do teachers bridge that gap using literacy? By reading a book to predominantly white students about a person of color? How do teachers make that an authentic experience for students with no background knowledge or ability to relate to their experiences? How do I ensure I do not perpetuate any stereotype that comes along with the cultures represented in the literature I choose?

All of these facts and events culminated with a determination to broaden my thinking with- how? That is where critical literacy comes into play. Not only do teachers need to diversify the books they put in their hands in many different ways, but they also need to broaden students' minds to think about who wrote the book, what voices are represented, and what is missing from this information and text. Critical literacy questioning strategies may lead to accomplishing a deeper understanding of text for our students.

Why Critical Literacy

There are many curriculums, strategies, and thoughts behind how teachers can expand students' comprehension skills and deepen their thinking about a text. Teachers and districts have many options from which to choose. Critical literacy is research-based, question-based, and relates to foundational beliefs from Paulo Freire in 1970 (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004). He believed that beyond just decoding language, students should understand how language was used in relation to the world. There is a very important relationship between text and context. Readers should not passively accept text at surface level, nor only read through their own lens. Rather, they should seek to understand the lens of the author, the lens they have, and finally the lens that others around the world have. Critical literacy empowers the reader to engage with the text and question the author, the author's message, and the choices they made throughout the text (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004).

Critical literacy fits into a school curriculum. There is no sure-fire single strategy for implementing critical literacy into the classroom. Rather, critical literacy is a way of

thinking and challenging texts. First, teachers must educate themselves so they can bring those authentic experiences to their students. Teachers should take the standards they are charged with teaching and the curriculum they are given, and implement critical literacy strategies and deepened questioning into their daily routine. Asking questions that engage students in critical analysis of a text such as those written by McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) include:

- *Who is in the text/picture/situation?*
- *Who is missing?*
- *Whose voices are represented?*
- *Whose voices are marginalized or discounted?*
- *What are the intentions of the author?*
- *What does the author want the reader to think?*
- *What would an alternative text/picture/situation say?*
- *How can the reader use this information to promote equity?* (p. 41)

This will encourage students to begin thinking critically about the texts in their hands.

Critical literacy leads back to questioning and the core of my learning: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* “The questions teachers ask profoundly shape learning. Critical engagement requires open-ended inquiries for which there is no single “right” answer. Students should be asked to form and defend their opinions about the meaning of complex texts and social realities.” (Scharf, 2018, p. 3). Teachers should not only ask students to recall textual information, but should pursue critical reading where students ask and answer questions,

which spark discussion, allow students to read with speculation, and share their ideas (Scharf, 2018). Although this view of critical literacy was brief, a deeper dive into the literature is present in Chapter Two of this Capstone.

Summary

That day in my third grade classroom with my book club is one that rings through my mind often. How I responded to that situation often circulates through my thinking as an area of deep growth. Ironically, reflection is one of the deepest roots that comes from our understanding of critical literacy. How to broaden students' thinking beyond their own immediate experiences and teach them to actively play a role in their relationship with the author of the texts is one of the most important jobs educators have.

It should not have taken until I was a sixteen year old to have a concrete memory of learning to think critically about the texts, although I am grateful for that teacher and experience in his classroom. It laid much of the groundwork for the teacher I strive to be. Teachers need to be doing that in elementary classrooms beginning with the picture books they read to young students. Critical literacy also should not just take place in schools where students of color are present. It is equally, if not more important, that students with limited exposure to a variety of different cultures experience thinking critically about the texts authors write, whose voice is marginalized, and even as far as what books their own teacher has selected for the classroom library.

How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text? It is imperative now, more than ever, that teachers deepen their reflection, deepen the questioning they prompt their students with, and deepen the reflections their

students experience. It is understood that questions drive thinking. How teachers go about questioning, is provided. A deeper dive into Chapter Two of this Capstone explores what the experts suggest as questioning strategies to implement critical literacy into the norms of a classroom and therefore deepen student thinking about a text, and about the greater world. Various pieces of literature with given examples and research behind the importance of this work are explored. Chapter Three of this Capstone provides the basis for the rationale behind the project I created for teachers to utilize. Chapter Four of this Capstone reflects upon the learnings and research completed to put together this project, as well as future learning opportunities and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Teaching students to think about texts is one of the most important aspects of being a teacher of literature. Teachers strive for students to think deeply about texts. Deepening student thinking leads to a greater pursuit of their understanding of a text. Students thinking about a text is driven by teacher questioning practices and implementation. Teacher questioning practices could include critical literacy questioning strategies as a tool to deepen student learning. Learning and understanding how teacher questioning impacts reading and thinking within their students, leads to the question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* It is the basis of the learning for this Capstone.

The first section of Chapter Two focuses on how to answer the question at the basis of the learning and what the experts in the field say could be the key to deepening student comprehension within and outside of a text. This section also focuses on bringing attention to what expert researchers and authors say about critical literacy, exploring what critical literacy is, and the theory behind the implications it has in regards to students' thinking about texts. After a definition has been developed about what critical literacy is, the second section of Chapter Two explores different critical literacy strategies to be implemented in the elementary classroom. Strategies and their impact on students is the main focus of

this portion of the text. Finally, an agreed upon Critical Literacy Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework is explored, which gives teachers the steps to implement questioning strategies in their daily routine (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Formatted to make the implementation process seamless, the framework is offered to take the strategies learned and frame them for use with students in a gradual release format, ultimately making it a strategy to support deepened student comprehension of a text.

Chapter Two bridges the gap between reflection and questions as a teacher, and what the experts say and recommend to move students into being more informed and critical readers by deepening the questioning strategies teachers use in the classroom. Reading and teaching reading is complex. Hopefully, the opinions expressed here will confirm and challenge existing ideas about what literacy should look like in classrooms. With the focus being on answering: *how does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*, learning around deepening students' thinking about a text through questioning techniques is critical.

Deepening Questioning Practices

Engaging students in text on a daily basis as a facilitator is one of the most important jobs as an educator of literacy. To be a facilitator, teachers must have knowledge of how to simultaneously pull knowledge and thinking out of students, and guide them down the path to deeper comprehension through questioning techniques and examples. “Through the planning and implementation of questions that require high level

thinking, educators foster the kind of engagement and critical thinking skills that students will need to process and address new situations.” (Nappi, 2017, p. 30). Teachers dive into the purpose of questioning in the classroom, preparing questions, and into the Reading Comprehension Question Response Inventory.

Questioning Purpose

“The teacher is to act as a guide during the reading session, facilitating deepened comprehension by prompting students to further explain their thinking as well as by modeling their own responses.” (Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015, p. 233). Teachers understand that the purpose of questioning is for students to make meaning of texts by making connections, predictions, and being active in questioning and thinking aloud (Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015). Questioning is a critical component in each classroom, used for teaching as well as being able to assess student understanding. Nappi (2017) said that about 60,000 questions are asked in one classroom on a yearly basis, so the questioning techniques teachers use are incredibly important. With a need for high level questioning, authors argue that teachers need a plan for how to implement these structures. Higher level questions generally do not have one correct answer, which in turn encourages students to engage in thinking critically, therefore being beneficial to student learning (Nappi, 2017).

Although questioning has many functions, the focused attention is on the educational function of questioning. Qatipi (2011) asked the question, “But how can questioning help critical thinking? A very powerful means is the questioning technique. Questions should ask for reflection, thought, imagination, creation, and evaluation.”

(Qatipi, 2011, p. 78). Students will not and cannot think deeply or critically if teachers do not pursue questioning techniques that require a higher level of thinking.

Reading Comprehension Question Response Inventory

Guszak (1967) said, “In 1917, Thorndike outlined a classic definition of reading in three words when he said, ‘Reading is thinking.’” (p. 227). Reading is active. Guszak reported a study focusing on what questioning strategies teachers use with their students and if there are certain characteristics within a reading mini-lesson (1967). In a study of second, fourth, and sixth grade teachers, he found in a reading comprehension response inventory that teachers employed: recognition, recall, translation, conjecture, explanation, and evaluation. These skills build upon each other, bringing students deeper and deeper into the comprehension process.

