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Using a Text Set of Diverse Media to Teach Alternative Perspectives to Third Grade Students

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USING A TEXT SET OF DIVERSE MEDIA TO TEACH ALTERNATIVE
PERSPECTIVES TO THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

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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DEDICATION

To everybody that encouraged me, believed in me, supported me, and never let me quit.
There are too many of you to name. I couldn't have done this without you.
To my students, past, present, and future. You inspire me to be my very best self every
day. I hope I can inspire you to do the same.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Literacy, and the skills associated with reading, have the power to not only change us as people, but have the potential to change the world. Reading has always been near and dear to my heart, as one can probably tell from the master's degree I have chosen to pursue. In the past few years it has also become incredibly clear that I have a great deal of responsibility as a teacher of reading. The International Reading Association states that literacy educators must “create and engage their students in literacy practices that develop awareness, understanding, respect, and a valuing of differences in our society.” (IRA, 2010). It is not only my job to teach my third grade students the phonics and comprehension skills necessary to be a good reader, but I also have the task of teaching them how to think critically when reading, and to question what they read. If there is anything that I have learned from being an elementary school teacher over the past few years, it is that critical literacy skills are essential in order to be a good reader and a good citizen. Being able to understand another person's perspective and have empathy for someone who may have different thoughts or beliefs is a fundamental part of the human experience. I have also noticed a need to center the concept of identity and culture in the classroom, because the world would be a better place if everybody learned to be proud of who they are and to understand that not everybody will be exactly like them.

In Chapter One you will read about the personal and professional journey that led me to my research question, *how can a text set made of diverse books be used to teach*

alternative perspectives to third grade students? This chapter will include information and reflections about my personal and professional experiences with literacy, diverse books, text sets, and identity. I will then reflect on how I was influenced to determine my objective for my Capstone project. After that I will state my objective, how I plan to achieve it, and the relevance of my research to my students, colleagues, and the field of literacy education. This chapter will end with a look ahead at what is to come in the following chapters, as well as a summary of what was covered in this chapter.

Literacy: A Lifelong Passion

I have always loved to read. My family greatly influenced my love of literacy. My mom always read to me when I was a child, and brought me to the library every week in the summer to pick out books. I remember staying up late at night reading with just the light from my Gameboy Advance, which I used as a reading light far more than a gaming system. I just had to find out what happened in whatever book I happened to be reading that week!

Some of my favorite books growing up were books that were introduced to me by teachers or books that were read aloud during class. I remember always being so excited when that time of year came in elementary school to stop reading the stories from the reading book and read a real chapter book and talk about it as a class. These early experiences with books greatly shaped me as a reader, learner, and person.

Books were a way for me to explore the world outside of my small northern Minnesota town. I could read about far away and make believe places from the comfort of my bedroom. Reading was also a way for me to understand how the world worked, as there weren't many people in my small town that didn't look like me or have a similar

culture. It wasn't until I was in high school that I realized that I loved reading so much that I wanted to become an elementary school teacher so that I could share my passion for literacy with as many people as possible.

Early Years of Teaching

Literacy quickly became my favorite subject to teach as I began my career. I loved the discussions that stemmed from the literacy curriculum in my district, and that even though I taught reading to two different fifth grade classes, the discussions never ended up going in the same direction. I taught fifth grade in northern Minnesota in 2016, and this meant there were a lot of conversations about what was happening in politics and the world at the time in my classroom. Elementary students knew what was happening in the world, and they wanted to talk about it. As a first year teacher, I was not prepared to facilitate these types of conversations, or teach my students to see events from another person's perspective and have empathy for that person. There were also a lot of things about the world that my students didn't understand, and I struggled to explain them when they asked me. One day we were reading a story about a family that went on a trip to Colonial Williamsburg. The family in the story was Asian American, and one of my students asked how the family could go to Colonial Williamsburg if they lived in China. I tried to explain that we didn't know if this family was Chinese, and that they were an American family that happened to also be Asian. My students did not understand how someone that wasn't White could be an American. I remember going home that night frustrated and wondering how I could broaden the worldview of my students. I then came to realize that when I was a fifth grader I probably held the same beliefs. It wasn't until adulthood that I gained a wider global perspective.

Before my year of teaching in northern Minnesota, I taught English to Chinese first graders at an international school in Weifang, Shandong Province, China. Living in China was the first time in my life that I was in a place where most people didn't look like me, and it was a pivotal experience in my life. Having the chance to live on the other side of the world, in a country that has very different customs than the United States, made me realize how much of the world I didn't know about. Even as a twenty-two-year-old college graduate, I didn't always see China from the perspective of my Chinese classmates and coworkers. This led to a lot of misunderstandings that could have been avoided had I just known more about the importance of culture and identity. I made it my goal to teach all of my students about places and people from all over the world, so they could embrace the world for all of the amazing things it has to offer instead of viewing other places as "less than" because of how the people there looked, lived, or spoke.

Current Teaching Practice

My current teaching position is in a third grade classroom at an elementary school in a second ring suburb of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The population of this school is about half White and half BIPOC students. Working at my current school has taught me so many things, and has truly shaped who I am as a teacher and a person. During my first year we had professional development sessions with someone from Equity Alliance MN, and those were incredible learning experiences for me. Race and culture were never topics that were discussed in my home growing up, and this was the first time that I realized that I, a white person, had a culture. I am embarrassed this took until I was twenty-five years old, but these professional development sessions taught me about the importance of identity and culture to a person's learning and experiences at school. The

following year I became a member of my school's equity team, and being a part of that group has helped me realize just how much work there is to do towards an equitable classroom, but also how important that work is.

I have been working to incorporate more diverse books into my classroom library since discovering the We Need Diverse Books hashtag and website (diversebooks.org) a few years ago. I remember reading an article about windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) in literacy during a professional development session and being absolutely floored that I had never stopped to think about how all the characters in the books I read growing up looked like me. It made me want to work as hard as I could to give each of my students the chance to pick a book from my classroom library and see themselves.

Critical literacy was introduced to me during my first class at Hamline. The course was called Critical Literacy, and I had never heard the term before. I learned that critical literacy requires a reader to think critically about what they read and question what they hear and don't hear (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). That course still stands out as my absolute favorite, not only because we got to read and review diverse children's books as assignments, but because I had never stopped to consider how important it is to be able to read something from a critical stance. This was a completely new way for me to think about reading comprehension. I got to discover possibilities of literacy instruction that could be engaging and transformative.

My interest in these topics was developed further through my coursework at Hamline. Creating a text set was another assignment from my critical literacy course that has stuck with me, and has come into my classroom. One of my goals as an educator is to expose my students to as many different genres of texts as possible, and text sets are a

great way to incorporate various perspectives into literacy instruction (Pytash et al., 2014). A text set is a group of texts, both print and digital, that are centered around a common topic. My grade level team is always trying to bring in books with different characters and perspectives than those included in our reading curriculum, and it has been fun to work and create text sets for our units this year. At the beginning of the 2020- 2021 school year my grade level team and I made a commitment to reevaluate the books we use during our literacy units, and to add more diverse perspectives to the voices being shared in our classrooms.

The Call for Racial Equity

The summer of 2020 and the call for racial equity in America, and the Twin Cities area of Minnesota where I live, led me to closely examine my teaching practice and think of ways I can teach my students about identity, race, culture, and how to respect and understand these ideas. The internet was suddenly flooded with lists of children's books with diverse characters and stories, and I began to seek out as many book titles as possible to add to my classroom library. Adding these books to my shelves wasn't enough though, I needed to find a way to incorporate these titles into my curriculum so all my students could have access to them. I committed to taking an even deeper look at myself as a teacher of a diverse group of students, and to take a look at the materials I use for instruction in my classroom. I began to seek out Instagram profiles of educators of color that were willing to share their knowledge, and I began to dig deeper into social justice topics. I have learned a lot about using children's books as a bridge to discuss important topics with elementary school students, and I learned even more about how important representation in media is.

Now What?

My objective is to research how to create an effective and engaging literacy unit that uses diverse media that is centered around the theme of identity and culture to teach the critical literacy skill of alternative perspectives. I will do this by taking my desire to include diverse literature in my classroom and my interest in critical literacy and the use of text sets and digging deeper into these topics.

This all comes back to my passion for literacy. Authentic experiences with authentic texts are important in order to boost student engagement and enjoyment of literacy (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Students will also see reading as something that can be done outside of school when they are presented with authentic texts and tasks during literacy instruction. Knowing all of this, I have tried to use authentic texts during my own literacy instruction as much as possible, and I have noticed that when I use texts featuring diverse characters or stories, my students are more engaged.

This work is important to me now for a few reasons. The first is the power that curriculum and the people that create it have. Curriculum guides instruction, and it is essential that instruction is equitable and inclusive. I want to create a curriculum that can not only teach students comprehension skills, but can teach them the social skills needed to create a better future. Kids need to learn this, now more than ever.

