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Implementing Cultural Sustaining Literacy: Curriculum Unit Plans

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Approaching Social Studies Content By Using Equitable And Culturally Sustaining Literacy
Practices

by

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

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Dedication

To my partner, friends, colleagues for your continuous encouragement and support.

Your guidance, patience and radical hopes and dreams helped me to complete this project.

Special thanks to my students who this work is ultimately for. I have learned a great deal from you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

For the last few years, I have been beginning my career as a social studies teacher and before this, I was a youth worker and volunteer predominantly working with immigrant and refugee students who were mostly Black, Latine, and Asian. Throughout my first years of teaching, I have been in the process of forming a teaching style that both honors the abilities and skills that I bring but more importantly those of my students. Similar to my students, my identity has played a major role in how I show up in the classroom culturally, socially, and linguistically. I can identify with the students whose parents speak another language that they struggle with or do not understand. I can understand navigating a culture that is both beautiful and complicated. Similar to my students, unfortunately, I have experienced and continue to experience a society and educational system that devalues, demonizes, and erases the cultural, historical, and societal contributions to the world of both my background but also theirs as well. With that being said, I am a Black teacher who wants to have a social studies education in my school and across the country that is intentionally uplifting the voices, experiences, and the literacies that our Black, Brown, and Indigenous students bring to the classroom from their communities.

Social Studies Classroom

The social studies classroom can be a place where students study all aspects of society, identity, and cultures in this world. However, it continues to be a place where the White Mainstream cultures are still valued over our Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and their communities. This is in the face of the slow-paced but essential move to teach history within

social studies in a way that tells the truth no matter how difficult and distressing it may be. While social studies content has moved to some degree towards this goal, some considerations like students' personal identities continue to be left out. Since social studies is the second most reading and writing-intensive course, we should place more intention around the way we teach literacy in these classrooms.

Literacy and Culturally Responsiveness

Social studies should be as intentional as ELA in the integration of explicit literacy skills as practices. Additionally, these literacy practices should be rooted in an equitable and culturally sustaining mindset that both values and celebrates students and their identities and have them critique the world they live in (Muhammad and Mosley, 2020). Literacy and cultural responsiveness are treated as separate concepts, however, when they can work together they can empower students. All this has led me to my research question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?* The purpose of this capstone is to create a curriculum that more fully integrates these concepts in the structure of my social studies class with the backing of research on these approaches. The hope is that social studies teachers can use this as a tool for integrating equitable literacy skills into their classrooms.

This chapter will discuss the context around my research question and will dissect my personal and professional reasons for posing this question. This will also explore my overall rationale for this project and its significance. There will also be a short description of the entire capstone project.

Personal Connections

There are a few things that make up my cultural identity including language, race, and ethnicity. I was originally born in New Orleans where my parents had immigrated from Nigeria 13 years prior. Back then there was a pretty sizable community of people from Nigeria living in the city at the time. Like most Nigerian-American families, we spoke English and another tribal language. For our family, that language is Yoruba, a widely known tribal group and language which has a deep oral, music, and storytelling history. I did not speak this language growing up and my family mostly spoke to me in English. A couple of years after I was born, my family would move to Minnesota and within a year I was put into ESL classes and reading support classes. I never truly found out the reason why this occurred. Almost everyone in Nigeria speaks English in everyday life and I barely knew a few words of Yoruba. I found out later that this was not an uncommon occurrence especially among the children of African immigrants. Out of three other siblings, I was the only one who attended EL classes of any kind.

While I was in these classes, I learned more about English and the different mechanics and structures of it but it also communicated to me that English was more important than anything else. Not only that, but my reading support classes reinforced that I should not speak the Black English that my siblings and many other Nigerian-Americans speak. These experiences made my relationship to literacy fraught with what was superior. I was in a predominantly white environment where no one could pronounce my name, I could not speak or write *correctly* despite being raised to only speak English and my cultural or racial history was rarely spoken about in a way that truly mattered. On top of this, I struggled to learn in general because of ADHD and needed to get pulled out of the classes that I loved for support. I loved

social studies and learning about history. Each Black History Month I would create a trifold discussing historical Black leaders. One year I decided to present to the class. My teacher said yes but I was nervous and I wanted to present it to my friend. She then said no and I never did the presentation and more troubling, we did not learn much about Black people or any other people of color that year. This was a pattern that continued in my education especially in regards to Africa. Thinking about it now, I wonder about the contrast between school literacy and social studies and home literacy and social studies. At home, I heard songs in Yoruba, told creation stories, and was taught to seek out and learn the complicated history of both this country and the country where we originate from. At school, this was not the norm of course outside a few teachers who valued my interest and my identity.

In junior high and high school, I figured out how education worked. I realized that certain interests and concepts were a personal initiative and when interest overlapped, I took them and ran with it with varying success, of course. I was still a learner and I enjoyed school. I just needed to take the extra steps of going further than what I learned in the building. As I entered college, I was eager to learn on my terms the ideas and concepts that were always kept and never fully allowed to explore. I also wanted to learn in a way that embraced all parts of myself and I immediately started working with youth because I wanted them to have that experience too.

Being a Youth Worker and Volunteer

I became a youth worker because I wanted to be like the teachers that had supported me along the way. All the experiences I had during my childhood and beyond informed the way that I worked with these young people. When I started working in these spaces I noticed that many of

these students, Black and Brown, came from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. This is something that I identified deeply with.

I worked in homework centers and after-school programs where students told me about their insecurities about school and speaking their struggles with learning English. They talked about the push and pull of navigating a school system that did not see them or their needs. The longest program that I stayed with for almost two years solidified my conviction of becoming a teacher. It was a program dedicated to making sure students become change-makers in their community but also people who embrace all parts of themselves.

Freedom Schools

I taught about race and culture and students were surprised, angered, and empowered by learning about a history that they were not taught in the schools they were going to. They also taught me the importance of having an education that teaches you how to advocate for yourself. This space showed me that students, when given opportunities and freedom to explore as a group and by themselves, their identity, their language, and their communities, were capable of impacting the world in beautiful ways. Working with this pushed me to work with students in this program called Freedom School. This program through the Children's Defense Fund seeks to revive the Freedom Schools of the 1960s. Its goal is to cultivate and continue to cultivate a love for reading, community, culture, and self while pushing students to critically think about what they are reading and how to change the world around them. With these experiences in mind, I knew that I wanted my social studies class to be one that empowers students in every way that I can.

Teaching and Curriculum Transformation

In my first year of teaching in an urban public high school, I was starting in a new quite innovative program at my school. Outside of the fact that it was my first year of teaching, this program known as Community Connected pushed me to think more deeply about how I wanted to teach. I wanted to understand what it means to do project-based learning and know how to integrate social-emotional learning into everything we do. Helping out students transition into being comfortable with voicing what they want from their education became important to me. That being said I thought about how to meet the needs of students as they grew into their own voice.