Starting with recognition. Recognition questions ask students to identify specific parts in a story or the literal information they should be able to find within a text. The most basic of comprehension skills, recognition asks teachers and students to simply recognize the information read (Guszak, 1967).

Recall also asks readers to understand literal information in a text. The difference between recognition and recall is that recognition asks students to find a specific bit of text within a book, whereas recall asks students to recall information based on what they read within a text. Students are asked to recall factual material, like answering a question by finding the factual information in the text (Guszak, 1967). Recall is also a lower level questioning technique that does not ask students to analyze or synthesize the text, rather simply produce the information to answer the question correctly (Nappi, 2017).

Translation is a questioning technique that calls upon students' ability to retell a story, draw a picture based upon a scene or information from a text, or make sense of metaphors or symbolism within a text. Taking students into a text by asking them to change words, ideas or pictures into symbolic form, abstract to concrete, long in length to shortened and brief are examples of the translation technique. Asking students to translate the story into their own way of thinking and making sense of a text is another example of this technique (Guszk, 1967).

Conjecture asks students to walk beyond the text and anticipate what will come next in the text. Questioning with conjecture could sound like: *What will happen to (character) when they _____?* Conjecture is predictive or anticipatory questioning. Teachers ask students to make a prediction about what will come next in a text (Guszk, 1967).

Explanation prompts students to inference and to find rationale behind that inference. Similar to conjecture questions, explanation questions are inferential. Calling upon students to develop contextual proof, basing a conclusion or rationale for the inference. Questions include: *What is the main idea of the story?* (Guszk, 1967).

Finally, evaluation questions ask for students' opinions. Evaluation questions include asking students to rate a character, the story as a whole, or an idea. They also include calling students to judge a character with a *yes* or *no* answer. Evaluation questions can also call students to make a choice between two options laid out by the teacher, or asking probability questions (Guszk, 1967).

Preparing Questioning

The work of questioning starts prior to bringing a text to students. Higher level thinking questions do not necessarily come naturally; rather they must be learned, practiced, and implemented by teachers. But how is this accomplished?

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom identified domains within the cognitive development educational setting and created, along with psychologists, the levels within the questioning sequence and a framework for teachers to use when developing the questions used with students (Bloom, as cited in Nappi, 2017). Bloom's taxonomy provides scaffolding for teachers as they attempt to create more and more challenging questions and model deep thinking with their students, attempting to reach a new level of questioning before the next is achieved. Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are hierarchical and develop a synthesis of critical thinking and problem solving (Nappi, 2017).

Teachers should seamlessly scaffold, model, and support in live time as students are working through a text. But are there a common set of practices among experts in the field? Wiseman (2010) argued that information should be communicated in four different ways: confirming, modeling, extending, and building.

“Confirming contributions of the students not only promoted a positive classroom atmosphere that encouraged children to discuss their ideas about the book, it also supported certain topics of conversation that led to important interpretations about literature.” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 435). Students play a large role in building meaning during a teacher's guided conversations while looking at a text. Wiseman (2010) argued that this mental shift takes place when teachers become facilitators rather than the only

person in the room with all the answers, and that this has been incredibly impactful to students' comprehension.

The next agreed upon practice by professionals in the field is teacher modeling reading, comprehending, and critically analyzing a story. Students learned new strategies, including critical literacy strategies, for comprehension through modeling practices. Wiseman (2010) said, "By thinking aloud, the teacher can show how she understands the text and model ways of understanding the book which is an important way of teaching beginning readers how to find and make meaning as they are reading" (p. 436). However, keeping students engaged and participating during this time is important- balancing students observing and offering interaction with teacher modeling.

"Extending is where the teacher takes what the students know and guides them to a deeper meaning, sometimes by focusing on an important theme or idea that might not have been discussed by simply facilitating the students' comments." (Wiseman, 2010, p. 436). Extending is what is typically called a critical analysis or conversation with students by taking their learning deeper than the surface level answers. Much of extending student learning is being flexible in meeting them where they are and monitoring where to take the conversation next in order to push their learning further.

A student-centered approach to reading instruction is powerful. Letting students lead and build their own meaning and conversation requires strength from a teacher to step back and watch and listen. It requires teachers who can facilitate, foster students' ability to deeply comprehend and engage with texts.

In a transactional exchange of ideas, it is significant to have many opportunities for the students to be able to guide the conversation and contribute to the meaning as it is for the teacher to direct the way that books are discussed. The student-centered approach to reading and learning reflects the power of the interactive read alouds-to engage and motivate children's involvement in the reading process. (Wiseman, 2010, p. 437)

At this point in the process, the work has just started. This process of planning questions before bringing a text to students is a strong one. If the facilitators are prepared, they have a better chance of asking a thought provoking, high quality question to make critical analysis a norm for students, and make breaking the norm a reality. Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004) went so far as to argue that teachers should practice reading the text, working to find where the pauses will come in for questioning, as well as practicing how to effectively model fluency throughout that particular text. This is where students come in. Part of establishing a purpose of reading could include reviewing or previewing a specific skill or comprehension tool the students are currently practicing (Fisher et al., 2004). All of this strong learning and planning happens before even opening the book.

There is great purpose behind the questions teachers ask and the level those questions fall on the higher level questioning scale. One way that teachers can implement questioning is through critical literacy strategies. There is a strong relationship between the quality of a teacher's questions to students' understanding and use of critical literacy strategies (Winograd, 2015). There is understanding that teachers must ask questions that prompt a higher level of thinking in their students. One way to accomplish this is through

critical literacy questioning strategies. Anything beyond a recall level question could be constituted as a critical literacy question. *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* If the goal is to prompt students with higher level thinking questions to deepen understanding of a text, critical literacy is one strategy to explore. An agreed upon definition of critical literacy and the strategies behind it will be explored in the rest of this chapter.

Critical Literacy Defined

Critical literacy has been defined as the ability to move beyond the passive mindset, to instead become an active participant in comprehending texts (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Readers cannot simply accept the author's message as truth without thinking critically about what is beyond that message in relation to the world. Founded by Paulo Freire in 1970, the thinking and theory behind critical literacy states that there must be a relationship between the text and context (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Reading is more than simply decoding the words on the page. Critical literacy argues that truly comprehending texts means reading with understanding of multiple viewpoints and with a knowledge of how the text fits into the greater world and society.

Critical Literacy Definition

Before applying critical literacy strategies in classrooms, a broader vision is required to truly understand the agreed upon definition of critical literacy and the theory is critical. According to Luke Allan (2012), the word *literacy* refers to writing or reading, and the word *critical* comes from the Greek word *kriticos*, meaning to judge or argue. Putting critical and literacy together, deeper

understanding is gained in the process of judging or arguing the many aspects of literacy, both reading and writing. A variety of professionals in the field agree that there are four critical pieces within the definition of critical literacy, “disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice.” (Lewison, Flint & Sluys, 2002, p. 1). Critiquing the norms, point of view, perspectives set out by the author of the piece of literature are all components of critical literacy. The readers are to become active participants in the reading process, said McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004). They emphasized being called to move beyond passively accepting the author’s messages, and instead making context the focus of comprehension.

With large amounts of information coming quickly from all directions, reflection as educators and students about how to encounter writing with a bias, slant, persuasive arguments, or even illogical, nonfactual-based information is critical. Gunning (2013) warned readers to pay close attention to the use of language by the author, carefully interpret factual statements vs. opinions, recognize the author’s purpose, draw logical conclusions, judge the sources used by the author, among other things. Texts deeply influence people and their ideas about all aspects, argued Norris, Lucas, and Prudhoe (2012). Within the same article, three authors, Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) stated critical literacy can “disrupt the common situation or understanding... , examine multiple viewpoints... , focus on sociopolitical issues... , and take action and promote social justice” (p. 1). With deep emphasis on culturally responsive teaching strategies as

an important part of the reality within teaching experiences, critical perspectives arose within those strategies.