Being a teacher is what I'm supposed to be doing. I know that it is the one thing that I can do to make the world a better place. One Capstone project can't fix the world's problems, and one read-aloud and discussion can't make everybody a more empathetic person. But it sure is a place to start. Hopefully this project, and what I learn from

creating it, can lead me even further on my journey as an educator and advocate for equity and social justice.

This topic is important to other teachers as well. My grade level team and I have had many conversations about how our curriculum needs more stories with characters that look like our students, and more books about places around the world. Many of the books that I will use in my text set were books that I have read with my students this year that have led to interesting and eye opening conversations.

Children are also curious about the world. I have students this year that are fascinated by other countries and cultures. They want to know how they are alike and different from children from other places. My students love reading stories with diverse characters. I will never forget when we read a story about Mae Jemison this year. After reading the story, we watched a short video of the real Mae Jemison talking about what it was like going to space. One of my girls yelled in the middle of the video “She looks like me!”. Representation matters. Empathy and understanding matter. This topic is important to the world.

I developed my research question after realizing that while I’ve always been able to find great critical literacy lessons using one book to teach a certain skill, it has been harder to find complete units focused on critical literacy skills. It is also difficult to find a unit that uses a connected text set made up of diverse books focused around one theme. I want to create something that does it all. This unit will be a combination of all of the things that have been at the forefront of my teaching practice this year, and will center around my one true passion, literacy, while addressing my research question *how can a*

text set made of diverse books be used to teach alternative perspectives to third grade students?

Conclusion

This chapter began with an introduction in which I explained the personal significance of this topic to me, as well as how my professional journey has tied into my choice of project. My passion for literacy and my thought provoking experiences in my early years of teaching highlighted my interest in the areas of diverse books, critical literacy, and text sets. My current teaching position has challenged me to further explore these topics, as I stated in this chapter. I also explored world and local events that caused me to reexamine my practice and recommit to creating a literacy curriculum with diverse representation and perspectives. Finally, I explained what I can do to tackle these goals, and why my goals and objectives matter to my colleagues, my students, and the field of education.

Chapter Two will be a review of relevant literature that I explored to begin my journey of creating my literacy unit. This chapter will explore the topics of critical literacy, diverse books, text sets, and third grade literacy curriculum further, and will tie them all together. Chapter Three will describe my project. The participants, setting, standards, curriculum and lesson design framework, assessments, materials, and instructional strategies will be explained in detail. Chapter Four will be a critical reflection of the work I will have done to create my literacy unit project. This will explore my thoughts on the process, the successes and failures of my work, places where I can grow or improve my work, and steps that I will take to move forward on my path after completing this project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The creation of a curriculum that is made up of diverse media and is used to teach the critical literacy skill alternative perspectives involves a lot of pieces of knowledge. Many different sources have been explored in order to answer my research question *how can a text set made of diverse books be used to teach alternative perspectives to third grade students?*. This chapter will take an in-depth look at the various components and thoughts that are involved in the creation of such a curriculum. The first section will focus on critical literacy. It will explore the definition of critical literacy, the importance of critical literacy skills in today's world, define point of view and alternative perspective, review best practices when teaching critical literacy, and give information on selecting texts used for the instruction of critical literacy skills. The next section of the chapter will focus on diverse books. It will begin with a definition and description of diverse books, explain the importance of representation, cover why diverse books are important, explain the importance of diversity in books going beyond race, and the effects of using diverse books in the classroom. The third section will dive into text sets. Text sets will be defined first, then creating a text set will be explored, the use of text sets for literacy instruction in the elementary classroom will be covered, and finally it will look at using text sets to teach critical literacy. The final section covers the various knowledge that is required to create a third grade literacy curriculum. First it will explore information on the learning theories used in the creation of this curriculum. After that both unit design and lesson design framework will be covered, followed by information

about interactive read-aloud and dialogic discussion in elementary classrooms. Last, strategies such as modeling and authentic tasks will be explored. The chapter will end with a review of what was covered and a preview of chapter three. Critical literacy skills are the main focus of this curriculum project, and have a lot of dimensions to them for both students and teachers, so let's start there.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy has been described in various different ways throughout the years as knowledge and study of the topic has broadened. It can be described as consuming media from a critical standpoint. Critical literacy is thought of as reading the world as opposed to reading the words of a text (Freire, 1970). This may include thinking about the voices heard and not heard, challenging the viewpoints expressed, or examining how the text can promote social justice. A further understanding of the definition of critical literacy is required for this work.

What is Critical Literacy?

Critical literacy sees the reader as being active in the process of reading and encourages them to move beyond accepting the message of the text and instead question the relationship that exists between the author and the reader (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). This process involves students thinking critically about the literature they consume. Reading is not a neutral experience, and critical literacy requires students to think about more than just what the author writes. Understanding the power relationship between the author and reader is needed in order to become critically aware when reading. To practice critical literacy, the reader must consume text from a critical stance, and analyze information that is read instead of accepting it all as fact.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) identify four principles of critical literacy. The first is that critical literacy centers instruction on problems concerning power and promotes critical thinking, change, and taking action. This principle centers on the idea that authors are typically in a position of power over their readers. They choose the words that are written and how those words will be presented. Critical literacy gives power to the reader to question the author and the perspectives heard, and not heard, in stories. Readers can reflect on the author's words and use their power to promote change and take action. The second is that critical literacy focuses on a complex problem. Traditionally, problems are often viewed to have one solution, but in critical literacy the reader is encouraged to examine other factors that may contribute to a problem along with other possible solutions. The third is that critical literacy strategies are dynamic and must be adaptable to the situations in which they are used (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). The entire thought process behind critical literacy is disrupting the ordinary, and this also extends to strategies used during instruction. Two lessons involving critical literacy topics and discussions may be completely different based on the teacher and students present. Critical literacy strategies can and must be adapted to fit the unique situation in which they are used in order to make them as meaningful as possible for students. The fourth and final principle of critical literacy is that it disrupts the traditional by looking at situations from multiple points of view.

Creighton (1997) discusses other principles of critical literacy that are also worth noting. The first is that a reader brings their knowledge of the world with them into any given text or situation. How a person interprets a text is greatly influenced by their thoughts, beliefs, values, and life experiences. This is important to consider when

thinking about alternative perspectives, which will be discussed later in this section. The second principle is that because the reader brings their own knowledge to the text, thus influencing their interpretation, no text can have one meaning. The third is that a student's voice is developed based on their personal experiences and their culture. These three principles can lead one to acknowledge that a group of students can make very different meanings of the same text, and that teachers need to create a literacy community that gives students a chance to respond to text in many different ways to suit the different meanings they may make.

There are several dimensions of critical literacy as well (Lewison et al., 2002). The first is to gain perspective and disrupt a typical situation or understanding. A student in The United States could read a book about what food students from around the world eat in school, and examine why a school lunch in Korea might look different from a school lunch in America. The next is looking at situations from many viewpoints. This could be done by reading a book that presents a perspective that is often left unheard, such as reading a story about the three little pigs told from the wolf's perspective after reading the traditional tale. This would disrupt the pig's narrative which is what is typically heard, and would cause the reader to reflect on how their understanding has changed based on this new perspective. The third is to focus on power relationships between people. Critical literacy often focuses on the power that an author or illustrator has, and acknowledging and being aware of that power while reading. Students can question why an author chose to use certain words to describe a character, or why an illustrator chose a certain medium to create the illustrations. Another dimension is to take action and advocate for social justice. True transfer of critical literacy results in the

ability to stand up and speak out against injustice. Readers could use their skills to critically consume media and use their knowledge to advocate for themselves or for other marginalized groups.

Critical literacy is seen as a necessary part of literacy instruction, but often conversations surrounding how to teach critical literacy skills are either only held at the middle and high school level, or are only mentioned in samples of one or two lesson plans for elementary students that introduce one specific skill. However, these principles and dimensions are essential in order for a person to navigate today's world, regardless of age.

Importance of Critical Literacy Skills

It is said that even in a perfectly equitable society with no conflict or issues critical literacy skills would still be essential (Janks, 2012). In our society that is far from just and equitable, critical literacy is a necessary skill needed to navigate the constant stream of information with which a citizen of today's society is presented. Social orders that place certain people above others based on religion, race, class, gender, or other categories are not created from thin air. They are created by human action or failure to take action. Critical approaches to education and literacy can lead to naming and questioning the practices of society in order to take action to change them (Janks, 2014). Critical literacy is centered on the role of texts and discourse in maintaining the status quo of inequity in our society. Seeing education as a tool to teach critical thinking can help students become aware of their beliefs and biases and work to change them. People have access to more information today than ever before. It is essential that we teach students to navigate the world critically so that they can question what they read and see

in order to take action and make the changes necessary to make our world a better and more just place. Students may need to intentionally seek out voices that are not heard in order to get the full story, and they will need critical literacy skills in order to ask themselves about those unheard voices. Finally, critical literacy is a vehicle for change, and these skills can prepare students to advocate for a more socially just society (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). That is the purpose of critical literacy, and why teacher exploration of, and instruction in, the topic is needed in order for students to develop this essential skill. Young students are capable of learning about and forming their own opinions of social justice topics, and it can often be difficult to find resources that can explain these issues in a manner that can both teach students literacy skills and teach about the social justice issue that one is trying to teach. One strategy that can help students explore these ideas is called alternative perspectives.