Literacy Standards

Additionally, I had to think about the concept of standards-based grading and how to use social studies standards and I realized the difficulty with trying to integrate a lot of standards that had little to do with the lives of the students. As a result of all that I have done before I officially entered a classroom, I valued the separate literacy standards that all social studies are expected to teach but are not consistently paid attention to. For Example, in the

11-12.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. (MDE, 2010, p. 81)

I struggled with what to do and at times was overwhelmed because I felt my students deserved better. I did my research and worked on growing ethnic studies at the district level to help me figure out how to support my students more.

Pandemic

The pandemic shifted a lot of my thinking around what students needed and what they deserved in this prolonged time of distress. Additionally, the murder of George Floyd made us as a school community think about how we are showing up fully for our students who are majority black and Asian who have historically suffered from police brutality and general racial violence in this country for centuries. During the summer of 2020, I thought about how I can make my classes more culturally sustaining and more responsive to the literacy needs of my students. I came across Muhammad's (2020) *Cultivating Genius* which uses 19th Century Black literary circles to inform our understanding of how to teach Culturally and historically responsive teaching in the classroom. The book opened up the door for me to fully bridge the gap between Social Studies and literacy.

My second year of teaching brought new challenges, concerns, and questions. I was concerned about building a virtual environment, keeping in contact with students and families and recentering social-emotional learning in everything we do. This was a tough, complicated and exhausting year as the pandemic seemed to intensify in all communities, but especially communities of color. In addition, continuing conversations of elections, police violence, gun violence, anti-Asian hate crimes and the importance of an anti-racist education that supports how we approach these topics. Using what I researched and learned about cultivating genius I made the world history class thematic and less chronological and I began to center current events more

consistently. I also worked at the district level to help curriculum transformation in World History to get more ideas. With the help of colleagues and student feedback, I tweaked a decent amount over the year. By the end of this school year, students knew that I cared about their well-being and their success and also that I was trying my best to give them the language they needed to describe themselves and critique the world around them. All my experiences and growth over my life and my teaching in the last few years have led me to explore the research question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?*.

Rationale

I am a Black teacher who wants social studies to be intentional with uplifting the voices, experiences, and literacies that our Black, Brown and Indigenous students bring to the classroom from their communities. The students that I have had the privilege of teaching and working with are inspiring, brilliant, and truthfully amazing. Similar to my experience, students might be doing well or might be struggling in school but the commonality across the board is that they have felt erased, not valued, and not considered especially in social studies settings. I believe that literacy in all its forms is foundational in our understanding of the world therefore we must be intentional as social studies teachers to make sure that our literacy practices do not oppress students in the same ways that our content has and in many circumstances continue to do. Literacy and cultural responsiveness work hand in hand in the classroom to facilitate an environment that values students in every way. Muhammed (2020) discusses the idea of literary presence, “Literary presence means staking a claim and making one's self visible within the intellectual community

through acts of literacy. Black people did not wish to merely exist in the country they wanted to exert their presence and make their mark on history and tell their own narratives” (p. 27). Our students deserve the right to stake their claim in both our learning communities and our larger communities. Our Black, Brown, and Indigenous students do not wish to merely exist in this country; they also want to exert their presence and tell their own narratives like those Black literary societies of the 19th century (Muhammed 2020).

This project is truly significant to my life both professionally and personally because I strive to be the best teacher for my students but also as a member of this society passionate about racial and social justice. I want to build this curriculum so that other teachers can use it as a resource by which to inform their understanding of what they should do for the classroom. As a recent member of the literacy team and an advocate for equity and culturally responsive practices in my building, I hope to spread the intentionality behind integrating literacy and cultural responsiveness at the school level with my research question in mind: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?*.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the personal and professional reasons that led me to this topic. All the experiences including struggling in school and feeling undervalued to doing well in school but feeling silenced have made a profound impact on me. In addition, my experiences with working with students who were in similar situations that I once was in and my pursuit of being an equitable and anti-racist teacher that values literacies and narrative my students has to led me to the research question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate*

equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in High School Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?

In Chapter Two, I present a literature review of literacy practices that empower all students, culturally sustaining practices in the social studies settings, and where these concepts overlap. In Chapter Three, I will overview a project consisting of curricula and lessons from my classes and the student products and feedback that result. In Chapter Four, I will reflect on my process and implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In researching the components of the equitable social studies classroom, I reviewed the literature on how equitable literacy practices, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and approaches that support all learners together can make a more equitable social studies curriculum and environment. I learned about the many different approaches to literacy and how literacy can be used as a resource for creating a more culturally inclusive classroom for all learners. Additionally, I learned about how I can implement these frameworks to be used in my classroom. This research has supported my ability to answer the question, *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?*

This chapter is a review of literature on the differing perspectives of how literacy ought to be taught in social studies, culturally sustaining pedagogy and practices, and the differing approaches to support all students that may be present in a mainstream social studies classroom. The section on literacy will explore the place and importance of literacy in general and within a social studies classroom at the secondary level. The first part of this section will focus on the expectations of secondary literacy practice in the state of Minnesota using literacy and content standards for social studies. Additionally, This section will focus on how this concept of literacy is perceived and transition to discussion on the purpose of equitable and culturally responsive literacy practices and the frameworks that can be used to implement these practices in a classroom setting. The next section will explore the literature around culturally sustaining

pedagogies and their approach to instruction, planning, and the classroom environment. It will also explore other kinds of literature that are grounded in these approaches. This section will still reference the concept of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy but those sources will be used to further explain the step towards culturally sustaining pedagogy. Then the section will end with discussing how culturally sustaining pedagogy and literacy can overlap and be implemented in social studies classrooms.

The final section will focus on literature that discusses approaches that support all learners in a social studies classroom. The first part will explore literature that synthesizes the connection between cognitive development in students and culturally responsive pedagogy. Then will explore the practices of English learners, students with special needs and how those populations' needs can be met through both equitable literacy practices and culturally sustaining pedagogy working together. Finally, it will transition to literature discussing work that focuses on how culturally sustaining literacy can be used to create educational models that support social-emotional learning in students.

Literacy

Literacy has a wide range of approaches within a classroom and can be defined differently across disciplines. The first step to understanding how literacy is used in a social studies setting is to focus on the expectations of social studies teachers around literacy in Minnesota. Additionally, we must think of the ways social studies teachers view their role in a student's literacy development before understanding the models and frameworks that seek equity and culturally inclusive pedagogies for all learners. Equitable literacy practice can be essential

for the empowerment of all students in social studies setting and in order to do this, we must be aware of how we need to go above expectation to do this.