All of these concepts encompass how critical literacy is defined.

Ultimately, teachers understand the importance of comprehension strategies for students to promote growth and perspective within a text. At its core, critical literacy is a comprehension strategy. A deep one. It teaches students to question and therefore deeply understand the texts they are exposed to.

Critical Literacy Theory

In order to understand how to implement critical literacy into reading experiences and in classrooms, teachers must step even further back to fully understand the background and foundational beliefs that brought critical literacy to the forefront. Paulo Freire (1970) began exploring education and how it exploited certain groups of marginalized people. He began urging people to take action and reflect. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) argued that Freire's beliefs can also be applied to the literacy lens. Literacy should be viewed from a critical stance. "...reading is much more than decoding language-it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world." (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 19). Freire noted that school often kept students' world, culture, and ideas out, even calling it a *banking system* of transaction (Luke, 2012). He pushed for there to be dialogue with students and a framing of the information presented to reflect students' worlds. He believed in reading the word and the world. Freire called for

“radical pedagogical change” with how we teach our students to think (McDaniel, 2004). McDaniel argued:

Regarding empowerment, Freire would argue that it does not come *from* the educator *to* the student, or *from* the adult *to* the child. Rather, the educator or adult provides the skills that will hopefully lead to the development of a sense of agency, self-sufficiency, and confident decision making. (p. 474)

Freire’s beliefs around the importance of a reader’s reflection and critical stance laid the foundation for the critical literacy strategies to be implemented in classrooms.

The relationship between text and context is an important one to teach students about understanding texts. Having an agreed upon definition for what critical literacy is and the theories behind the development of the ideas, lays the foundation for answering the question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*

Critical Literacy Strategies

An understanding of what critical literacy encompasses is the first step in implementing it into classrooms. Where do teachers start? How do they make this part of questioning in the classroom with students? How do teachers flip their students’ thinking around to deeply understand the texts they have in their hands?

Professionals agreed on a variety of different specific strategies to increase students’ ability to critically comprehend text, which is covered in the following sections

of this chapter. However, there are a few ways to begin having students think critically about texts they encounter. McDaniel (2004) said it can be as simple as questioning students on how characters and situations are portrayed. For example: *Who do you like in the story? Who is always in the background in this story? Which people don't you hear in the story, and what might they say if you heard them?* Students should also question how information is presented to them. They can begin to ask: *Are there other ways to show this person/place/event?*” (p. 44). Students should learn that texts are intended to be read in a certain way by asking them questions such as *“What does the author want the reader to think?”* (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 44). Finally, McDaniel (2004) said teachers need to teach readers that they should respond to texts by asking themselves *“What did you notice about this story?”* or *“How does this make you feel?”* (p. 44). These questioning strategies that teachers implement begin to develop critical literacy in students by prompting them to think about multiple perspectives within and out of a text, and deepen their understanding of texts.

In this section of the Capstone, reflection is categorized into a variety of specific critical literacy strategies for implementation in the classroom (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Problem posing is a strategy that dives into who is represented in a text and who is missing from the representation. Another strategy, switching, opens up thinking about changing a variety of different parts of a text and how they would impact comprehension and a text as a whole. Gender switch, theme switch, body-style switch, clothing switch, emotion switch, ethnic/race switch, language switch, and relationship/organization switch are a small representation of things teachers could switch in a book to boost

comprehension. Alternative perspectives, another critical literacy strategy, includes alternative texts, character substitutions, character perspectives, juxtapositioning, and mind and alternative mind portraits that help look deeply into a text and the choices the author makes. A final strategy, exploring identities, helps readers explore their own identities in relation to the text. Readers should explore their own identities in relation to the texts to see the influence (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Disclosed in the rest of this chapter, is a deeper dive into each of these critical literacy strategies including an explanation of what they are, and examples of how they could be implemented.

Problem Posing

Problem posing is a critical literacy strategy that encourages readers to ask questions about the text they are reading (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2019). Often, it is first modeled by the teacher as a think aloud- teaching students to question the text while they consume it. Problem posing is an encouragement, or empowerment, for students to utilize critical analysis of the text they just read. There are many different ways to do this. Delacruz and Jackson (2019) argued that problem posing is a way to challenge a text and ultimately challenge an author. Question examples teachers and students could use by McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) included:

- *Who is in the text/picture/situation? Who is missing?*
- *Whose voices are represented? Whose voices are marginalized or discounted?*

- *What are the intentions of the author? What does the author want the reader to think?*
- *What would an alternative text/picture/situation say?*
- *How can the reader use this information to promote equity?* (p. 41)

Problem posing focuses on who is represented within a text and being conscious of who was left out (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). The author puts forth intentions and bias with what they specifically choose to include in their novels or nonfiction texts. The author has a set of beliefs or norms they want the reader to think and understand. What is implicit? What/who is favored? Who is marginalized? Problem posing points out what the reader should start paying attention to and subsequently take action upon once readers become aware (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

Teachers should model this strategy for their students in a variety of different forms- during an interactive read aloud, in a guided reading group, and even with students one-on-one while they are conferring. If teachers begin to make questioning the author the norm in their classrooms, they will not only deepen student comprehension of texts, but also empower their students to question authors also, therefore becoming critical thinkers.

Switching

A strategy within problem posing is switching. Similar to asking questions based upon critical analysis, switching focuses specifically on what an alternative version of the novel would look like (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Often, the

author of a text specifically chooses genders, which fit the message they are sending to the reader. Switching would look like a reader asking questions such as, *What gender is represented in the text? How would the text be different if a character from the story had a different gender?* A reader who focuses on switching parts of a story around could reveal the biases of the author or the reader (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2019). According to McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004), there are many different examples of switching:

- *Gender Switch- switching the gender of the characters in the text*
- *Theme Switch- switching the story to an opposite theme or closely related theme to the current theme of the text*
- *Setting Switch- switching to tell the story in a different time, place, or social class*
- *Body-Style Switch- switching the main characters body type (tall, athletic, short, etc.)*
- *Clothing Switch- switching how the characters are dressed (formally, preppy, gang, etc.)*
- *Emotion Switch- switching the character's emotional tone*
- *Ethnic/Race Switch- switching the character's race or ethnicity*
- *Language Switch- switching the accent, vocabulary or expressions of the characters in the text*
- *Relationship/Organization Switch- switching the relationship the characters have (family, friends, etc.)* (p. 47- 48)

These examples of switching could be implemented within the problem posing strategy. Questioning students about any of these brings awareness to their biases or thinking about texts, as well as the author's bias and thinking. Teachers must prompt and model reflective practices for students to teach them to actively participate in the reading process and critical analysis (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2019). If the ultimate goal is action from students, they must be prompted with creating connections.

Implementation in the classroom could include asking students to reflect in written form using one of the many switching examples listed above. What if the main character switched genders? How would that impact the story? What if we switched the character's ethnicity? How would that impact the story? The practice of analyzing a text using switching deepens student understanding of text and opens up the conversation to deeper topics of great importance (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Alternative Perspectives

Within a text, there are multiple viewpoints and perspectives represented. Alternative perspectives is a comprehension strategy that looks specifically at the perspectives and viewpoints of the characters in a novel or the people within an informational text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Pulling forward these perspectives and dialoguing about them is a critical literacy and comprehension strategy. Within alternative perspectives, there are a variety of critical literacy strategies. This exploration includes alternative texts, character substitutions,

character perspectives, juxtaposition texts and photos, and mind and alternative mind portraits.