Alternative Perspectives

Being able to see the events in the story from various points of view is an essential critical literacy skill, and is often thought of as seeing alternative perspectives (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). There are varying ways to teach this skill and some include using alternative texts, substituting characters, examining a character's motives and emotions, and juxtaposing. This curriculum will focus on the character perspectives approach. When using this strategy, a student examines a specific character and arranges the facts of the story to match up with the wants, needs, and emotions of said character. This can be done with multiple characters from the same story in order to understand that each person brings their own unique experiences to a situation, and those influence their perspective. In a story that only has one character, students can step even further outside

of the story to think about how people that are not seen in the story might view the events. There are multiple strategies and activities that can be used to teach the skill of alternative perspectives (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). The first is the creation of an alternative text. The reader creates a text that is told from a perspective that is different from the original story, and this helps the reader understand that the issue in the story is not as simple as one character may view it. Another strategy is character substitution, which is where the reader thinks about what the story would be like if one of the characters was substituted for someone else. This person could be someone they know or a fictional person. Character perspectives is another strategy that can be used. The reader thinks about the feelings of different characters in the story and imagines what the story would be like if it were told from that character's perspective. This can lead the reader to discover that a story has the potential to be different when it is told by different people. Each of these strategies can be used in a classroom to teach the skill of seeing alternative perspectives.

Critical Literacy Instruction

Critical literacy instruction can happen at the elementary level (Creighton, 1997). Critical literacy skills must be explicitly taught in order for students to grasp them and transfer them to all parts of their lives. These skills are developed with careful and intentional practice and experiences. Students must be engaged in reading and the discussions and activities of a lesson in order to acquire meaningful learning. Critical literacy lessons must be engaging. There is not a one size fit all approach to teaching critical literacy, as one of the principles previously mentioned states. The entire thought process behind critical literacy is disrupting the ordinary, and this also extends to

strategies used during instruction. Two lessons involving critical literacy topics and discussions may be completely different based on the teacher and students present. Critical literacy strategies can and must be adapted to fit the unique situation in which they are used in order to make them as meaningful as possible for students.

McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) recommend first teaching the strategies of critical literacy, then teaching lessons in which students apply strategies they have previously learned. Alternative perspectives can be taught using these methods. Examining alternative perspectives leads students to think about different perspectives of various characters or people in a story or situation. Seeing events from a point of view that differs from the author or the main character is the skill that will be focused on in this curriculum. The most effective way to teach this skill is to give students access to texts that represent different perspectives on the same issue, or texts that feature an often unheard voice.

Selecting Texts for Teaching Critical Literacy

Texts are the primary tools for teaching critical literacy skills such as alternative perspectives in a classroom setting. There is much to consider when selecting texts to use to teach critical literacy skills. When selecting texts for these types of lessons, teachers must consider representation. Students need to see characters that look and live like them in the books they interact with in the classroom. Creighton (1997) feels strongly about using texts featuring human characters over animals in critical literacy lessons, as using animal characters can hide the real issues that humans face in the situations represented in the books. By reading about the experiences of characters in stories students are able to see things from their point of view and can even potentially develop empathy for the

characters. In developing empathy, students are more likely to understand the character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations. It is important to acknowledge that the books used to teach alternative perspectives should present diverse perspectives and include a diverse group of people or characters to truly teach critical literacy skills.

Diverse Books

As stated in the previous section, books featuring diverse perspectives are best to use when teaching critical literacy skills. The characters in diverse books can include characters of different genders, races, religions, cultures, sexual orientations, and abilities. In order to present an alternative perspective, diverse voices need to be heard. This is where diverse children's books come into the picture. Children need to see people of different races, religions, gender, sexual orientation, and cultures in the books they read to help them understand the world around them. Using diverse books in the elementary classroom will give students this opportunity. In order to do this properly one must first understand what makes a book diverse.

Definition of Diverse Books

“Diverse” is a difficult word to explicitly define. In society diversity is complicated and can have different meanings in different situations. When thinking about books, diversity is thought of as including people from different races or cultures. However, we know that racial diversity is not the only type of diversity. The About Us section of the We Need Diverse Books website (diversebooks.org/about-wndb/) states “we recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.” Differing family structures including foster and adoptive families,

as well as sexual and gender identity are also included in the make up of diverse books (Boyd et al., 2015). Diversity in literature is necessary in order for children to experience books as mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990).

Seeing Oneself and Others in Literature

Bishop (1990) says that books can be windows that give the reader a view of a world that might be familiar or new to them, and that these windows can become sliding glass doors that the reader can walk through and enter the world of the story. Books can also be mirrors that reflect a person's story. When a book is a mirror, one can see their life and culture reflected back at them. One purpose of reading is to take one's experiences and reflect it back at them in order to help us better understand them (Bishop, 1990). When one is able to see their own life through a piece of literature, they recognize they are part of something larger than themselves, and their place in society is affirmed. Mirrors in literature are necessary for children because they help them know that their story matters to the world. When children can find characters and situations that reflect their lives in the books they read, they feel that their lived experiences are valued. Windows in literature are necessary to show that people are different, but always deserve respect and kindness. It is also important for books to be seen as sliding glass doors, in which children can see themselves as a person that can travel between worlds and cultures. Imagine what one would feel if they did not experience this while reading, and how this would impact their sense of self worth.

Importance of Diverse Books

The stories in children's literature don't always represent America's wide array of people and cultures. When children don't see themselves, or when they don't see others

that differ from them in books they have access to, it can potentially have an impact on their imagination (Thomas 2016). When diverse characters do show up in text, they are sometimes “problematic” depictions and might further the stereotypes associated with that particular race or culture. Books, and the images shown in them, may influence how children see themselves and their place in society. If children don’t see their life and culture in the books they have access to they might feel that they don’t have a place in society, or that their lives and experiences are of less value.

All children should see a positive representation of their culture in the media they consume in order to feel valued and important in society. Children need to be exposed to diverse books to show how the world works, to learn to appreciate the stories of others, and to interact respectfully with people who are from a different culture. Children's literature also needs to show positive depictions of people, cultures, and lifestyles outside of the Western world to work towards a more globally aware society. Books are a chance for children to see people that have a different worldview than they do, and for some children the books they read may be the only chance to do this.

It is important for all children to be exposed to positive representations of all races and cultures in children’s literature. When children understand race as a recognizable piece of humanity, they are able to recognize racial stereotypes (Pauker et al., 2010). The same study also found that white children learned more stereotypes about people of color before learning stereotypes of their own racial group. Participants as young as six years old had formed racial stereotypes. Children can learn these stereotypes from a number of places. Negative representation can harm children’s sense of self-esteem and self worth, and can cause children to form biases, disrespect, or to dismiss the stories of their peers

who differ culturally or racially from them. Literature that children engage with may help to determine their self-perception and can help them create a positive or negative self image. Books can also help develop or disrupt stereotypes that children may see in society, or that students may already hold.

Moving Beyond Racial Diversity

It is not just racial diversity that is lacking in children's literature. There is also gender, sexual orientation, and people with disabilities to consider. Female characters in picture books are often supporting characters, or seen in stereotypical gender roles. When the only female characters that children see are stereotyped, girls can view themselves as less worthy, and boys can view themselves as more worthy. Girls are less likely to see women as smart and are less likely to engage in activities that they perceive to be for smart people by the age of six (Bian et al., 2016). This bias could be created due to the roles in which young children see female book characters.

In addition, Koss (2015) found that people with disabilities are often seen as burdensome or a stigma in picture books, and not as important and contributing people in a community. Hughes (2017) states that "most schools in the US continue to operate on a charitable model of disability." (pg. 188). In this model being disabled is seen as a problem, and the unfortunate people that have this problem need to depend on the charity and pity of good people in order to get what they need to survive. When children are shown stories with people with disabilities being friends with people without a disability, they have less bias towards people with disabilities (Cameron & Rutland, 2006).