Literacy in Minnesota Social Studies Classrooms

Literacy in secondary social studies in Minnesota is shaped by two sets of standards: the Social Studies Standards, which are the content standards by which social studies are required to teach and the Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies standards, 6-12 (MDE, 2011).

The Literacy Standards for Social Studies are composed of two sections, Reading and Writing. The reading section is composed of four categories: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading, and Level of Text Complexity. (MDE, 2010). Key ideas and Details focuses on identifying and analyzing central themes, Craft and Structure focus on the language and meaning while breaking the purposes and structures of the text, Integration of knowledge and ideas focuses on evaluating textual knowledge and arguments while Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity focuses on the comprehension of a multitude of differing texts (MDE, 2010, p. 81).

The second section of the Literacy standards focuses on writing and is broken up into four components: Text types and purposes, Writing Process: Production and Distribution of Writing, Research to Build, and Present Knowledge and Range of Writing (MDE, 2010). Text types and purposes focus on building arguments and constructing exploratory texts, Writing Process: Production and Distribution of Writing focus on the use of a writing process, Research to Build and Present Knowledge focus on the research process, and Range of Writing focus on student engagement of arrangement of writing tasks (MDE, 2010, p. 86).

The main purpose of the Social Studies standards is to focus on content and encompasses five different subject areas at the 9-12 grade level: U.S History, World History, US Government, Geography, and Economics (MDE, 2011). The benchmarks under the standards do not directly address literacy directly but there is some overlap in the section regarding Historical Thinking Skills which is described as “Historical inquiry is a process in which multiple sources and different kinds of historical evidence are analyzed to draw conclusions about how and why things happened in the past” (MDE, 2011, p. 124). This definition is a point by which the standards described in the History/Social Studies Standards overlap. This is clearer with the two benchmarks that fall under this Standard:

- 9.4.1.2.1 Pose questions about topics in history; suggest possible answers and write a thesis; locate and organize primary and secondary sources; analyze them for credibility and bias; corroborate information across the sources; use sources to support or refute the thesis; and present supported findings.
- 9.4.1.2.2: Evaluate alternative interpretations of historical events; use historical evidence to support or refute those interpretations. (MDE, 2011, p. 124)

These standards are important in helping social studies teachers guide instruction in the classroom in order for students to meet the benchmarks. Both the content and literacy standards are markers by which to construct our instruction to students but social studies teachers, in particular, have varying perspectives of the role they serve as literacy teachers (Nokes, 2010) Additionally, these teachers can have different ideas on how to implement literacy practices in their classrooms.

Literacies and The Role of Secondary Social Studies Teachers

There are multiple approaches and perspectives a social studies teacher might take in regards to literacy. Nokes (2010) discusses that there are multiple influences that shape teachers' instruction in literacy but highlights two literacies at play: general literacy and content area literacy or in the language historians use to construct their understanding of history. Furthermore, Nokes (2010) discusses how these teachers tend to implement lower level literacy skills such as summarizing and visualizing than specialized literacy for historical processes such as sourcing and corroboration. Countering this assertion, Hubbard (2019), a study which explores how social studies perceived and implemented literacy in the classroom, found that many perceived literacy as a foundational aspect of being a social studies teacher. The study continues to push back further to say that teachers tended to use a mix of literacy strategies with some identified teachers using “higher level” literacy strategies such as primary sources analysis. Despite the willingness for social studies teachers to see themselves as an essential part of literacy instruction, Evans and Clark (2015) argue that many social studies teachers feel ill-equipped or reluctant to intentionally and fully implement these strategies into their teaching. While there is a connection between social studies and literacy among teachers, the actual reality is the skill level to implement this literacy seems to be quite varied, which may be a reflection of teacher education programs (Nokes, 2010).

Content area literacy or disciplinary literacy is defined as “the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline” (McKenna & Robinson, 1990, p. 184). While this concept should be most accessible to content-specific teachers, Social Studies teachers in one study expressed a need to seek collaboration in order to build effective

disciplinary knowledge (Lee, 2018). This study is specifically valuable because it demonstrates the need for social studies teachers to collaborate in order to integrate disciplinary knowledge effectively. This study concludes that teachers and students do better when there is a collaboration between teachers and experts (Lee, 2018). Another study (Langan & Lawrence, 2017) looked at how middle and high school social studies teachers implemented literacy disciplinary strategies after professional development. The study found that only a third of the teachers fully transferred the literacy practices to the topic, which in this case was primary source documents . It concludes that students benefit the most from a balanced approach of content area reading and disciplinary literacy approaches. Additionally, it states the importance of connecting students' experiences to the content area reading while also going further to critique and analyze the work by which the teachers struggled to do so.

This literature focused on the role of social studies teachers in teaching literacy, highlighting the very struggles and barriers with literacy instruction. Social studies teachers have varying skill sets in their ability to implement literacy and content-specific literacy in the classroom (Lagan & Lawrence, 2018). When teachers are given resources to implement these strategies, there can be a mixed bag of outcomes which could be a reflection of the mode by which this information is given to teachers (Lagan & Lawrence, 2018). Shortcomings of these studies and articles are that there is very little mention of how the lack of these strategies affects certain more marginalized students within these buildings or if the strategies being implemented and or acquired by these teachers are actually benefiting all students regardless of race, culture, and language (Lazar and Patrica, 2013) .

The Need for Equitable Literacy Practice

Over the last decade, there has been a shift in the way teachers need to arrive in the classroom, which now asks teachers to know and grow their knowledge beyond skills and knowledge (Lazar & Patrica, 2013). Lazar and Patrica (2013) state that teachers need to go beyond knowledge and literacy and realize the privileges that they might have and the historical and social factors that have shaped student access to literacy instruction. Schools and educators need to move beyond skills only and eurocentric instruction, that centers white middle class or European cultures, in order to serve the needs of all students in order to reach, Black and brown students in particular (Muhammad & Mosley, 2020). This concludes that students are not having their needs met in general by an education system that is skills-focused and stops short of involving the lived experiences which makes literacy inequitable (Muhammad and Mosley, 2020). Equitable literacy practices do not mandate standardized *literacy* but rather *many literacies* and the students who tend to struggle and fail in the current system are students whose many literacies do not match the standard (Morell, 2013). These many literacies are rooted in the identity of students and identity has historically been the center of education for communities of color (Muhammed & Mosley, 2020). Furthermore, the move into a more technologically advanced world mandates that we utilize literacy to understand and critically think about the media we consume (Morrell, 2013).