The first example is alternative texts. Alternative texts, propose a perspective that is different from the one being read by a reader (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Both a narrative story and an informational text can both include the opportunity to create an alternative text. If a story or informational text is from one perspective, readers could write, physically or mentally, an alternative text, from a different perspective than was originally written. An example used by McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) was the story of the three little pigs. A whole new story can be written from each different character's perspective, which could change the message of the themes of the story. Students could also be questioned about this strategy, simply communicating about it with guiding questions as you go along reading a book together in a whole group or small group setting. Take a book that has been read, identify whose perspective is present and most prominently listened to in the book, and then challenge students to think about a different character and what their perspective might be. How would the story written from their perspective change the story?

The second example is called character substitutions. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) explained that this comprehension strategy includes substituting out a character in the book for a different character. Changing the character as a whole would change the personality of that character, beliefs, traits, thoughts. This strategy could also be reflected upon in the classroom with students. It not

only asks them to think about the characters currently present in the book they have in their hands, but it also deepens that thinking by asking them to replace that character with a differing one and reflect upon how that would change the tone of the book, lessons within the book, or other character reactions (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

The next strategy also has to do with characters in a text. The characters within a book have existing perspectives and motives based upon what the author communicates to the reader. The characters play a major role in the layout of a book and therefore greatly impact the story. However, when teachers apply the character perspectives strategy, they would change the character's motives and perspectives to fit the desires of a different character in the book (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). The same character with a different perspective or motive could change the overall outcome of a book based upon how the character reacts to other characters or big events in the book. This could be a simple question for students comparing two characters' motives, perspectives, or personalities and then exchanging those too. From there, the student would need to think deeply about how that would impact the events in the story or even the overall theme or lesson the character learned (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004) .

The next strategy takes readers outside of one text, and rather has them looking at two different texts. Juxtaposition helps readers see a text in a new light, by identifying a sharp contrast between texts. Juxtaposing is choosing two very different texts and looking for the obvious differences between those texts

(McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). This comprehension strategy gives deeper understanding of the text by truly giving a different way by looking at the text and understanding how students and teachers perceive that text. This strategy shakes up perceptions and motives with reading the book and rather has readers take a step back to truly look within what perceptions the author is putting onto the reader (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

The final strategy from McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) is an activity to engage students in an understanding of two different perspectives through visualizing alternative mind portraits. Readers start by looking at two different perspectives either in the same text or in different texts. Once students have analyzed and chosen their characters and perspectives, they draw two silhouettes of two heads and write down words or drawings inside to represent the perspectives. This gives students a visual to spark a conversation about critical analysis. The strategy gives students a starting place without it needing to be verbal communication (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004).

Exploring Identities

The final critical literacy strategy is how to explore identities within text. That ultimately makes teachers, or their students, think deeply about a text. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) acknowledged the importance of identity and personal critical literacy experiences:

We acknowledged that identity is personal. It defines who we are and who we are not. We also talked about identity as a social process and observed

that much for who we are and who we are not is constructed through our reading, our everyday experiences, and the conversations we have with others. (p. 89)

Readers who are critically aware deeply look within their identity and how that shapes what kind of reader they are and how they accept and comprehend texts they encounter. Readers do not often enjoy acknowledging their biases, or sometimes do not have an understanding that they have an underlying bias. There is self assumption that readers do not possess a bias, but part of understanding identity is identifying biases. If teachers and students critically analyze their sense of self, they can see how and why they are stereotyping the characters, places, voices, dialogue within the texts they explore. If teachers want students to step up and take action within society, they must teach them to acknowledge their own biases.

Professionals in the educational field have agreed upon a set of strategies to implement in the classroom utilizing critical literacy to deepen questioning practices teachers utilize with students as a way to broaden student thinking about a text. Teachers are facilitators, and the questions they use to prompt students impact the level of comprehension, and broadened world views that they possess. To be implemented with an already prescribed resource, critical literacy strategies are used as higher level questioning practices in the classroom, and work answer the question: *how does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*

Critical Literacy Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework

Now that there is understanding of a few of the different critical literacy strategies available to use as questioning practices, teachers need to understand how to implement them. This is where the Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework comes into play (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Exploring the framework to help teachers become facilitators of questioning that leads to critical thinking is the next step in the process of deepening student thinking about a text. Implementing the Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework means first, explaining the critical literacy strategy, then moving into the demonstration of the strategy, guiding students to create a response, having students practice applying the critical literacy strategy, and finally reflecting with students on how it helped them read critically and deepen their understanding of texts. In this section of the literature, exploration into the Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework is laid out for teachers to implement in their classrooms. There are specific questioning strategies to help students become critically aware and engaged in the world.

After exploring the role of teacher questioning, defining critical literacy and the theory behind it, and identifying some specific strategies teachers can use in their classrooms, the next portion of this Capstone explores what the authors have agreed upon as a framework for instruction in the classroom (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Basically, how do teachers implement all of the new information they have learned so far into their classrooms and do it well? That is where the framework comes into play. As with any skill, it is agreed upon that acquiring a new skill involves the following steps: explanation, demonstration, guided

practice, and finally reflection (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Critical literacy as a whole or within strategies is no exception to this.

In 1978, Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist and social constructivist, coined the concept zone of proximal development, saying there are developmental levels within a child and their ability to independently solve a problem, solve a problem with adult guidance, or solve a problem in collaboration with peers (McLeod, 2019). There is a difference between what students can do independently and what they can do with the support of someone else- a partner, teacher, or parent. The word proximal means skills that learners have nearly mastered (McLeod, 2019). Teachers can support their students in moving through the zone of proximal development by giving support to the student in the presence of a person who has deeper knowledge and skills than the student. Teachers can also let students have social interaction, or observations of a tutor practicing their skills. Finally, teachers can also scaffold learning for students by helping them complete skills with support (McLeod, 2019). Scaffolding is a gradual withdrawal of support as it becomes unnecessary to students as they grow. This leads to Gradual Release of Responsibility.

The model of Gradual Release of Responsibility was built upon several theories- Piaget's cognitive schema in 1952, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development in 1978, and Wood, Bruner, and Ross's ideas on scaffolded instruction in 1976 (Frey & Fischer, 2013). Pearson and Gallagher in 1983 introduced the Gradual Release of Responsibility model which says that teaching

and student practice should be a slow release with intentionality. Explicit lessons, guided instruction, group work and finally independent learning (Frey & Fischer, 2013). This work was foundational for the work in the development of the Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework by McLaughlin and DeVoogd in 2004.

Explain

Teachers start with their students by naming a critical literacy strategy and explaining how it works. It is important that students have a background in what critical literacy is and why it is important to implement it into our daily routine as readers. Once teachers have chosen a strategy, they need to explain to students what and how that strategy works (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) gave an example that teachers could start by explaining Alternative Perspectives- explaining to students that characters have different points of view and that stories are normally told by one specific character and their perspective. Disclosing this information before reading gives students purpose to read and helps them to understand what to be listening for to prepare for a critical analysis discussion post read.

Demonstrate

After teachers have explained what the strategy is that they will be using, teachers should demonstrate it for their students. There is understanding that students learn well when teachers model for them what their thinking should look like and how they should respond to their reading (McLaughlin & DeVoogd,

2004). Continuing, McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) used the critical literacy strategy Alternative Perspectives as an example. Teachers should model or demonstrate for their students what using Alternative Perspectives looks like by comparing the perspectives within a text to a different text, or a different perspective.

Guide

Next, teachers let their students try the strategy for themselves, while keeping a close eye and monitoring for progress. According to McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004), this stage of the process is called guiding. Teachers must still have supports in place as students are still new to the specific strategy. With a gradual release, students still have support from their teachers, but are able to implement the strategy into their own understanding of a text. Teachers may need to prompt with additional questioning, or support students with language surrounding the strategy.

Practice

At this point in the understanding of critical literary analysis, McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) instruct teachers to loosen the reins a little. In this stage, students continue to practice with a familiar text that has been introduced to students; one in which the teacher knows the critical literacy strategy will apply. Students should analyze the text independently, or with a partner, so teachers can see if students understand the strategy and the implications along with its use.