It is also important that the character in the story is more than just their label, and that they have a story that involves more than just the way society views them. Joy and

celebration should be focused on in these stories instead of just seeing how challenging their lives may be. When stories also focus on joy, it makes the characters more human in the eyes of the reader. It is important that the stories shared with students focus on the joy of the diverse community, and not just on the hardships or trauma the community has faced or is facing. Children may view marginalized communities as only struggling if they are not exposed to stories of these communities thriving. The classroom is a great place to introduce students to diverse perspectives and communities through literature.

Diverse Books in the Classroom

The use of diverse books in the classroom can only happen when a teacher is willing to put in effort to create change (Boyd et al., 2015). Iwai (2015) lists tips for using diverse books in the classroom. One tip is for the teacher to model a positive attitude toward diversity. A teacher needs to understand and model the acknowledgement and acceptance of each student's differences and show that they care for all of their students. Students can learn about the importance of understanding people that have different backgrounds and acknowledging diversity. Another tip is to choose high-quality material. A teacher must be critical of the books they choose to use in their classroom. They must make sure the illustrations, languages, and depictions of cultures are accurate. Books that do not treat characters as individuals or reinforce stereotypes and tokenism are to be avoided.

When students read books that discuss topics of equity and diversity they develop empathy towards these situations. Diverse literature gives students the chance to see various points of view, beliefs, and emotions. Children need to feel valued in their community in order to be successful. Using a diverse array of books to teach literature,

specifically to younger students, may give students tools to see things from the perspective of others, disrupt biases, and understand that the world is made up of many kinds of people that do not have the same lived experiences as they do. When diverse books are used in the classroom more students are engaged, and more students feel seen and valued during reading time. It could also be said that exposing children to diverse books can lead to more engagement and enjoyment of reading. Student enjoyment of reading can be boosted by reading books with characters that look like them or have other similarities to their lives. How can we expose students to as many diverse books and perspectives as possible? One way that this can be done is through text sets.

Text Sets

A text set is a group of materials that is centered on a common topic or theme that gives students the opportunity to interact with a number of different resources to focus on an overarching question. Text sets are not focused on individual books, but on an idea or topic as a whole. The word text may be thought of as only books, but text sets can consist of videos, articles, photographs, and other forms of media as well. The various texts are of different genres, reading levels, and are written or created from different perspectives which allows them to be accessible by all readers. Text sets can be used to compare and contrast and to make connections between texts while engaging in critical literacy. If one wants to use a text set, one must first understand how a text set is created.

Creating Text Sets

Text sets can include written texts, pictures, music, websites, and movies that are built to help students build connections across genres. They lead students to engage with a variety of texts to help them understand the world around them (Tatum et al., 2009).

The use of text sets can also validate students' favored form of literacy, as text sets do not view print materials as superior to non-print materials. Text sets are not created to influence students to value print over other types of media, and this is important to acknowledge when creating and teaching using text sets. All types of media are equally valuable and essential to the experience of a text set.

There are many different ways to create a text set. One can focus on a specific topic and find media that all relate to said topic. One could also find media that has opposing viewpoints of a topic. It is first important to decide what students should learn from the use of the text set. There should be a balance of fiction and nonfiction materials in a text set in order to present a wide view of the desired topic.

Background knowledge is an essential piece of being able to comprehend what one reads. If someone does not have adequate background knowledge of a topic they will struggle to make sense of a piece of literature that features this topic. The components of a text set can be used to build students' background knowledge on a topic in order to boost comprehension.

The texts that make up a text set should be different readability levels and accessible to all readers. Materials in the text set can be a broad range of levels, and students will find books to read in the text set that are appropriate for them as they gain more interest in the topic. It is also important to include texts that send different messages in order to provide a wider perspective. Text sets for literacy instruction should comprise a variety of texts, and should include both fiction and non-fiction pieces.

Text Sets and Literacy Instruction

Text sets make content accessible for all students, even students that may be struggling readers (Lent, 2012). The use of lower level texts to begin instruction using a text set can encourage students to take risks and read more difficult texts on the topic as the unit continues. Text sets can also help build student interest in a topic, the same way that reading the first book in a series can build interest in that series. The texts should be seen as a way to help students understand ideas in order to think critically about real world issues (Scales & Tracy, 2017). Students should read various texts that present different points of view. When a lesson or unit is focused on a concept versus a single book students get a wider perspective and deeper understanding of the topic than they would when reading a single book on said topic. Reading only one text at a time can cause students to miss out on a more diverse reading experience (Pytash et al., 2014). Text sets encourage readers to question the position and purpose of the author, and develop a more meaningful understanding of the topic. Texts in the set should be ordered to build upon each other and help deeply develop student understanding. There must also be established routines and procedures surrounding how students interact with texts before, during, and after reading.

Often when text sets are used in the elementary classroom, they are focused on one specific event, such as using text sets to teach about an event in history. There is a need for more units of study using text sets that present a diverse group of characters within the media chosen for the set. Creating a text set with books that feature diverse characters gives the reader exposure to more perspectives, which can be beneficial for critical literacy instruction.

Text Sets and Critical Literacy

Students today need to be exposed to diverse texts that include a variety of perspectives (Batchelor, 2018). Using text sets can push the reader past their comfort zone and experience things outside of the cultural norm. This is also the purpose of critical literacy, which is why text sets are a great tool to teach critical literacy skills. Teachers are required to think deeply about the texts they select to use for instruction in their classrooms. When texts that draw focus to social issues are used students can become aware of inequity and other problems facing society and begin to take a stance on said subjects.

When text sets present different points of view surrounding social issues they can help students understand and empathize with inequity and create a desire to advocate for social justice. The use of text sets to teach critical literacy can lead to more thoughtful students that speak up to create a more equitable future.

Most literature on the topic of text sets in the elementary classroom is focused on using text sets to integrate science or social studies topics with literacy. Text sets can also be used to teach literacy skills. Alternative perspective is a skill that requires students to be presented with multiple perspectives, and this makes a text set an excellent resource to use to teach this skill at the elementary level.

Third Grade Literacy Curriculum

The knowledge from the above sections will be used to create a curriculum for third grade students. There are different strategies, best practices, and learning theories that contribute to the creation of a curriculum. Various learning theories were considered when creating the plan for this project, as learning theories are the basis for any type of instruction.

Learning Theories

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory states that learning does not happen individually, but is instead something that occurs collectively. This is based on the paradigm of social constructivism that says that knowledge is built through interactions with others (Wang et al., 2011). Learning is created through social events and happens as one is engaging with people and items. This theory states that learning cannot be thought of as separate from the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs. Social interaction is therefore seen as essential to learning and development. Through social interaction, the Zone of Proximal Development is said to shrink.

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development is another piece of education and learning theory that can be used in the creation of curricular units. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) can be thought of as the area between what a student has knowledge of and what they have potential to know. The ZPD was originally thought of as something that could not be grown through children having discussion with other children. However, it is now known that the ZPD gets smaller when talking with peers that know more, and when being exposed to different perspectives. Children are able to have meaningful discussions that can be a source of knowledge acquisition and development. These discussions need to be facilitated by a teacher that has the ability to ensure each child is able to participate actively in the discussion.

Dewey (1938) also states that students learn from group interaction that is facilitated by a teacher. All students should contribute to learning, and the teacher must plan and prepare their instruction with this idea in mind. Students and teachers need to work together in order to achieve the learning that is meant to occur in these settings.

Teachers need to be given the freedom to make decisions that they feel will best help their students be successful. This cooperative approach to learning is an important part of a well designed curriculum.

Johnson and Johnson (2009) have identified five variables that influence how effective cooperation is, and the first is positive interdependence. This is when there is a positive correlation between two people's goals, and these people believe that they can only achieve their goal if the other person does so as well. If people believe they are working towards a goal together and their success is related to the success of another person, these people will cooperate. Personal responsibility, the idea that one must do one's part when working in a group, is another variable. If there is an element of accountability when working with a group, the group members will believe that they are required to do their share of said work. Interaction is another variable, and this variable gives the idea that people must interact in order to exchange resources and ideas and that this interaction must be productive and positive. Appropriate use of social skills is also essential in a cooperative activity. Johnson and Johnson (2009) stated that "unskilled group members cannot cooperate effectively." (pg. 369). Students need to be taught the social skills that are required for cooperative work in order to participate successfully. This instruction is important, but all students can contribute to the work of the group regardless of social ability. It is most important to teach students to be accepting of others and understand that each person has different communication and social skills, but each person is a valuable member of the cooperative team. Group processing is the final variable that contributes to cooperative learning. Group members must have time to reflect on the activity and the contributions they made, as well as contributions of others.

This helps improve the effectiveness of the group. Reflection is an important element in the learning process. All of the theories mentioned above can be used to create a curricular unit that is developed with a solid lesson and unit design framework.