Muhammad and Mosley (2021) discuss the importance of evaluating curriculum and policies because of teacher programs' overreliance on pedagogies and approaches that were created by white theorists . Educators can use the following questions to evaluate curriculum, state assessments, and teacher evaluations:

- Are the authors of these documents from diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds? Have they been masterful teachers of literacy? Do they have successful experiences teaching children of color or children who have experienced generational trauma?
- In what theories of education are the documents grounded?
- How do the documents align with literacy research across time? (Muhammad and Mosley, 2021, p.193)

These practices seek to create a literacy education that is more equitable and culturally inclusive to the needs of communities of color (Muhammad, 2020).

Cultivating Genius and Historically Responsive Literacy

Historically Responsive Literacy is a framework that uses Black literacy circles from the 19th century to inform the way we instruct students today. This framework asks educators to respond to the social and political times of the past and the one currently living within (Muhammed, 2020, p. 52). Additionally, this framework asks teachers to question the ways by which they the histories, identities and literacies of students and their communities (Muhammed, 2020, p. 51).

Muhammed (2020) explores five different approaches that construct a more equitable and culturally sustaining literacy practice. The following are the components of the Historically Responsive Literacy with the corresponding questions:

- Identity: How will my instruction help students to learn about themselves and/or about others?
- Skills: How will my instruction build students' skills for the content area?

- Intellect: How will my instruction build students' knowledge and mental powers?
- Criticality: How will my instruction engage students thinking about power and equity and disruption of oppression?
- Joy: How do our curriculum and instruction elevate beauty, truth, and happiness in humanity? (Muhammad, 2020, p. 59; Muhammad & Mosely, 2021, p.195)

Literacy within secondary social studies classrooms are shaped by both Social Studies standards and the ELA Literacy standards. As described in the research, literacy is an essential part of a student's learning within social studies class which is informed by these standards. However, social studies teachers have varying perspectives on how to effectively integrate literacy or disciplinary literacy. Regardless of this reality, a more pressing need for equitable and culturally responsive or sustaining literacy practice is needed to truly reach students in an effective way. Furthermore, in addition to equitable literacy practices it is important to examine specific pedagogies that can make this practice a reality.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

In order to create curriculums and environments that establish a literacy practice that is more equitable, it involves the reevaluation of not only the traditional practices but also the ways in which we use students' cultures and lived experiences now (Paris & Alim 2014). There is a tendency to separate out the concept of literacy with the concept of culturally inclusive practices into a class environment, however an intersection of both can be used to meet the needs of students (Paris & Alim, 2014) Culturally relevant pedagogy sought to focus on the needs of Black and Brown students by focusing on the academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness of all students (Ladson-Billings 2014). However, since its

establishment culturally relevant pedagogy has morphed into something unrecognizable.

Ladson-Billings (2014) discusses this distortion,

What state departments, school districts, and individual teachers are now calling “culturally relevant pedagogy” is often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate. The idea that adding some books about people of color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting “diverse” images makes one “culturally relevant” seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to. (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 9)

Culturally sustaining pedagogy builds on the work of Ladson-Billings (2014) and seeks to expand the

range of its tenets. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is not necessarily a critique but rather the natural evolution of pedagogy that has existed for decades .

Defining Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy grew out of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy responding to the years of implementation and research (Ladson-Billings 2014). Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to establish a more expansive term for the current place of the work, “The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence.” (Paris 2012 pg. 3). This expansion of the reach of cultural responsiveness asks teachers to create environments, curriculums and implement instruction that centers the communities, identities and cultures of

the students as the guiding principle of pedagogy and practice. Additionally, this pedagogy asks educators to ground the work in both the traditional and present realities of the cultures of our students and their communities while also critiquing the potentially regressive or problematic aspects such as misogyny, homophobia and racism (Paris and Alim 2014).

Emerging Frameworks for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy has been approached in many ways through the years because it seeks to respond to the needs and the cultures of the communities that are being served. However, there is very little research about how these practices have been in social studies (Martell and Stevens 2019). One of these studies done by Martell and Stevens (2019) identifies three different approaches to CSP which were described as:

- Exchanging, which is facilitating discussion and activities that discuss and construct meaning around cultural differences and social inequity. For example one of the teachers using this approach used stereotypes from the 1920's to inform a conversation comparing past and current stereotypes.
- Discovering, which focuses on exposing students to different racial and cultural perspectives of the past and present and creating historical and present-day interpretations from this. One of the teachers in the study who fell under this category used student organizations and black lives matter protests to discuss the idea of freedom of speech.
- Challenging, which is focused on helping students build analytical lenses for questioning the world around them. The overall goal was to make sure students are recognized and justice well also becoming agents of change. An example of this is the study weather

when multiple teachers discuss the construction of race in the United States and how it is socially constructed.

The overall conclusions reached by Martell and Stevens were that CSP benefits when it is rooted in local contexts and then expanded. Additionally, it highlights the importance of critical reflection of the teachers in order for them to teach cultures not as a monolith but as complex and ever evolving as our society (Martell & Stevens, 2019).

Another framework that has grown out of the work of culturally responsive and sustaining teaching is Antiracist Black Language Pedagogy (Baker-Bell, 2020). Baker-Bell (2020) discusses the importance of rejecting the widespread practice of treating Black English or African American English as inferior in the classroom but rather using this as a resource for pedagogical process. Baker Bell's (as cited in Paris & Alim, 2017) research is a part of an essential tenet of CSP, recentering the current languages and cultures of youth such as Black English in the students education (p. 8). A framework is outlined for approaching Anti Racist Black Language Pedagogy which is organized into Seven *Black Language Artifacts* and is described by Baker-Bell, 2020 as the following:

1. Black Language and Identity: This artifact focuses on the overlap of language, culture and Identity in the Black community.
2. Language, History and Culture: This explores the historical, cultural and political aspects of Black language
3. Study of the Grammatical and Rhetorical features of Black Language: This artifact discusses the grammatical construction of Black language especially in conversation.

4. Language and Power: This artifact discusses the intersection of language and power
5. Language and Racial Positioning in Society: This artifact allows students to think about how race and language meet and how anti-blackness informs perception of the language.
6. Language, Agency & Action: In this artifact student investigates how to use Black Language to implement political action.
7. Imagining a Language of Solidarity: In this artifact students find common experiences across racial groups. (p. 35)

This framework focuses on Black Language but also gives flexibility to acknowledge other marginalized versions of English and ways to empower these versions of English among students through cultivation of solidarity across communities (Baker-Bell, 2020, 88).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Practice and Outcomes

Implementation of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy can have very different outcomes based on the approaches by teachers and their knowledge level of culturally sustaining or even culturally responsive practices. In the study by Woodard and Vaughan (2017) multiple teachers from a range of backgrounds implemented writing strategies that they consider culturally sustaining. The teachers implemented a variety of techniques, one of which focused on decentering White English and conversations and critiquing the dominant cultural prevalence. Additionally, these teachers sought to expand the definition of literacy which was demonstrated in valuing oral discussions and valuing multiple ways of communication (Woodard & Vaughan, 2017).