Reflect

Finally, one of the most important aspects of the lesson is the time of reflection. It is important to help students reflect upon how the critical literacy strategy was applied and why it is important (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). How to apply that specific strategy to other texts is also important to truly understand the strategy and not just the strategy specific to that particular text. Students should also reflect upon how the strategy makes them better readers and more critical of the text and the author.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) encouraged teachers to make critical literacy strategies and the implementation process part of daily instruction. It should become ingrained in students' minds and reading routines. The framework engages students' background knowledge and sets a purpose for reading, giving them insight into what critical literacy strategy they will be previewing. It guides students as they engage in the text, pushing them to engage their thinking as they read or are read to. The framework pushes to engage students after reading by participating in conversations involving critical literacy and learning how to take a critical perspective. Finally, the framework pushes teachers to reflect on the strategy and how it was important for students.

How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text? Teachers have heard what the literature says about teacher questioning practices and their impact on student comprehension of texts, including the purpose behind questioning, different types of questions teachers employ, and how to prepare questions. Exploration leading to critical literacy in

the classroom has taken place with a definition of critical literacy, the theory behind it, and specific strategies to implement. Finally, teachers have learned about the implementation process through a framework provided to use in the classroom.

Summary

How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?

Teachers work to consistently deepen their questioning strategies as a pursuit of deepening and broadening student thinking about a text. Learning how questioning practices with higher level thinking prompts students to deepen their understanding of texts they are exposed to is essential to being a successful educator and facilitator of literacy. Prompting their students to make meaning of texts with connections, predictions, and actively questioning the text is the true purpose of questioning.

“Critical literacy has been described in many different ways by numerous literacy educators, theorists, and linguists...disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and prompting social justice.” (Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002, p. 382). Paulo Freire (1970) got much of the credit for getting the ball rolling on making students aware beyond what they see in their own perspectives based on the texts they read. There are a large variety of questioning strategies to teach students to participate in a critical analysis conversation, including problem posing, switching, alternative perspectives, and exploring identities. It is important that teachers become fluent with these in their practice as not only a deepened

comprehension strategy, but also a tool to get students to think beyond their own perspectives.

There is an agreed upon framework to implement critical literacy within the classroom including using the strategies of explain, demonstrate, guide, practice, and reflect. Walking students through this process allows for transfer and gives students the tools to successfully dissect a text. By employing this framework in classrooms, teachers slowly release responsibility to students as they have fully set them up for success in comprehending texts by modeling it and guiding practice with students.

Chapter Three of this Capstone provides a detailed explanation of the Capstone Project- a website created that utilizes deepened questioning and critical literacy strategies with specified texts. An overview of the project, the purpose behind the work completed, the rationale behind the topic chosen, the intended audience for the project, the research needed to complete the work, and a timeline of the work that was completed.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text? I still consider and keep this question at the center of my continuing pursuit about deepening my questioning techniques while utilizing critical literacy strategies to prompt student understanding of texts. Being centered upon this question helps as I begin to piece together an answer. I disclosed my personal journey to becoming critically literate, as well as my professional journey as to why this topic is important to myself and my students. I thoroughly examined and explained what many professionals and experts in the field of education and literacy have to say about what critical literacy is, the theories behind it, as well as what strategies to implement into our own existing curricula and routines with students during the literacy block. An agreed upon framework professionals say should be used to implement critical literacy strategies in classrooms was explored. Finally, I reviewed what the professionals in the field say about questioning our students. This information was synthesized from various different professionals in the field and the agreed upon norms within the literacy block when it comes to deepening student thinking about a text and specifically how critical literacy and questioning techniques can support student learning.

But where to go from here? How does implementation look? How does critical literacy fit into the teaching day? Where does one find the resources to implement critical literacy? Teachers need a resource, a place to go, that houses this information and

has easy, applicable strategies built into existing curriculum. My Capstone Project addresses these needs and provides teachers with resources to begin implementing critical literacy strategies in the classroom, in turn deepening their students' understanding of texts. To address the needs teachers have, I created a website that is user friendly and packed with applicable information, books, and strategies. The website houses a variety of different texts that teachers can use in their own classrooms, as well as comprehension questions and critical literacy strategies to implement.

In Chapter Three, I provide a basic overview of what my project looks like and how it could be useful to teachers. I also share research behind the paradigm, framework and theories of my project, as well as some background as to why I believe this project is important now more than ever in our schools. I explain how it is organized, as well as who can use it. A full project description is followed by a personal timeline of when the project was completed. My hope is that this will be useful in future classrooms and an easy one stop shop for teachers who are always short on time to easily implement in their own classrooms.

Overview of Project

To attempt to answer the question, *how does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*, I have developed a website of resources for teachers to implement in their classrooms that promotes deep thinking through questioning and critical literacy practices (Appendix A). The website is filled with resources based on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this Capstone. What I learned about questioning in Chapter Two of this Capstone is that achieving a higher

level of comprehension with students in a text, teachers must prompt them with higher level thinking questions beyond simply recalling information from a text (Nappi, 2017). One way of achieving this is through critical literacy strategies.

A passion filled project, the website gives background on why deepening questioning through critical literacy strategies is important for student comprehension. The website houses a basic overview of information about critical literacy and the research behind why it is important for students to utilize critical literacy in their learning. The website is filled with sources, articles, books, and videos to give educators further information on the topic of questioning and how it can boost their students' comprehension with questioning and critical literacy strategies. Another portion of the website includes the critical literacy strategies recommended by the professionals in the field with questioning examples to go along with each strategy. The bulk of the website is resources that teachers can use- mostly intended for my third grade team of teachers in my school district. It aligns with the text sets within our reading curriculum and extends upon the suggested questions in the curriculum. For each text, I have included critical literacy strategies aligned to the book. The Critical Literacy Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework, described in Chapter Two, gives the basis behind how all the resources and information are presented within the website. I gave an overview of questioning practices and information to use within a classroom with students during interactive read aloud, small group instruction, or individual conferring. The implementation process can be found in the Critical Literacy Guided Comprehension Direct Instruction Framework. The bulk of the website is a resource that teachers can use

because of all that I learned from Chapter Two of this Capstone. I created a database of diverse books that teachers can have at their fingertips to pull and use within our district's website. However, I believe the website could also be utilized by teachers outside of the district.

Purpose

The first and most important purpose for my Capstone Project is to bring texts that accurately and fairly reflect a diverse set of characters and experiences to teachers. I learned that both having texts that reflect student perspectives and having texts that do not reflect, but rather stretch student perspectives is of strong importance. Bringing forth a diverse set of texts, with worldly viewpoints, for students to examine to deepen their understanding and perspectives of the texts was the driving purpose behind my work.

The second purpose behind creating a website for teachers is to have everything in one place and to be easily accessible. Halfway through the school year 2020-2021, the school district I work in adopted a new resource to be utilized for our reading instruction. *Fountas and Pinnell Classroom Interactive Read-Aloud Collection* (Heinemann, 2021) is filled with texts and corresponding questioning strategies and lessons. The intention of *The Fountas and Pinnell Classroom Interactive Read-Aloud Collection* is to bring forth texts with a worldly viewpoint that reflect diversity (Heinemann, 2021). It is designed to implement interactive conversations among students in context rich environments. I wanted to take those texts and pre-existing questions supplied for teachers and expand upon them, implementing critical literacy strategies that teachers can use to further and

deeper comprehension for their students. Questioning and using critical literacy strategies will deepen student understanding of texts, which is the purpose behind this Capstone.

My goal was to make my website be a similar format to our school's websites for the teachers in my school district and my team. However, it could also be used by other teachers outside the district and could be implemented within any school district's curriculum. Often, in speaking with colleagues both in and out of my own school district, teachers express that finding quality children's literature that is easily accessible with lessons and strategies is incredibly time consuming and challenging. With teachers supplying so many of their own texts in school districts, my goal is to give them an accessible place to gather resources. I am hoping my website will take some of the burden off of teachers, and give them a one-stop place to acquire diverse, quality texts alongside questioning and critical literacy tools and strategies.