Unit Design Framework

The Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe 2011) guidelines state that a quality unit is designed with desired transfer results in mind, and not just simply listing content objectives that students must learn. The Understanding by Design (UbD) framework begins with the desired results of a unit, and thinking about what a transfer of that knowledge would look like in the real world. Units of curriculum are not just content objectives to check off, but must include learning tasks to help students develop an understanding of the topic. Understanding by Design says that long-term achievement is more likely when teachers teach for understanding and transfer of topics and processes while giving students opportunities to engage in authentic tasks. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) say that understanding is a difficult term to explicitly define, and teaching for understanding therefore requires a more mindful approach. UbD uses a backwards design procedure, which begins with identifying the anticipated outcomes of a unit, then deciding on evidence that would indicate the outcomes were achieved, and finally planning the instruction and learning tasks of the unit. In order to determine the desired outcomes of the lesson one must consider the idea of transfer. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2011) “The ability to transfer is arguably the long-term aim of all education.” (p. 14). If a student is unable to transfer their learning to a context outside of the classroom it is clear that the student never truly learned the desired skill. Transfer of skills is said to be dependent on meaning making. One must be able to understand the

skill through experience and reflection, otherwise the skill is just a piece of information from class and nothing more. UbD asks writers to consider essential questions when creating a curricular unit. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) define essential questions as continuous questions which one uses to explain to students that real learning is active rather than passive. Using essential questions also promotes transfer by urging students to make connections, identify patterns, and come up with strategies when experiencing challenges. Understanding by Design gives the framework to create a quality unit of instruction. Another essential piece of this work is a lesson framework.

Lesson Design Framework

Guided Comprehension (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009) is a framework that can be used to teach critical literacy skills. In this framework students are taught comprehension strategies in a variety of contexts using different levels and types of text, which makes this a framework that is well equipped to handle the use of a text set. The model has two stages. In the first stage students are explicitly instructed about the strategy in a whole class setting, and a five step process is used. In the first step of the lesson the teacher explains the strategy being taught and how this strategy will help the students become better readers. Then the teacher demonstrates the strategy during a read-aloud by stopping during reading to share a think-aloud. Modeling of the strategy is done during this stage of the lesson. After that teachers then guide students by reading more of the text aloud and having students work with each other to use the strategy while monitoring and supporting the groups. Next, students practice the strategy using another text that has been read with less support from the teacher than in the previous step. The final step is

reflection which is where students spend time thinking about how they can use the strategy with texts that they read independently.

Interactive Read-Aloud

Interactive read-aloud is when teachers ask questions during reading to model meaning making for students, and to encourage them to make their own meaning (Barrentine, 1996). Interactions during a read-aloud can be spontaneous responses from students or be connected to the reading process. Students play an active, rather than passive, role during interactive read-aloud. The teacher acts as a guide during this process, and has the important role of encouraging students to explain their thinking. The combination of critical literacy and interactive read-aloud gives students the chance to share their thinking and respond to others about their thoughts on social issues (Peterson and Chamberlain, 2015). When these discussions are properly facilitated by the teacher, students could potentially disrupt their way of thinking in order to see things from a different perspective.

Dialogic Discussion

A dialogic discussion is a discussion where teachers are seen as the facilitators that guide students towards understanding (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Whole class dialogic discussion has the potential to give students more chances for meaningful learning experiences in the classroom. Discussions that are centered on the meaning of texts lead to growth in literacy and communication skills. Lessons that are built around discussion and create opportunities for students to develop their literacy and linguistic skills are an important piece of authentic literacy instruction. These discussions must encourage students to reflect and engage in critical thinking, be about a topic that is

meaningful and relevant to students' lives, and have a solid focus throughout. To have a meaningful class discussion all students must be equal participants, and the teacher must be thoughtful about structuring the discussion to ensure this. The teacher is not meant to be the leader of this discussion, but an active participant that is not seen as a higher authority. This is not meant to be a conversation where the teacher is telling the students what to think, but a chance for the teacher to push the students to think critically on their own and develop their own opinions when they are presented with accurate information.

Modeling

Teachers have to model the use of critical literacy skills in order to teach them effectively. Duke and Pearson (2002) say that modeling is giving a broken-down model of the thought process that happens when making meaning of a text. Modeling makes the process necessary to do the skill able to be seen by students so they learn and use the process. Proper critical literacy instruction involves teacher modeling of skills, students practicing skills with mentoring from the teacher, and finally students engaging in skill usage while being monitored by the teacher. Critical literacy skills must be modeled in order for students to understand how to use them. Schutz and Rainey (2019) found three related ways of modeling during literacy instruction: showing, situating, and abstracting. Showing is when the teacher makes important parts of the strategy being focused on visible to students, and shows the thinking done when using the strategy. Situating is when a teacher connects a strategy to something that the students have previously done in class. Abstracting is when a teacher tells students what other context they may use the strategy they are learning about. Students need to first see and hear a teacher model a critical literacy skill before they are ready to try the skill in the real world.

Authenticity

Media based in the real world should be used in classroom instruction to make the text relevant to students (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). Authentic learning tasks are essential to quality literacy instruction. Students must receive explicit instruction in authentic reading contexts in order for transfer of learning to occur. Students need to practice strategies using all types of authentic texts, such as pictures, books, video, graphic novels, and magazines. While reading or viewing these various types of media students must think about how to use their strategies in different settings and situations. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of reading authentic texts for authentic purposes in elementary literacy curriculum.

The Gap

This chapter has examined literature on four topics that are relevant to the creation of my third grade critical literacy unit to teach the skill of identifying the author's point of view and one's own point of view. The review of the literature has shown that there is a need for more elementary level literacy centered units that teach critical literacy skills, and has identified the gap that exists which I intend to fill with the creation of my project. It is often difficult to find a critical literacy unit that features a diverse text set of books to use at the third grade level. This guided me to create my research question *how can a text set made of diverse books be used to teach alternative perspectives to third grade students?*

Conclusion

In chapter two critical literacy was defined and strategies and best practices to teach it were described. Diverse books and media were discussed, as well as the

importance of the inclusion of books that explore more than just racial diversity. Text sets were defined and their components were explained, and it was stated that text sets are made up of more than just texts, but also media such as video, audio, and pictures.

Finally, learning theories and best practices for teaching literacy skills to third grade students were reviewed, as were both curriculum design and lesson design frameworks.

The next chapter will be a description of my Capstone project and will include information about the participants, setting, relevant standards, curriculum and lesson design frameworks, desired outcomes, assessments, and materials.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Over the past few years I have been looking for ways to incorporate both diverse books and critical literacy skills into my literacy instruction. The critical literacy skill that my students would benefit from learning most is alternative perspectives, which is when a reader examines stories and events from the perspectives of different characters or people. Diverse books are great materials to use to teach this skill, as they present perspectives that are not often seen or heard. Text sets are an effective way to give students a chance to read multiple books from the perspectives of different types of people and make connections between them. Text sets also can include books that are written about the same event from different perspectives. Discovering all of this information during my literature review led me to develop my research question: *how can a text set made of diverse books be used to teach alternative perspectives to third grade students?* In the previous chapter I have explored the definitions of critical literacy, diverse books, and text sets, as well as discussed best practices surrounding literacy instruction and curriculum design. In this chapter I will describe my Capstone project in detail. I will provide the theoretical framework used to create the curriculum and lessons, discuss the variables in my research, the participants and setting of my project, and the procedure of my curricular unit including the types of lessons and assessments the unit will include. I will finish with a summary of what was covered in this chapter, as well as a preview for what is to come in Chapter Four.

Project Description

My project is a curriculum that uses a text set made up of diverse media, including fiction and nonfiction books, videos, articles, and songs to teach students the critical literacy skill of alternative perspectives. When students have achieved understanding of this skill they will be able to view a situation from multiple perspectives and understand how and why different people might see situations differently. The unit will focus specifically on distinguishing their perspective from that of the author or characters. The curriculum will include one text set, and the theme will be “What Makes You Unique”. The texts will be focused on the idea of being proud of your identity and culture, and learning about different cultures and people from around the world. There will also be a focus on how a person’s relationships can influence their perspective. This theme was chosen because exploring culture and identity is an effective way to build a welcoming and inclusive classroom community. Students should get the chance to explore what makes them unique, understand that not all people will be exactly like them, and that it is important to respect and have empathy for people that are different. This knowledge is one of the ideas critical literacy is based around.

This topic is important for a number of reasons. First, critical literacy skills are essential in order to successfully navigate the current information in the world we live in (Janks, 2012). Students need to be able to understand that the author or character’s point of view could influence what they say or write, and that just because something is written down doesn’t make it true. There has also been an increased focus on diversity in children’s books and how it is essential that children see a diverse cast of characters in the media they consume. Children are at a critical stage in their development and need to be taught empathy and seeing things from various perspectives. Text sets are a great way

to bring authentic literature material into the classroom. There are plenty of guidelines or sample lessons to teach critical literacy to kids, but I wanted to create a solid unit plan that covered every piece of one topic to make it more accessible to teachers and students.