Jimenez and Luevanos (2017) discusses the implementation of culturally sustaining practice in a social studies classroom. The teacher was informed by the realities of the community and used that as a starting place for teaching the US and World History classes. The findings were broken down into five major themes which were: *Establishing and Building Relationships* which discussed how the teacher used personal understanding to inform the community. *Relevance and Practical Applications* which focused on how here content involved current events related to their lives or impacted their communities. *Varying Instructional Techniques* which involves the teachers intentional usage of visuals, music, audio and other technology to convey information to students. *Scaffolding Instruction* which focused on the teacher matching texts to meet students' needs, building vocabulary and utilizing background knowledge. *Developing Higher Order Thinking* which discussed how the teacher built higher order thinking with cause and effect, sequencing events and application of concepts (pp. 87-99).

A final study by Puzio et al. (2017) discussed how teachers struggle or fail at implementing culturally sustaining practices. Some of the major findings were that teachers at times had a prevalent misconception of culturally sustaining pedagogy as a concept such as simply integrating surface levels references to cultures or diverse stories was enough to be culturally sustaining. A second was that teachers came across institutional barriers such as authority figures and English only policies. A final take away was that these teachers relied on community members to grow and realize their mistakes and failures (Puzio et al., 2017)

As discussed in the research, culturally sustaining pedagogy is a space where culturally inclusive teaching and literacy can meet to deepen the needs of students and their communities. It does ask teachers to go farther than just surface level integration of diverse perspectives which

was also present in the needs in the research surrounding literacy. If implemented intentionally this framework can be used for the benefit of our students and their communities. However, other approaches and frameworks can be integrated to support the needs of all learners in a social studies classroom.

Culturally Inclusive Practices and Meeting The Needs of All Learners

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) and Equitable Literacy are important shifts in thinking and process that strengthens the needs of all learners.(Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim 2014; Muhammad & Mosely, 2021). However, other frameworks are necessary in creating a situation where the needs of all learners can be met in a classroom. This section explores frameworks that used in combination of CSP and equitable practices can further support the need of students in a secondary classroom. These include Social Emotional Learning, Supporting Special Education and ELL Learners and using more student centered pedagogies.

Culture, Cognitive Needs and SEL

There are multiple components and approaches that are necessary for caring for the needs of students but some of the needs are more fundamental in the needs of our students. Hammond (2015) argues that there needs to be an understanding about how people's brains work and understanding of culture and its impact on the brain to truly engage and reach the needs of students. Furthermore, Hammand (2015) discusses the idea of six "Culturally Responsive Brain Rules" which helps in the understanding of how the brain uses culture to interpret threats and opportunities. These rules are as follows:

1. The brain seeks to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others in the community.

2. Positive relationship to keep our safety threat detection system in check.
3. Culture guides how we process information
4. Attention drives learning.
5. All new information must be coupled with existing funds of knowledge in order to be learned
6. The brain physically grows through challenge and the stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning. (Hammond, 2015, pp. 47-49)

With these concepts in mind, Hammond (2015) discusses the four- part "Ready for Rigor" Framework (p. 14). See Figure One.

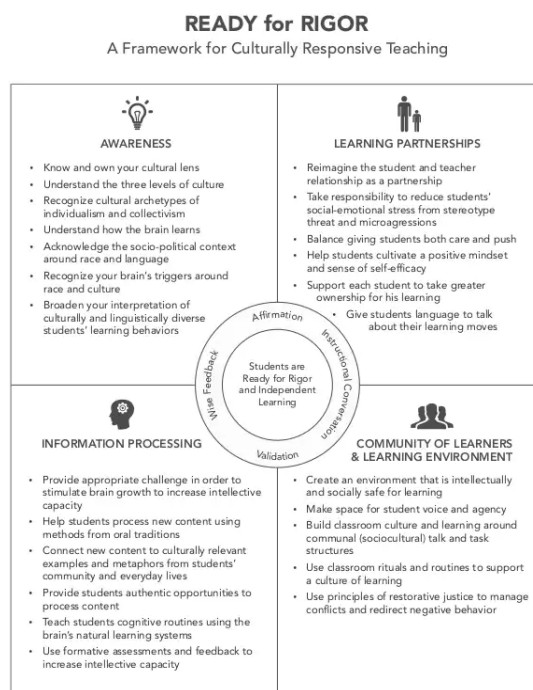


Figure 1 - Ready for Rigor Framework

Hammond (2015 p. 14)

Implementing practices that respond to the cognitive and culture needs is important teaching for engaging and active learning (Hammond 2015). However, the cultural needs of students have been left out of social-emotional learning (Gardener et al., 2021). Gardener et al. (2021) argue that the many SEL Standards are eurocentric and gender neutral, leaving out students and tending to be more about enforcing the norms of white dominant culture rather than intentional SEL practices. Gardener et al. (2021) argue for and integration of cultural sustaining literacy practices in order to move towards emotional justice which they describe as “ More than a set of competencies or skills, emotional justice nurtures reflective relationships with and through stories, creating opportunities for students to understand themselves within the hyper racialized gendered world they navigate, while also expanding their evolving social identities and relationships to literature and their literacies.” (Gardener et. al, 2021, p. 4).

With these concepts in mind racial/culture-neutral approaches to concepts such as SEL, rigor, and the cognitive needs of students can be specifically detrimental to Black and Brown and indigenous students. The concepts described by Hammond (2015) and Gardener (2021) asks teachers to use more culturally and linguistically intersected approaches in their pedagogies.

English Language Learners

English Learners have become a major presence in the U.S schools system, with the share of immigrant children comprising a quarter of all children in the country by 2017 (Jeong, 2021, p. 79). As a result of this reality there is a growing need throughout the country to address this population. Jeong (2021) studies the work of a white women teacher in her work to implement culturally sustaining literacy practice and concepts around social justice. In this study, he found three approaches that aided students in the teachers class: *Recontextualizing of curriculum and*

material in the classroom which involved making students the guiding force in instruction by involving them in the co-creation of materials and allowing students to use their native language. *Connecting classroom instruction with community resources* which involved bringing in community members and family members to be active participants in the students learning. Lastly, *active involvement in the community* where the teacher was an active participant in the concerns of the students community such as getting involved in refugee organizations and expanding the relationship to students out of the classroom (Jeong, 2021, pp. 87-92). These components were effective in creating an environment that allowed the students agency over their education while also allowing them to take ownership over their acquisition of English language. Additionally, these practices were described by Jeong (2021) as an *agentive CSP pedagogy* which contrasts the *assimilative pedagogy* common in the education of immigrant children and English Learners.