Rationale

According to Niche (2021), the school district where I work has a student population where 89.2% of the students are white. In my first year of teaching in this district, a professional in the building called our lack of diversity "our greatest downfall." It is also a very affluent district. In turn, our students have a slightly skewed view of what the diversity of the world looks like. The reality is, the general population of the United States does not mirror this statistic. It would be a disservice to our students if teachers did not give them authentic learning opportunities about cultures outside of their own. Again, this prompts thinking about the work done by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990)- readers seek out books where they feel as if they are seeing a mirror, a reflection of their lives. If the

goal is for students to be deeply knowledgeable and possess worldly intelligence, teachers must give them those learning opportunities.

In consulting with our district literacy specialist, the curriculum utilized within the district was written by teachers for teachers. The newly adopted resource has given us a solid start to creating diverse text sets, but in an attempt to diversify texts for students, some of the texts perpetuated stereotypes. There is a need for thoughtfully curated text sets with representation of diverse characters, settings, and topics. The School Library Journal (2019) says that there is improved representation of underrepresented communities within children's books, but there continues to be misrepresentation. The number of books was expanded, but the inaccuracies also expanded (School Library Journal, 2019). Expanding the diverse texts teachers bring to students and how to talk about them with students is integral to the critical literacy process. Hopefully my project will help accomplish this.

Audience

The intended audience for my project was my third grade team of teachers. My goal was to expand the text sets already in place and diversify the books students have contact with during interactive read aloud. My website takes the texts provided, and applies critical literacy strategies. Additionally, the website expands the text sets beyond what is provided. That being said, my goal was to give a resource for teachers beyond my team as well. I wanted to give a variety of different texts for third grade teachers, in or out of the district, for teaching purposes of a variety of different skills. I also felt that this resource could be used outside of my school district for any teacher that wants to

diversify their read alouds and needs an accessible database of texts to use with students. The comprehension questions and critical literacy strategies that go along with each text could be useful for teachers who want to deepen their own questioning techniques and create critical thinkers in their own students.

Research

According to Wiggins and McTighe (2011), “Essential questions are ongoing and guiding queries by which we make clear to students that true learning is about digging deeper; it is active, not passive” (p. 15). The focus of my time working on the project was on developing essential questions to go along with the texts chosen. As the research showed, higher level questioning, and perhaps using critical literacy strategies, is essential to student deepened comprehension. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) said “when we truly engage with a topic, we pursue questions that naturally arise: Why? How? What does this mean? What of it? What is its significance? What follows? These and other vital questions kindle our own meaning-making...” (p. 15). Giving teachers embedded questions that take students deeply into comprehension of the text, as well as giving them opportunity to critically analyze a text is what is provided within my project. The research done in Chapter Two answering the question, *how does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*, prompted this Capstone Project and the implementation of higher level questions that teachers utilize in texts.

The goal of the Capstone Project was to diversity text sets and provide critical literacy tools and strategies for teachers to use with students in order to deepen comprehension. To complete this work, I followed Wiggins and McTighe’s (2011) states

of design: desired results, evidence, and finally a learning plan. I completed a needs-based assessment with the district literacy specialist where she identified holes in the scope and sequence of the curriculum and identified desired results. The evidence is based on data from students, as well as what other staff feels is needed. My final step was a created learning plan to help make my resource.

Assessment

My Capstone Project aimed to answer the question, *how does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* The first part of my website focuses on the first portion of my research question- questioning. The attention is on how teachers question in the classroom and how it impacts student understanding. The deepening questions page in the website addresses why questioning is important as well as discloses the importance of a reading comprehension question response inventory within the reading context and the impact on student understanding.

The second part of my website focuses on the second portion of my research question- critical literacy. One strategy that teachers can use to address and deepen the questioning practices used with students is through critical literacy. My website gives background and defines what critical literacy is, as well as names multiple different critical literacy strategies that implement a deeper questioning stance during the reading process. A variety of different texts were gathered and critical literacy questioning strategies were listed for each individual text.

The final focus on the website is how student thinking about a text is deepened and comprehension is explored. Beyond disclosing research behind deepening questions

through critical literacy strategies, beyond specified texts and correlating critical literacy questionings, comes additional research and information for teachers based on the research I learned about through this process of understanding how students expand their lens of texts.

Timeline

My pursuit of giving students the opportunity to think critically about texts and providing students with texts that offer multiple perspectives, all started in June 2020 when I began to search for the answer to the question, *how does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* I began gathering information and established a need in my own community and school district, along with input from professionals in my building for a way to deepen student comprehension. Keeping students at the center of all of this has always been my number one goal. I worked through the summer, crafting together research and information to see how I could make an impact on my own students and on my colleagues' students to deepen their understanding of texts.

Throughout the winter of 2021, I continued my pursuit of learning about questioning techniques and critical literacy strategies to deepen my students' understanding of texts. I selected texts that prompted deeper questioning and expanded upon the questions provided in the curriculum. I aligned those texts with critical literacy strategies studied in Chapter Two. As I selected texts, I tried to think about what opportunities those texts provided for deeper thinking questions. Whose perspective is absent from the text? Is there multicultural representation within the text? If so, how are

those cultures portrayed? I began piecing together strategies with the texts and listed them in a formatted lesson plan page that students could use to supplement the questions that were already prepared for them. The process was long and tedious, but incredibly rewarding. It gave me a greater perspective into the texts prepared for my students. I put those questioning lesson plans on my website. I also added extension research for teachers if they want to learn more about critical literacy and provided citations and links for teachers to do further research. In April 2021, I completed the website that houses strategies for questioning in the classroom, and potential research for teachers to pursue. I worked with the district literacy specialist to truly gauge the need within the school and spoke with colleagues to understand their desires for deepened questioning strategies beyond the supplied questions from our curriculum. September 2020 through December 2020 was a time of planning and gathering to launch off the actual work of putting the project together in the spring before I graduated from Hamline in the spring of 2021. I used time with my colleagues during meetings to assess their own needs and see what I could put into the website that could be useful to them and of easy access. In the professional learning community weekly meetings, the focus is on a subject and a need. I proposed this project to the team and determined how I could work to meet some of the needs we have. The launch date of the website and ability to use the resources by my colleagues was June 2021.

Summary

What a journey this has been. Starting the summer of 2020 with an idea to deepen my students' comprehension and thinking about texts has brought me to this point-

creating a website filled with resources that teachers can utilize in their own classrooms, with their own students, and their own curriculum. Many authors and professionals agreed that deepening the questioning of our students builds up their ability to comprehend text and actually has a large impact on how they question texts themselves. Teachers need resources that are easily accessible and are laid out for them with text examples as well as comprehension questions and critical literacy strategies are all embedded. Within this chapter, I have stated my rationale behind why I have chosen this topic, the importance to student comprehension, the intended audience, and an overview of what the website entails.

Chapter Four is the overall conclusion of my whole Capstone Project. It draws upon many of my conclusions while putting the project together. Chapter Four also discloses my personal plan going forward for how I will share my project and use it in my own classroom. It also communicates some of the results of the information I gathered from colleagues and how this impacts their ideas about shortcomings. Finally, Chapter Four communicates overall how my project benefits the profession, and in conclusion, my students and the students of my colleagues. If teachers become stronger at questioning and using critical literacy strategies, students will gain so much and truly be prepared for the diverse world in front of them.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The goal of this Capstone Project was focused on answering the question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* A tall order, certainly. As I began reflecting upon how to answer this question, I moved through a series of learning opportunities and growth. In Chapter One of this Capstone, I reflected upon my “why.” What personal reasons do I have for this work? What professional reasons do I have for this work? Taking a wider glance, I began learning about the greater need to answer this question within the teaching profession. With purpose behind my work, I launched into reviewing the literature around critical literacy and questioning in Chapter Two. A brief history and an agreed upon definition for critical literacy brings readers to the same level of learning and understanding, and gives reasoning behind effective questioning strategies within the classroom. This process sets purpose for the strategies teachers can utilize in their classrooms, how to deepen our questioning practices with students, and how it is implemented in the classroom. This led into Chapter Three and the launch of my Capstone Project implementation. Bringing those strategies and information right into the hands of teachers to be utilized in the classroom through the use of my website.