There will be several major learning events in this unit. Students will learn what perspective is, explore various identity based texts and identify points of views of characters and authors, and identify their own point of view if they were in the same situation as a character in a text. Students will also get the chance to explore the same event from different perspectives, and learn about how people from cultures around the world live. They will read about characters that represent the LGBTQ community, as well as characters with disabilities. Students will also reflect on the differences and similarities that they have with characters and people from the stories in the text set. The unit will end with an assessment where students will create a project that shows the understanding they have gained from the unit by writing or describing how a story would be different if it were written from a different perspective.

Design Framework

This unit will be designed using the Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) unit design framework. Understanding by Design begins with the end in mind by first asking what the desired outcome of a unit is, and what transferable skills the students should have at the end. This design framework uses a backwards design method to ensure that learning is meaningful and that understanding is achieved because successful learning of a skill is achieved more often when teachers set student understanding as their goal. Understanding is a difficult term to explicitly define, and teaching for understanding therefore requires a more mindful approach (Wiggins &

McTighe, 2011). Understanding by Design's backwards design procedure has the creator start by identifying the outcomes they want students to achieve during the unit. Then they decide on evidence that would show the outcomes were successfully achieved. These may be tasks for students to complete or ways that students should be able to think. After that the creator plans the instruction and learning tasks of the unit.

In order to decide upon the desired outcomes of a unit, one must consider the idea of transfer. If a student is unable to transfer their learning to a context outside of the classroom, then it can be argued that the student never truly learned the skill. One must be able to understand the skill through experience and reflection if true learning has taken place. Considering essential questions is another piece of the Understanding by Design framework. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) define essential questions as continuous questions which one uses to explain to students that real learning is active rather than passive. Using essential questions also promotes transfer by urging students to make connections, identify patterns, and come up with strategies when experiencing challenges. It is through the identification of these essential questions that the creator of the unit can begin the planning of individual lessons.

This unit will use the Guided Comprehension Model (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009) as a lesson design framework. The framework for whole-class instruction, which is stage one of the Model, will be the primary framework for the design of each interactive read-aloud based lesson in this unit. This framework is used to explicitly teach comprehension skills, and can also be used to teach critical literacy skills. The Guided Comprehension Model for whole class instruction has five steps. The first step in the lesson is for the teacher to explain the strategy that will be taught to students, and how using the strategy

will help students achieve the goal of the unit, which will be to understand that different authors and characters have different perspectives. The next step is a read-aloud where the teacher stops to do think-alouds to model using the strategy. After demonstrating using the strategy through think-aloud the teacher guides students by continuing the read-aloud and having students work together to use the strategy while monitoring student responses. When the read-aloud is finished students then practice using the strategy with a text they have read with limited teacher support. The last part of the lesson gives students a chance to reflect on how they can use the strategy with texts that they read independently. This model takes various learning theories into account.

Learning Theories

Sociocultural learning theory says that learning does not happen individually, but is instead something that occurs collectively (Vygotsky 1978). This theory is based on the paradigm of social constructivism that says that knowledge is made through interaction and socialization (Wang et al., 2011). Learning is constructed through social situations, and happens as one is actively engaging with people and items. This theory also states that learning cannot be thought of as separate from the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs. Social interaction is therefore seen as essential to learning and development. The Zone of Proximal Development is also said to shrink through social interaction.

The Zone of Proximal Development is thought of as an area between what one knows and what they have the potential to learn (Vygotsky, 1978). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is defined by Scales and Tracy (2017) as “the space between the known and what could be known.” (p. 134). It was originally stated that the ZPD could

not be improved through children having discussions with their peers, as at this time adults were seen as the sole authority of knowledge in the classroom. However, it is now acknowledged that the ZPD does shrink when talking with peers and being exposed to their different perspectives. Children are able to have meaningful discussions that can be a source of knowledge acquisition and cognitive development. It is important that these discussions are facilitated by a teacher, so that each child has a chance to actively participate in the discussion.

Students learn from group interaction that is facilitated by a teacher (Dewey, 1938). All students should contribute to the learning activity in order for it to be effective. Therefore, the teacher must plan and prepare their instruction with this idea in mind. Students and teachers need to work together in order to achieve the learning goals of these discussions. In order for this method to be successful, teachers need to be given the freedom to make decisions that they feel will best help their students meet learning goals. Cooperation between students and teachers, and students with each other, is also essential in order for these learning goals to be met.

There are five variables that influence how effective cooperation is, and the first is positive interdependence (Johnson & Johnson 2009). When there is a positive correlation between people's goals, and these people believe that they can only achieve their goal if the other person does so as well, cooperation is effective. If people believe they are working together towards a goal and their success is related to the success of their team, these people will cooperate effectively. Another variable is personal responsibility, which is the idea that one must do one's part when working in a group. Group members need to see their part of the work as essential. Interaction is another variable, which gives the idea

that people need to interact in order to exchange resources and ideas, and that this interaction must be productive and positive. Appropriate use of social skills is also essential in a cooperative activity. Johnson and Johnson (2009) stated that “unskilled group members cannot cooperate effectively.” (p. 369). I do not agree with this statement. All students can contribute to the work of the group regardless of social ability, and can even learn necessary social skills from group work. It is important to teach students to be accepting of others and understand that each person has different communication and social skills, but each person is a valuable member of a cooperative team. Group processing is the final variable that contributes to cooperative learning. Groups need to have time to reflect on the activity and the contributions they made, as well as contributions of their group members. This helps improve the effectiveness of the group. An effective group is able to better meet learning goals and standards.

Relevant State Standards

My curricular unit will cover Minnesota English Language Arts Standard 3.2.6.6, which is that students will be able to “distinguish their own point of view from that of the author of a text” and Minnesota English Language Arts Standard 3.1.6.6, which is that students will be able to “distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator of those of the characters” (MN ELA Standards K-12, 2010). Minnesota English Language Arts Speaking, Viewing, Listening, and Media Literacy Standard 3.8.1.1, which is to “engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly” (MN ELA Standards K-12, 2010), will also be

addressed. All of these state standards will be assessed through the summative unit assessment, and through other lessons and activities during the unit.

Variables

The independent variable in my research study is text sets made up of diverse books and media. The use of diverse text sets will be the treatment that the participants in my research will receive. Diverse text sets will be successful in leading students to achieve the desired outcomes of the curricular unit. The dependent variable in this study is critical literacy skills. The development of the participants' critical literacy skills will be enhanced by the use of the above mentioned independent variable, diverse text sets. Qualitative data will be collected as a part of my research. Data will be collected from the entire class of students following the unit as a summative assessment. This will be done to assess student progress on the state standards listed above and to assess the effectiveness of the use of diverse text sets to teach critical literacy skills. The qualitative data will be both written constructed responses from students and class discussions.

Unit Outcomes

The goal of this unit will be for students to understand that different people have different perspectives of the same event, and that factors such as identity and culture can influence a person's perspective. This will be achieved through identifying the author or character's point of view, understanding how this impacts their writing (in the case of the author) or actions (in the case of the character), and stating their own point of view on topics or situations from the texts read and discussed in the lessons of the unit. Another goal of this unit is to introduce students to diverse perspectives and texts that disrupt certain commonly held beliefs and biases. Students will also read texts from the point of

view of characters and authors that may disrupt their knowledge of familiar topics or events.

My hypothesis is that using diverse text sets to teach alternative perspectives will be more effective and engaging than other methods. This hypothesis will be tested using a curriculum of read-aloud and discussion lessons involving diverse books and other media from a text set that I will create. Students are more likely to be engaged in learning when characters in books look like them and share common cultures and values. Featuring a wide variety of authors and characters in my text set will allow students from multiple cultures and backgrounds to make connections with the material.

My proposed solution will be the curriculum I create in order to test my hypothesis. This curriculum will use diverse literature in the form of a text set to successfully teach understanding the author and character's points of view to third grade students. This curriculum will feature texts centered around the topic of identity and culture, and this will be an engaging topic for the students that will be participants in this research.

Participants

The intended audience is third grade students in a suburban Minnesota elementary school. The school is made up of 46% white students, 24% Hispanic and Latino students, 13% Black or African American students, 10% students that are two or more races, 4% Asian students, 0.6% Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander students, and 0.4% Native American students according to the Minnesota Department of Education Report Card (https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId--10199575000__p--9). So, the student body of this particular class is about half white and half BIPOC. I decided on this

audience because these are the students I have the most experience teaching and the group I love to work with the most. I also think this particular lesson and theme of the text set will be impactful for this makeup of students, as there are a wide variety of cultures and perspectives present in most classrooms at this particular elementary school. These students are also at a critical age in their literacy skill development, as in third grade instruction often switches from time spent on learning to read and more time spent on comprehension strategies or “reading to learn”. There has also been increased focus on social justice issues and how teachers can help. I feel that it’s my job as an elementary school teacher to make sure my students learn about culture and identity, and also how to advocate and stand up for what they believe in.