Special Education

Sciuchetti (2017) discusses the need for greater around the ways Culturally and linguistically diverse students are left behind in Special education and the factors that have caused this to happen. Sciuchetti (2017) calls for further integration of culturally responsive teaching by using the framework to differentiate culturally specific behavior and disability related behavior and social emotional learning which states,

“Effectively delivering SEL instruction to students from CLD backgrounds requires teachers to adhere to critical features of culturally responsive social skills instruction including: teaching skills that are relevant and of interest to the student; using culturally relevant materials; providing culturally competent peer

models; integrating students' experience into instruction; and providing authentic opportunities to roleplay and applying learned skills" (Sciuchetti 2017, p 5).

This being said, teachers need both CRT and SEL, informed by CRT to create an environment that is more equitable in addressing the needs of CLD students with special education services.

Conclusion

The goal of this literature is to answer the question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?* The research suggest that equitable literacy practices can be essential in integrating culturally inclusive practices and empowering Black and Brown student, Culturally sustaining pedagogy is a more expansive concept that can be implemented in multiple contexts to recenter the needs of marginalized students and culturally inclusive practices can be used to provide more substantial support to all students in the classroom. This information can be helpful in forming a curriculum and facilitating a classroom environment that intentionally and centers empowers Black, Brown and indgenious students which is the ultimate purpose of this capstone project.

The next chapter will explain the capstone project in detail. This capstone project integrates the literature chosen in this chapter including some of the frameworks and approaches referenced. Chapter Three will overview the project along with a timeline, the framework that informs the structure of the curriculum creation as well as the setting and some of the sample materials that will be used in the implementation of the capstone project.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

The research for this capstone is based on the question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?* With this a guiding question I created a project that applied my research to the curriculum and needs of my classroom. This project will focus on the curriculum for my 12th grade US Government class and focus on intentional integration of culturally inclusive instruction, environment and curriculum.

The overall goal of my US Government class is to bridge the connection between a person's personal identity and their political identity and how this informs political participation in our society. This specific set of units will explore a student's idea of government, how political activists were informed by their personal identity and how we can use research to implement change and action in the community. The goal of these sets of units and this class overall is to have students understand how their positionality informs the way that they navigate the world, their community and as people living in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

In order to create these units and my classroom, there are multiple frameworks and ideas that need to be addressed in order to create a social studies classroom that integrates equitable literacy practice, uses a culturally sustaining pedagogy approach, the content and instruction and other approaches that are student-centered. The following frameworks described below offer a holistic approach to the needs of all students.

Historically Responsive Literacy. Students need a literacy instruction that seeks to empower the voices and the voices of those within their communities. Muhammed (2020) wrote, “History from Black communities tells us that educators don’t need to empower youth or give them brilliance or genius. Instead, the power and genius is already within them” (p. 13). We know that there is a capacity for all students to learn, create and cultivate their genius and literacy is an avenue by which we facilitate this for students. Literacy has been used in the past by Black communities to create a greater understanding of identity, to learn helpful skills, to grow their intellect and critique the world around them (Muhammed, 2020, pp. 57-58). Many educators focus too heavily on skills building when in fact a more holistic view is necessary for the more effective and transformative needs of our students. Using Historical Responsive Literacy asks of educators to approach literacy integrating identity, skills, intellect, criticality and joy (Muhammad, 2020; Muhammad & Mosely, 2021, p.6). This framework will be used as a part of the daily lessons and units within the classroom. These additional concepts are fundamental in creating more equitable and culturally sustaining literacy practice as it allows for a deeper integration of themselves, their communities and their worldviews in the process.

For this course, I will structure each of the US Government units with this literacy structure as a guiding pedagogy. **Identity** will be integrated by having students reflect on their positionality in relation to the idea of government but also have them explore how other identity has shaped their politics. **Skills** will be integrated by implementing civic skills and research skills as defined by MDE standards for social studies and literary skills described in the ELA standards section for social studies. The **intellectual growth** of students will be structured in ways that are accessible and nourish the cultures of seeking out learning. “Some have connected the aims of

intellectualism to higher-order or higher level thinking, but historically among Black communities. Intellectualism wasn't seen as exceptional learning- it was just the norm and the way they approached learning" (Mumamad, 2020, p. 105). The goal of this class is to hopefully create an environment that values and normalizes not only activities that expand knowledge but a community that cultivates further growth in knowledge, ergo the emphasis on both critical thinking and research. This will be done through research, action-oriented instruction and human focused lessons and units. **Criticality** will be integrated as many of my lessons will address how power dynamics show up in the government including conversations about oppression, racial justice, white supremacy and resistance movements within the United states across time. **Joy** will be focused on creating happiness and explore the multiple ways that humanity creates joy and seeks out truth. I will create a framework with my daily lessons to address all five components of the Historically Responsive Literacy framework.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. It is important to have instructional approaches that recenter the needs of the community and literacies are a way to expand beyond surface level approaches that have become common culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 9). This emerging pedagogy sustains the experiences, literacies and cultures that may show up in the classroom. There are multiple approaches that teachers have taken that can be defined as culturally sustaining pedagogy but much of this work still builds on earlier work of culturally relevant tenets of academic success, cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 2). The goal of this pedagogy is to answer the urgent need to engage with the communities and lived experiences of the students while addressing and critiquing the problematic and oppressive issues within these communities. (Paris & Alim, 2014).

I will use multiple approaches to implement practices that align with culturally sustaining teaching and literacy practice. One of which is the Historically Responsive Literacy Framework which uses this pedagogy as one of the guiding principles. The other way is the implementation of the approaches that teachers in the research saw their students benefit from. One of these frameworks described the approach of exchanging, discovering and challenging (Machado 2017). This is the point by which frameworks start to overlap with one another. Discovering and exchanging fit comfortably within the concept of Identity and Intellectual described in the Historical Responsive Literacy (HRL) framework. Additionally, challenging which was described in Machado (2017) as critiquing power and systems or their own perspectives which is similar to criticality described in the HRL.

Approaches for all learners. The research shows that culturally inclusive practices can be used for engaging students and reaching their cognitive needs and will include several components.. The component of the Ready for Rigor framework is *Awareness*, which focuses on having students explore their socio political position and building their social emotional skills. This course has students constantly thinking about their relation to the thematic concepts and power dynamics that have developed across time and in the present. Social-emotional skills will be addressed in self-reflection on projects, check-ins and growing awareness on personal needs. Learning Partnerships is about building relational trust and keeping high standards for students. This will be done with structural and direct feedback to students and activities or processes that give students a voice in the classroom. Information processing involves using culture to inform the way that is based on brain science. Applying this will involve using structures described by Hammond (2015, pp 128-130): Ignite which will look like a “Do Now” , Chunk which focuses

on new and accessible information given in a manageable amount of time, Chew which focuses on processing the information, and Review which will give students an opportunity to apply new learning. All four parts will be present in the daily lessons of the class. The last component is Building Community which focuses on the need for people to learn with the community using familiar cultural practices.