This brings Chapter Four: the reflective narrative about all of the learning I have encountered the past year of study, and how implementation of my project could benefit the greater profession. In Chapter Four of my Capstone, my reflections are explored.

What have I learned? Why is it important to the profession? Where will my project go? Where do I go from here? What are my personal plans for my Capstone Project, and how could I see the implementation in the school district where I teach? How could it be used outside of my own school district?

This finalized the formal writing process and construction of my Capstone Project. I review the main emphasis of my learning and conducting my final thoughts. However, the idea that is bringing me comfort is that my learning is not finished, nor will ever be finished, despite the final publication of this writing piece. Although it is a snapshot of what I have learned thus far, I hope I will continue to see it as a working document, for my own personal, and professional growth as a teacher.

Capstone Highlights and Reflections

In this portion of Chapter Four, I reflect on some of my biggest learnings through this year of reflection. I also pull the greatest learnings I have had through the Capstone process as a researcher, writer, and learner. This section will also focus on the literature review from Chapter Two. A few of the most important authors are brought forward to give a brief background on the purpose behind the work I have completed this year.

Learnings

The Capstone Project started as a dream or maybe even a frustration about how to deepen my students' comprehension of texts and expose them to diverse texts that accurately represented different cultures. I began researching and looking into strategies teachers can use to accomplish this, and came across critical literacy. This prompted my question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student*

thinking about a text? I began learning how to think critically about texts myself as a teacher. Questions began running through my mind as I was reading text with a critical lens. It was at this point, I began looking at those same books from the lens of bringing them to my students. What kinds of questions would I ask my students to deepen their understanding of the text? I began researching critical literacy strategies and the theory behind it. The work of Paulo Freire continually came up in my research and his ideas about looking through a critical lens at texts. Including, varying the lens you view text with. A different lens can offer a different understanding both within and out of your own worldly lens.

I then began looking at specific strategies teachers can implement within their own teaching practice to deepen their student understanding of texts. The questions teachers prompt students with impacts their understanding. Teachers can accomplish a deeper sense of understanding by prompting students with questions that involve critical thinking. The deeper questioning strategies used with students, the deeper their understanding is. I began to exhaust the research on the topic, pouring over what the experts in the teaching field had to say about deepening questioning. As a researcher, I began to notice commonalities within the research and what professionals in the field had to say about my topic. I began to learn about and notice how the research was formatted, which aided in my own creation of my project and the academic writing I was completing.

Aside from growing as a researcher, I also grew as a writer. I noticed very quickly how casual my writing style is even in an academic writing sense like this one. I began

learning about how to craft together sentences and strengthen the word choices I was using. I also began learning how to rephrase academic writing but keep the academic integrity of the sentence. Further, I learned that I enjoy using a lot of pronouns which are not acceptable in an academic writing sense when reviewing literature. I had to take myself out of the equation of the work I was doing within my writing. I feel as though crafting together research from many different sources into a work product that flowed was also a challenge presented to me. I did most work and construction in my second chapter and the flow of the information presented going in a logical order. Finally, I had to work through the repetitive nature of always drawing the reader back to my question and the importance not only for me, but for the greater education community.

Through the process of doing this work, I discovered I really enjoy being a learner. I began thinking about how research from multiple authors can come together to create impact and change upon your teaching patterns and your student's learning. This Capstone Project aided in my understanding of questioning and critical literacy strategies. I began to think about texts with a different lens. I audited my classroom library, studied books written by diverse authors, and began to think about questioning differently and the impact questions have on my students' comprehension, and view of the world. I looked for texts that expanded upon the perspectives my students are exposed to. I wanted to find literature that opposed their viewpoints. I carefully planned the questions to use with texts, reflecting the critical literacy strategies I learned about, and applied them to the texts I brought to my students. Literacy is so much bigger than I ever realized. Literacy has a great impact on who our students become and the impact they will have on the

world, if we cultivate those expansive conversations. I also had to learn how to format a research paper, use google sites for my website creation, and organize information that is easily accessible. The greatest comfort to my learning is that the learning is not over. There will be continued research by myself and others on the topic for teachers to deepen questioning with their students and implementing critical literacy strategies within the classroom.

Literature Review

Seeking an answer to the question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*, I compiled research from authors writing about how teachers can deepen their questioning practices with students to deepen their comprehension of texts. One way this is accomplished is if teachers employ critical literacy strategies when bringing a text to their students. The work of Judith S. Nappi in her article for the *International Journal for Professional Educators*, gave the basis for why questioning is important for educators to keep at the front of their professional development (2017). Discourse between teachers and students not only is informative for teacher work going forward, but also deepens student understanding of a text through higher order thinking level questioning (Nappi, 2017). The understanding behind questioning, Bloom's Taxonomy being named of importance, gives purpose to the attempt at answering my question and the reasoning behind my attempt at understanding the agreed upon norms set by professionals in the field.

This brings in the work of Paulo Friere and his work in the 1970s. He encouraged teachers to empower their students by questioning the world and the word they encounter.

He had deep ties to the inquiry process and encouraged readers to read with a lens of thinking critically about the text and its portrayal of marginalized people. He pushed the thinking that reading is more than simply decoding text, but rather is intertwined with knowledge of the world and personal experiences (McDaniel, 2004). Friere's research paved the way for teaching teachers to deepen their student's comprehension of texts through a deeper understanding of thinking critically and questioning critically (McDaniel, 2004). He paved the way for critical literacy strategies to be implemented in classrooms.

The final portion of my literature review was based on the work of Maureen McLaughlin and Glenn DeVoogd (2004). To deepen the questioning teachers use with students, they need guidance on how that is done. McLaughlin and DeVoogd said teachers should encourage their students to question; how characters are portrayed, how situations are portrayed, how the information in the book is presented to the reader, and whose perspectives are included or not (2004). Teaching students to question, by teachers modeling questioning strategies, deepens their comprehension of texts. Strategies to be implemented in the classroom include: problem posing, where teachers teach students to question the representation (characters, perspectives, settings) within a text. Another strategy is switching, where teachers change a variety of different portions of the text and analyze the impact on the text. Alternative perspectives, another critical literacy strategy, changes the perspectives, characters, alternative texts, or physicality of the characters within a text. Finally, exploring identities, analyzes the readers identity and the identity of the character's within a text (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). These critical literacy

strategies deeply impacted my understanding of questioning and how to deepen student perspectives when analyzing a text. Questioning, if implemented with higher level application, can expand student perspectives and give them a worldly view. It can support them in seeing perspectives beyond their own, or in the opposite sense by seeing characters who look like them. There is a balance of students seeing themselves in the texts they read, but also bringing different perspectives to students who only see themselves in the texts they read. Having perspectives in two different schools brought this thinking out in how I want to support my students.

Policy Implications

The work to be done is important. The impact this work can have on students is encouraging. There is great need in the field for this work. Teaching students to analyze texts with a critical lens and understand that each author has a bias not only increases their comprehension of texts, but also makes them deeper thinkers. Teachers questioning their students with a deeper level questioning technique only brings that out for students.

Many school districts are doing the work by implementing cultural competency work and diversifying the texts students are being exposed to. Expanding the texts in classroom libraries, bringing forth different perspectives in the education world, understanding the backgrounds and trauma some students come to the classroom door with. However, the implications of implementing critical literacy strategies as a norm within the classroom could have a lasting impact on students and test scores. School districts adopting the policy of critical

literacy in the classroom and the commitment to deepening questioning with students will see benefit. Professional development around this area and giving teachers time to plan for implementation is key. Training from reading specialists and modeling in the classroom could increase teacher understanding of the topic of deepening questioning.