Materials

This unit will be focused on one text set with the theme of identity and culture, and all of the media in the text set will be centered on this theme. The media in the text set is listed below, grouped by genre.

Fiction Picture Books-*The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi, *Same, Same, But Different* by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw, *Chocolate Milk*, *Por Favor!* by Maria Dismondy,, *Bilal Cooks Daal* by Aisha Saeed, *I’m New Here* and *Someone New* by Anne Sibley O’Brien, *I Love My Purse* by Belle Demont, *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newman, *Papa, Daddy, and Riley* by Seamus Kirst, *The Proudest Blue* by Ibtihaj Muhammad *My Brother Charlie* by Holly Robinson Peete, and *Your Name is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow.

Nonfiction Picture Books- *One World, One Day* by Barbara Kerley, *At the Same Moment, Around the World* by Clotilde Perrin, and *This is How We Do It* by Matt Lamonthe

Songs- *This is Me* written by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul and sung by Keala Settle and the Greatest Showman Ensemble

Nonfiction Articles-*Opinion: From Feeling Awkward to Celebrating my Bicultural Identity* by Rudi Patel (adapted by Newsela staff)

Videos-Kids Share Their Cultural Traditions (YouTube), We Are All Different and THAT'S Awesome!- Ted Talk by Cole Blakeway, and Kid President's Guide to Making a New Friend (YouTube).

Formative and Summative Assessments

Formative and summative assessment will take place throughout the unit. Students will be assessed through observation of class and small group discussion, short answer written or spoken response, and a final task that will be written or spoken. Formative assessments will be done through observation of student responses in small and whole group discussion, as well as student performance on tasks completed after the day's read-aloud. Students will have the chance to show their understanding through having meaningful discussions with small groups. They will also have a chance to complete a written or verbal response to a question at the end of each lesson. Written responses will be completed either individually or with a group depending on the lesson.

The summative assessment will give students three options to demonstrate their understanding. The first option is for students to choose a scene from a story that was read aloud during the unit and either rewrite it from the perspective of a different

character or write about how the scene would be different if it were written from the perspective of a different character. Another option is for students to rewrite a scene from a story read aloud during the unit from their perspective. The final option is for students to write about how a story read aloud during the unit would be different if it were written from another character's perspective and from their perspective. Each assessment will have students reflect on how their perspective differs from those of the characters in the story. The assessment will be done in writing, unless an accommodation is needed. If so, students can verbally respond to the prompts on the planning page for their chosen assessment. The rubric for the assessment will score students on their ability to distinguish their own perspective from that of characters or authors, determine factors that influence perspective, acknowledge that different people have different perspectives, and understand that someone's identity, culture, and relationships influence their perspective. Each of those pieces will be given a score from one to four. Earning a one will mean a student has not met the goal, a two is that a student partially meets the goal, a three means that a student has met the goal, and a four means that a student has exceeded expectations surrounding the goal.

Instructional Strategies

Various instructional strategies will be used throughout this unit. They include interactive read-aloud, modeling, dialogic discussion, the use of graphic organizers, and the use of authentic texts for authentic purposes.

During an interactive read-aloud teachers ask questions while reading in order to model and encourage meaning making (Barrentine, 1996). This strategy requires students to play an active role during the read-aloud while the teacher acts as a guide through the

process. This strategy will help students to stay engaged throughout the mini lessons, and will prepare them for the group discussion that will follow the read-aloud lessons.

The interactive read-aloud strategy involves teacher modeling of alternative perspective skills. Modeling is the process of teachers breaking down the thinking necessary to make meaning of a text (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Critical literacy skills must be effectively modeled by a teacher in order to achieve student understanding. This instructional strategy will be essential in order for students to grasp an understanding of the skill and be able to use the skill while participating in class discussions.

Dialogic discussion involves the teacher filling the role of facilitator of discussion that guides students toward understanding (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). These types of discussions will be used during the mini lessons in order for students to participate actively and learn to form their own opinions, which is important in order to understand alternative perspectives. These discussions will be planned with the knowledge that all students need to participate in order for the experience to be meaningful.

Written responses will be recorded on three types of graphic organizers throughout the unit. The first is a heart map, which students will use to write factors that influence a character's perspective, or what is in the character's heart that makes them see the events of the story the way they do. The second graphic organizer is a mind and alternative mind portrait (McLaughlin & Allen, 2002). This has students write the thoughts and perspective of one character in a blank outline of a head, and the thoughts and perspective of a second character in an outline of a head. These outlines are next to each other on a page so students can compare and contrast the perspectives of the two characters. Finally, a Venn diagram is used to compare and contrast the daily life of a

child in the story *This is How We Do It* with their own lives. The ways they are different will go in the far left part of the interlocking circles, ways the students are similar to the character they choose will go in the center, and ways the character is different will be written on the right side. These graphic organizers will help students make authentic connections to the texts.

Meaningful literacy instruction is also achieved through the use of authentic texts for authentic purposes (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). The purpose of this unit is to give students a skill that they can use in a real world context, and they can learn this through authentic learning tasks. The use of the various materials in the text set will allow students to experience what they learn in a way that is connected to how they would use their skills in the real world. This is an important focus of any well planned literacy unit.

Learning Plan

The unit will take place over three weeks. This will consist of thirteen days of mini lessons that are twenty to thirty minutes in length, and two days to work on the unit assessment project. My unit will introduce the skill of alternative perspectives. Students will learn how to identify author or character point of view, understand how that leads to their writing or actions, and state their own point of view on topics or situations from texts. The texts used in this unit will feature diverse perspectives and students will be introduced to disruptive ideas of familiar topics or events, as well as different perspectives from people all around the world.

The first lesson will serve as an introduction to the unit and involve an activity to help students understand the concept of perspective. Eight of the mini lessons will begin with a read-aloud and discussion using the Guided Comprehension Model (Mclaughlin &

Allen, 2009). Two lessons will be jigsaw based, where different student groups will read different books and share their learnings with the whole class. Two lessons will focus on either a video or article, and students will be asked if they agree with the author or creator's perspective following either reading or viewing. The final two lessons will be the summative assessment of the unit. The summative assessment will require students to put themselves in the shoes of a character from a story that was read during class, and tell about how they would respond to the events of the story either verbally or in writing. There will also be opportunities for independent reading of text set materials that are used in the lessons, and text set materials that are included in the set but are not directly used in specific lessons.

This project will be created during the summer of 2021 and will be completed and ready for use during the 2021-2022 school year.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given information about the unit and lesson design framework that will be used to create my curriculum. The learning theories that will contribute to the creation of my unit were stated. The relevant state standards that will be addressed were described. The variables, unit outcomes, participants, and assessments have been explored, as have the required materials, instructional strategies and learning plan. In the next chapter I will reflect on the creation of my Capstone project, the limitations of my study, and the implications my project has for both my professional career and the field of literacy education.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

Literacy has always been a passion of mine. I would like to think the young girl reading under the covers past her bedtime would be impressed by the teacher that has poured her heart into literacy education and into this project. My teaching experience thus far has taught me a lot about literacy, and about the wonderful things that can be learned from reading that go even beyond comprehension strategies. Books can open doors to new worlds, and can give people experiences that they might never have the opportunity to have outside of a book. I have also learned how important it is for students to be able to think critically about things they read whether that be books or other media they consume. The intersection of these learnings led me to develop my research question *how can a text set made of diverse books be used to teach alternative perspectives to third grade students?*

My research question was created in order to give me the opportunity to take some of the amazing diverse books I had discovered and create a unit centered around them. I wanted to see if using authentic literature would give students a more meaningful and engaging literacy experience, and I wanted to create something that I was excited to use in my own classroom. Through my research I learned about best practices surrounding teaching critical literacy and the impact that exposure to diverse books can have on students. I also got to explore the creation and use of text sets, which will allow me to use even more amazing media in my classroom going forward.

In this final chapter I will focus on the major learnings I experienced that further developed my research question and my Capstone project, including a look at the highlights from my literature review. I will also comment on the implications of my project, the limitations that may impact its successful implementation, and potential future projects that could take my research question and the work I have accomplished even further. Finally, I will explain how I am going to share my project with others and the benefit of my project to the field of literacy education. I have learned so much through working on this project, and the things that I have learned are going to help me become a better teacher.

Major Learnings

This project pushed me as both a teacher and a student, and I have learned a lot of important lessons through my work. I was able to focus intensely on areas that I have always wanted to learn more about, but hadn't had the time or resources to do so before starting my masters program. Research of this level was completely new to me, and was much more challenging than I anticipated. There are four things I learned in particular that have impacted my teaching practice greatly, and encouraged me to dig deeper and push myself even farther.