Understanding by Design. One of the guiding frameworks in the design of this curriculum and the units is Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The main purpose of the understanding by design framework is to think about the end point in mind in regards to schools. It asks teachers to think about the practical transfer of the information that is being learned in the lesson. Additionally, it requires that teachers be intentional about the ways in which they get students to understand the content. This framework can be broken down into three stages: *Identify Desired Results* which focuses on the end goal of the unit, essential questions and knowledge and the target standards. *Determine Desired Evidence* which focuses on how to measure learning and comprehension identified in the stage one. Finally, *Planning Learning Experiences and Instruction Accordingly* which focuses on creating the actual lessons and learning activities that will support the desired outcomes.

Project Based Learning. This is another framework that will be used to construct the curriculum. This is a student centered approach that uses student voices and interests to create projects that facilitate their project which demonstrates their learning (Boss et al. 2018). This framework asks to incorporate seven design elements described below.

1. *Challenging problem or question:* Neither too difficult nor too easy, the right challenge or problem puts students at the edge of their comfort zone and causes them to stretch their

thinking muscles.

2. *Sustained inquiry*: From project launch to final reflection, students engage in deep inquiry to make their own meaning. That means they need to be asking questions, conducting research, carrying out investigations, and weighing evidence to arrive at answers.
3. *Authenticity*: By making the learning as applicable to the real world as possible, you will up the ante when it comes to student engagement.
4. *Student voice and choice*: Students make decisions, and they express and defend opinions throughout the project.
5. *Reflection*: Students are prompted to think about their own learning throughout projects. Reflection encourages students to consider any obstacles they are facing, challenges they have overcome, and the quality of work they are producing.
6. *Critique and revision*: Students improve their work (and deepen their learning) by engaging in cycles of critique and revision en route to final products.
7. *Public product*: At the culmination of a project, students share their final product, solution, or argument with an audience that extends beyond the classroom. (Boss et al., 2018, 47-49)

Timeline and Project Description

The construction of the curriculum will take place in the fall of 2021. This nine week curriculum guide is intended for a 12th grade US Government course which is divided into two units or modules. It will include both a framework for creating the daily lessons and the construction of the overall units. Examples of daily lessons will be collected from both modules

and final projects will be used to demonstrate outcomes. These examples will be finalized between November 1st and Dec 1st.

These sets of units will take place over the course of the 9 weeks and each unit will explore two different themes: “ Political Identity” and “Politics in the Community”. The units in this quarter will explore how our political identities are shaped by power dynamics in our society. We will first explore students' personal identities and how it relates to politics, then students will see how politics operate in communities and end with exploring the political issues they are personally connected to and become experts in political issues.

Module 1 Self will last for 4 weeks. This section will be the first unit of the quarter and will explore the idea of political identity. Students will examine different historical leaders and investigate how their personal identity influences political action, how they collaborated with other people to reach a collective goal, and how their actions shaped the current state of the political issues they fought for. The purpose of this unit is to have students investigate the ways politics impacts their lives and their futures. Content that will be covered in this unit will include types of government, civic skills and the rights of a minority.

Module 2 Politics in the Community will last for 5 weeks. This section will examine the multiple dynamics that form the conflict in the issue, they will research the history of the political issue and the possible solutions. Students will then look at the issue at the community level and see how their issue affects the community. The purpose of this unit is for students to find a political issue that they are passionate about and implement an action plan together. Content that will be covered in this unit will include public policy, political participation, executive, and legislative branches.

Students will construct three artifacts that demonstrate their personal learning of the ideas around political identity and research political action. This can be done virtually and physically and this will be done in presentations. The final product will encompass the following based on the HRL framework:

Outcomes of Historical Responsive Literacy in Project		
Dream Government	The Personal is Political	Politics in the Community
<p>Identity: Students will explore how their identity can shape their perspective on government.</p> <p>Skills: Students will be focusing on articulating different perspectives of government and government structure.</p> <p>Intellect: Students will learn the structures of different government systems in the world.</p> <p>Criticality: Students will think about how power influences personal and community perspectives of government.</p> <p>Joy: Students will create a government that reflects what they believe is a government should do for people.</p>	<p>Identity: Students will investigate how a personal identity change shapes their politics.</p> <p>Skills: Students will identify textual evidence from primary and secondary sources while analyzing its credibility.</p> <p>Intellect: Students will learn more about how activist personal identity has and continue to influence political action.</p> <p>Criticality: Students will think about how oppression and power dynamics shaped the lives of the political activists they researched.</p> <p>Joy: Students will investigate how the community can find similarities in common issues.</p>	<p>Identity: Students will become an expert at a political issue that impacts them or their community.</p> <p>Skills: Students will continue to practice credible sourcing while working on revising and reflecting on written products.</p> <p>Intellect: Students will learn how activists in their community and other communities make change and participate.</p> <p>Criticality: Students will think about how power dynamics and oppression shape who benefits from a political issue.</p> <p>Joy: Students will experience the importance of advocating change in a community</p>

Standards and Assessment

The Standards used for this curriculum are based on the social studies Standards and Social Studies section of the ELA Standards. For these series of units five Standards will be used from 2011 social studies standards and at least 3 literacy Standards will be used from the 2010 ELA section. Standard usage may change based on the implementation of the new social studies standards that are set to be implemented with the 2021-2022 school year.

This curriculum and my classes follow a standards-based model, which means that lessons will be focused on mastery of the standards. Therefore, rubrics for all parts of class will be created and implemented using a scale that reflects this practice. This curriculum is being implemented in a project based learning program which means both the mastery of the content and prep/execution of public exhibition will be included in the grading process. Formative assessments will make up 20% of work and will focus on the skill building while summatives assessment which comprises 80% will comprise demonstration of mastery and public exhibition.

Setting

I planned this curriculum for a high school US Government course which is for a full year and is a requirement for graduation in Minnesota. Based on my previous experience in this school, I am expecting a range of students in my class including race, gender, home language and ability. I know that over 95% of my students will be BIPOC. The largest populations present both in my class and in the building are Black/African-American, Hmong or Asian-Americans and Latine populations. That being said, I find it essential to talk about the ways oppression and inequality manifest in our lives. while facilitating the conversations that are needed to resist oppressive systems such as critiquing oppressive ideas and growing our knowledge about

navigating and disrupting systems. Additionally, it is equally as important to recognize and prioritize the emotional and social well-being of these students. About a fourth of the school and the students in my class receive some sort of special education support including SEA or Special Education Assistant. A smaller section of our population additionally will receive English Language support.