Another policy implication relates to budgeting for quality texts for teachers to have access and having resources available for teachers to select texts that accurately represent different cultures. Building diverse texts for teachers to use in the classroom and school libraries is integral for the work we have in front of us to accomplish. More spending should be placed upon curriculums that support this deepened understanding of texts and more spending should be placed upon reading specialists in schools, reading interventionists in schools, literacy coaches and media specialists to support teachers in the selection of quality texts.

Project Limitations

Like any prepared work, there are limitations to the project I have created. One limitation of my project is the limited quantity of teachers who will have access to the materials I presented. Housed in the Hamline Commons, and shared with my district, the use beyond that may be limited. I understand that not everyone will have the opportunity to see the work I have created.

Another limitation of my project is the budget and finances for school districts. Although the district I work for puts great importance on providing texts for teachers that have characters with multiple different perspectives, I understand

that this is not the case for all schools. The texts provided here align with the text sets my school district has purchased, but this may not be applicable outside of my school district for many teachers who use money from their own pockets to supply the learning materials for their classrooms.

Additionally, reporting on the use of my website and the findings or feedback from teachers will be limited as the use of the website will not launch until the 2021-2022 school year. I have sought feedback from teachers throughout the process, but the final product will be launched in the fall of 2021, in which case the project is already completed. However, my hope is that this will propel me to continue my study and research of the topic. Just because it is published in the Hamline Commons does not mean that my study and editing of the website should stop.

An additional limitation of my project could be something that is always a challenge- teacher buy in. Teachers already have a lot on their plate. I could see teachers not seeing a need for critical literacy strategies as an attempt to deepen their questioning with their students, when there are other available pedagogies. My hope is that teachers will be open to a need for deepened questioning strategies.

Finally, a limitation of the amount of texts is present. I wish I could spend years and years putting together exhaustive lists of texts and applied critical literacy strategies that are available. However, I like to see this from my end as a

working document, and an ever changing website that evolves with my continued understanding and knowledge in my years of teaching.

Future Research and Recommendations

The work is not complete. This portion of the chapter will be my future recommendations and research for teachers to complete in order to have a deeper understanding of questioning students and critical literacy strategies. There are future recommendations given on continual pursuit to answer the question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?*

Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers educate themselves beyond what is presented within this body of work and what is in the website I have created. Due to the narrow focus of my topic, continued pursuit on the topic is highly encouraged. Additionally, it is recommended that additional sources be included in further study of the topic. The authors cited here are only a small handful of those represented in the field on this topic, so a wider lens of authors would give a better picture of the truths behind critical literacy work in the educational profession. New work is continually being published on the ideas cited here and therefore growth to the profession is imperative.

It is recommended that additional texts are presented to students, and that the texts cited here are a starting point for teachers to use with their students.

Beyond picture books, teachers should seek out chapter books that students could

read to themselves or teachers could use as a read aloud to supplement the suggested texts. New books are continually being published by diverse authors, and teachers should seek out the latest and greatest books to bring to their students. Because of this, a deep understanding of how to implement critical literacy strategies is important so teachers can implement those strategies in texts outside of what is included in my project.

Finally, continual spending on teacher development on the topics of equality, learning about cultural competency is highly recommended. Education very quickly adapts to the changing dynamics of the world, and it is imperative that teachers bring this knowledge and understanding to their students. If teachers continue in the inquiry process, their students will learn to do the same.

Benefit to the Profession

My Capstone Project is a compiled list of the latest research conducted on how to deepen student understanding of texts and in turn make them more critical thinkers and readers. The ultimate goal of teachers in the profession is to teach their students to be deeper thinkers and comprehend texts at a deeper level. But how do teachers go about accomplishing that? And how can teachers find quality texts to utilize those skills with their students?

I have compiled this information and created a website housing strategies to accomplish this goal. The website contains the latest information and research about critical literacy strategies and their benefit to the profession in the classroom. Additionally, teachers have easy access to a few diverse sets of texts

with critical literacy strategies tailored to each one so they can quickly pull the text and read it with students. They will have no more searching for texts with diverse characters or needing to come up with questions on the spot to utilize with students can serve as models, so that teachers can further the work on their own.

There is balance. Students need exposure to texts where characters look differently than them, live in different situations, or can think critically about how the text would change if the characters were different from them. For some students, they need exposure to under-represented characters because the majority of authors write books about characters who look like them. Other students need exposure to texts where the characters look like them. They are under-represented in the texts that they see and need to see characters that they can relate to. With so much work being done with race relations and social justice, it would be a disservice to students if they did not have the same access to this education before entering the real world. The implementation of the questioning techniques is easily laid out and can aid teachers in having some important discussions with their students to not only deepen their understanding, but also broaden their thinking.

Continued Work

The reality is this work I have completed is barely scraping the surface of the research on deepening student thinking about a text through questioning, and potentially utilizing critical literacy strategies. I understand there is important work still to be done. These questioning and critical literacy strategies should

become the norm in classrooms around the world. This work will continue for me personally, but hopefully for other teachers as well.

As of now, I have taken three text sets provided to me and applied my new knowledge and understanding of critical literacy strategies to these text sets.

However, I want to build in these strategies to all the text sets my school district has adopted with our new curriculum. This means that my website will constantly be changing and expanding in the future. I am hoping this is not only a resource for my students and my classroom, for the other teachers on my third grade team as well, but for other teachers looking to expand on the same work.

Communicating Results

While building the website and compiling the research, I decided to seek out feedback from colleagues and my content expert. I wanted feedback on the usability, the navigation of the website, and the content present. I feel like these teachers felt a sense of ownership and were invested in the work I was creating.

I will share my website with my team of third grade teachers in hope that they can utilize the website content in their own classrooms. Each teacher on my team has these same text sets, so will have access to those as well. My hope is that they feel comfortable coming back to seek implementation strategies in their own classrooms with their students. I am also hoping they come to seek out additional resources and learning opportunities about deepening student comprehension of texts.

Beyond my own team of third grade teachers, my project will also be presented to my Hamline colleagues to use in their own classrooms. The website link and access to the questioning strategies will be present for my colleagues attending Hamline and creating their own projects as well. Finally, my capstone project will be housed on the Hamline Digital Commons for other teachers to access for years to come. My hope is that the usability is easily implemented within the classroom and can be seen through a variety of different texts.

Through continued feedback, my website will be a working document and continue to be modified, expanded upon and changed. Much like the teaching job, what is the benefit of not seeing further development in the tools we are using? I look forward to seeing where my website could go.

Summary

Chapter Four was a culmination of the reflections I had completing the Capstone process and completing my project to be presented. The chapter reviewed my major learnings as a researcher, writer, and learner. I revisited the literature review and the main authors who impacted the work I created in my capstone project, citing sources that made a great impact on the work I created. I made understanding and connections across various different pieces of literature. I included policy implications that could, or should come from the work I created. I reviewed the limitations that come with the creation of my project, and the benefit that could come from either removing or mitigating/lessening the impact of those limitations. I also covered the hopes I have for the future of this project and where

I hope to take it personally in the years to come. I see it as a working document, ever changing and adapting as my learning grows.

Ultimately, the goal of this Capstone Project was to answer the question: *How does asking questions that promote critical literacy deepen student thinking about a text?* This was my attempt to answer the question. Will I ever know the full extent of how asking questions can deepen student thinking about a text? I do not think that work will ever have a finishing point. Rather, I hope this is a continual pursuit of excellence as a teacher. I have learned an incredible amount about critical literacy strategies. I have learned ways to implement critical literacy strategies with a particular text to question students and deepen their understanding of texts. Ultimately, I hope this project gives teachers the tools to have those conversations with their students, and my hope is that students have a deeper understanding of texts, and ultimately the world they live in.

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Appendix A

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