Understanding by Design Framework

The first major thing I learned in working on my Capstone project was that I needed to give up my ideas of what "normal" literacy units or curriculum is or how it is designed. The Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) framework was a new concept for me, and I had never thought of planning a unit like this before. I had

always been focused more on individual activities or lessons, and not always focused on how all of the lessons in a unit are meant to build towards understanding. Designing a unit assessment using this framework was especially challenging, as it forced me to step away from the traditional unit test, and inspired me to create something much more meaningful and creative. This was not only an immensely important discovery for my project, but also for my teaching practice in general. I will continue to remember that transfer of learning is the true test of a student being able to understand a skill (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Creating essential questions for each of my lessons in the unit was another piece of the UbD framework that I will continue to use throughout my practice. I have often gone into lessons thinking only about my objectives for that specific day. Now I have been pushed to think about how each lesson can build upon the understanding of the essential questions of the entire unit. Backwards design has opened my eyes to so much I was missing, and it has made me a better planner and teacher.

Expanding My Definition of Diversity

My second major learning was the importance of seeing diversity in literature beyond racial diversity. I started this project with a list of books that were culturally diverse, but didn't include any other types of diversity. Through my research I discovered the importance of introducing students to other types of diversity. The definition of diversity from the We Need Diverse Books website (diversebooks.org/about-wndb/) really challenged my thinking of diversity. Their About Us page states "we recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.".

This definition of diversity pushed me to include Cole Blakely's TED Talk, *My Brother Charlie, Papa, Daddy, and Riley, I Love My Purse, and Sparkle Boy* in my text set. It felt important for me to include materials featuring people with disabilities and LGBTQIA themes in my unit. Representation matters, and these are groups that are not as represented in children's literature. This more inclusive definition of diverse was also prompted by learning that children reading stories about people with disabilities being friends with people without a disability leads to less bias (Cameron & Rutland, 2006). I am going to continue to push myself to include more than just racially diverse materials in my lessons and classroom library going forward.

Critical Literacy

The first course I took as a Hamline student was on critical literacy, and I have wanted to dive deeper into the subject ever since. I have enjoyed reading and learning more about critical literacy, and about how to bring these skills into literacy lessons. One thing that stuck out to me about critical literacy is that the strategies need to be adapted in order to fit the context they are taught in (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). This principle really gives teachers autonomy to do what they feel is best for their students and adapt their lessons accordingly. Two other principles that stuck out to me were the idea that each reader brings their own thought, beliefs, and ideas to their interpretation of a text, and that no text can have one meaning (Creighton, 1997). This is not talked about enough in literacy, where often students are encouraged to find the one correct answer. Critical literacy reminds us that reading is a subjective activity, and that is what makes it fun!

Text Sets

I had the opportunity to learn about text sets in previous courses at Hamline, and this project allowed me to explore this subject further. The use of both print and non-print materials in text sets was very interesting to me, because previously I believed that literacy instruction needed to center around books. It was also interesting to learn that text sets can make content accessible to students regardless of their reading ability (Lent, 2012). This was an important discovery for me, as I often have a number of striving readers in my classroom. It is important to me to give all students access to meaningful content.

Implications

There are three stakeholders that my project can positively impact. My project will help students because it uses relevant and authentic literature which makes it engaging. The student audience will hopefully be able to see characters that represent their cultures and identities. The intended students that will participate in my literacy unit attend a school where the population is made up of 46% white students, 24% Hispanic and Latino students, 13% Black or African American students, 10% students that are two or more races, 4% Asian students, 0.6% Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander students, and 0.4% Native American students (https://rc.education.mn.gov/#demographics/orgId--10199575000__p--9). I am hopeful that the materials in this unit can be both windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) for my students. This unit also teaches a critical literacy skill that can help students to build empathy and understanding for others. This will not only make them better readers, but potentially better citizens. Whole class discussions and chances to have meaningful conversations with smaller groups can also build communication skills.

Teachers will find my project useful because it gives them the opportunity to include diverse perspectives in their literacy instruction. My grade level team has been working on bringing diverse voices to our literacy curriculum, and we are always looking for books that can represent more of our students. This project can also be a great way to share recommendations for the amazing materials I have found to include in my unit. Many of my colleagues are working to build a more diverse classroom library, and I would highly recommend any of the books from my unit as a great addition. I will also be able to bring the knowledge I have acquired on these topics to my grade level team, and we can work together to create more text sets that align with our literacy standards, critical literacy skills, and important themes we want to cover with our students.

Administrators will be helped by my project as well. This unit will address MN state English Language Arts standards in an interesting and meaningful way. It is my hope that creating more engaging literacy units rooted in authentic literacy experiences can improve student learning. The work I have done can also lead the way to the creation of more units centered around text sets. Text sets can be used to cover science and social studies topics as well, and these are areas that teachers often struggle to find time to cover in class. Administrators may also be willing to work to provide classroom teachers with funds to acquire more diverse books and media to use during literacy instruction.

Limitations

I see the biggest limitation to my project being the large amount of materials required. There are various digital materials included and used in my text set, but the majority of lessons require copies of specific books. This could be an issue because sharing materials may be difficult when a grade level team is teaching the same lessons

on the same days at the same time. Often when my grade level team is using books in our literacy lessons we plan our lessons so we can be using different books on the same day in order to give all of us equal access to materials. One thing that could be done to fix this is to acquire digital copies of the book through a library, an online reading platform such as Epic, or through purchasing digital copies.

Another limitation of my work is the Minnesota Department of Education's revision of the English Language Arts Standards. The revised standards will be implemented during the 2025-2026 school year, and include updated versions of the standards I have centered my unit around. The biggest change to the perspective standard is the inclusion of the Dakota and Anishinaabe authors, which unfortunately are not included in my unit. There is also a new writing standard where students should be able to compare their perspectives and identities to a character in a story. I would love to someday rework my unit to include the update standards, but as they are a few years from implementation, I chose to focus my unit on the current standards.

Communicating My Findings

My project will be implemented during the 2021-2022 school year. I plan to share my work with my grade level team during our workshop time before the school year starts to get their feedback. Once we have a chance to look over my unit as a group, I am hopeful that we can find a place in our literacy yearly plan for these lessons. I think this unit would be excellent to use in October or November as we are continuing to strengthen our classroom communities, but have already established routines and procedures surrounding group work and discussions. I look forward to sharing this work with my grade level team and getting their feedback, as they are all incredibly talented

professionals. Planning a literacy unit on my own was a new experience for me, and I am so excited to finally be able to share my work with others.

Future Related Projects

I am incredibly hopeful that I can use what I have learned from this project and from all of my time at Hamline to work with my grade level team to redesign our literacy units to incorporate more diverse materials and perspectives. I hope to weave more critical literacy skills into our units as well. Creating new authentic unit assessment options is also a goal of mine going forward. As I mentioned previously, the Understanding by Design framework has completely changed my thinking about unit planning, and I am hopeful that I can use the skills I have learned to continue to create text sets that can introduce students to new perspectives and teach our literacy standards in a more engaging way. I would also love the chance to create a literacy unit that pulls in science or social studies topics and standards. My next step is to take what I have learned and try and apply it to creating a literacy and social studies cross curricular unit on communities and making connections, which are the first two social studies and literacy units we cover.

Benefits to the Field

This curriculum can be beneficial to the field of literacy education in many ways. Through my research I noticed a lack of complete critical literacy units for elementary school students. The purpose of this unit is to teach students an important critical literacy skill while tying in Minnesota state standards, and most curriculum I have come across in my research do not do both of these things. Critical literacy skill instruction is often not

built into typical curricular literacy lessons for students in elementary school. In addition, this unit uses authentic materials to teach these skills. Authenticity is needed to engage students and to help them relate to the texts being explored during literacy lessons. Some of the lessons in this unit are focused on videos or articles instead of on books, which I hope will expose students to more types of reading than just books. Being able to use skills with a video or article are important real life skills for students to learn. My hope is also that through this unit students can learn about people that are different from them, and learn to embrace and be curious about those differences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reflected on my experience and what I have learned through creating my Capstone project. I explored four major learnings from this work that I will carry with me as I take the next step in my career, and took another look at the literature that relates to or led me to these learnings. The implications and limitations of my project were discussed, as were how I plan to share my work, potential future projects that I look forward to creating, and finally the benefits of my project to the field of literacy education.

This project has been the most challenging and most educational experience I have had in my teaching career thus far. I have learned so much about literacy, diverse books, text sets, and the many pieces that must be considered in order to create a quality literacy curriculum. I hope that my passion for this work is communicated through my project. One Capstone project can't change the world, but I hope that I can take what I have learned through this work and use it to create a more engaging and understanding

literacy community in my classroom. Teaching is how I can make the world a better place, and this work has been a step towards achieving my goals.

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