I am in a smaller project based program within an urban public school, which means that I work on a team with the students' other teachers. The class sizes will be around 25-30 students and all students will have 1-1 technology as a consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This means that the majority of the work will be done online; however, this will be adjusted based on student need.

Conclusion

This curriculum has been shaped by the research question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?* Using as Historically Responsive Literacy and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy as grounding I created a set of units about self, community and worldview across time using elements from Understanding By Design and Project Based Learning. The purpose of this curriculum is to center the needs and perspectives of the students while also pairing this with a learning environment that is conducive for learning of all students. This unit will give students opportunities to explore their positionality in regards to concepts that directly impact them while also investigating how these concepts have been shaped by power dynamics.

Chapter Four will review the research question after its implementation and the final product. This chapter will include the conclusions that came out of the implementation of this curriculum, a reflection on its creation and brief discussion of its implementation. Finally, this chapter will discuss the ways to use this curriculum in the future and next steps.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflection

Introduction

This chapter discusses the learnings, understandings, and outcomes that came out of addressing the following research question: *How can we create curriculums and environments that integrate equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices in high school Social Studies settings that intentionally consider all learners?*. This curriculum is not created from scratch but was a collection of lessons and units that I have been able to compile from my past and current 12th grade US Government class. This research question challenged me to figure out a way to systematically integrate equitable and culturally sustaining literacy using what I already had.

In Chapter One of this capstone, I discussed my path to formulating my research question for this capstone. As a person who struggled with school earlier on because of the lack of attention paid to my identity and absence of intentional empowerment of my abilities, I believe that it is essential that the social studies field be clearly rooted in seeking to empower the needs of Black, Brown and Indigenous students. In addition to my own experience in the education system. I came to this conclusion because of my experiences working with almost entirely students of color, who talked similarly about the problems that I had experienced in my education. All these experiences allowed me to approach my research for this capstone in a personal way.

In Chapter Two, I dove into the research around how we can approach literacy in the social studies classroom rooted in equitably and culturally sustaining literacy practices. This research allowed me to affirm the experiences of many Black, Brown, and Indigenous people

who have gone through the system but also allowed me to identify frameworks that brought a more holistic approach to the needs of all students.

In Chapter Three, I overviewed the conclusions of my research while also demonstrating how I would lay out the curriculum using different frameworks. I discussed a unifying framework rooted in project-based learning and how it would be implemented in my future US government classes.

Lastly, this chapter will focus on a reflection of both research and the creation of my capstone project. Then it will discuss the actual creation of my project and how the frameworks I researched informed the creation of the curriculum. Finally, I will conclude with some limitations and possible usage of this research going forward.

Reflection on the Capstone Process

The process of creating my capstone and exploring the different frameworks that inform the ideas of both equitable literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy has helped expand my knowledge base as a relatively new teacher. I feel more comfortable with identifying frameworks and implementing them in my classes and instruction. The biggest takeaway is that I can approach and self-reflect on my teaching practice through the perspective of culturally sustaining literacy rooted heavily in the research and philosophy of Black and Brown educators.(Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim 2014; Muhammad & Mosely, 2021) Beforehand I had struggled to identify how literacy fit within the confines of social studies because it is a topic that was not consistently applied during my teaching education. I can now say that I feel more confident in my ability to point out if something is more intentionally integrating literacy in my class.

Another important takeaway is the idea that good and effective teachers are inherently researchers in the profession. I found this realization, which came to understand early in my capstone process, very empowering because it reframed my idea of teachers as formulators of ideology, pedagogy, and frameworks. Not only is the research I do as a teacher a response to the needs of my students, but it is also an outcome of the nearly constant research I do on each of my students from day to day in the classroom. As a teacher who seeks to advocate for the importance of literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy, I believe that teachers should be inherently empowered by the knowledge of their students to be researchers and creators of educational frameworks and pedagogy.

Curriculum Creation

Reflecting on the creation of my curriculum I see major influences in the final product to be the work of Gholdy Muhammad (2020) the creator of the Historically Responsive Literacy Framework, and Django Paris and Samy Alim (2014) who began advocating for the importance of Culturally sustaining teaching and literacy. I learned about both these frameworks in the summer after my first year of teaching as I sought to redesign the way of teaching in the middle of the pandemic.

In Chapter Two, I wrote the following: “Muhammed (2020) explores five different approaches that construct a more equitable and culturally sustaining literacy practice. The following are the components of the Historically Responsive Literacy with the corresponding questions:

- Identity: How will my instruction help students to learn about themselves and/or about others?

- Skills: How will my instruction build students' skills for the content area?
- Intellect: How will my instruction build students' knowledge and mental powers?
- Criticality: How will my instruction engage students thinking about power and equity and disruption of oppression?
- Joy: How do our curriculum and instruction elevate beauty, truth, and happiness in humanity? (Muhammad, 2020, p. 59; Muhammad & Mosely, 2021, p.195)”

This framework laid out by Muhammad (2020) integrates what I believe is essential in integrating more equitable and culturally sustaining literacy practices. All parts of this framework can be systematically integrated into a U.S Government while leveraging and focusing on certain components of the framework. Additionally, this framework pushed me to consider what I am implementing effectively in my curriculum and where it would be most effective to implement it. I have learned of the flexibility and freedom that this framework has as long as it is rooted in true self-reflection of one's current teaching practices.

Historically Responsive Literacy framework response has informed the idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy which was formulated by Alim and Django. In Chapter 2 I stated,

“This expansion of the reach of cultural responsiveness asks teachers to create environments, curriculums and implement instruction that centers the communities, identities, and cultures of the students as the guiding principle of pedagogy and practice. Additionally, this pedagogy asks educators to ground the work in both the traditional and present realities of the cultures of our students and their communities while also critiquing

the potentially regressive or problematic aspects such as misogyny, homophobia, and racism (Paris and Alim 2014). “

This approach to curriculum allowed me to think about how I am recentring the community and the cultures of the students in the construction of knowledge of the different topics explored in the US Government class. It also required asking how my curriculum critiqued and challenged misconceptions and oppressive ideas. In the process of researching the Culturally Sustaining Literacy practices, I realized the need to be intersectional with the way I approached the implementation. For example, CSP needs to integrate aspects of literacy, social-emotional learning, and differentiation to be successful and effective. Furthermore, this realization allowed me to view teaching pedagogy as layered processes that interact constantly with each other instead of separate domains that need to be worked on separately.

Challenges and Limitations

Creating a curriculum that intentionally integrates Culturally Sustaining Literacy Practices involved a lot of current reflection on my teaching but also needing to balance this work with the changed needs of students as a result of the pandemic. I had to push myself to be more intentional with the time I dedicated towards different components of my life. The return to in-person with the demands and pressure that are resulting from it took a lot of time. The needs of my students have simply changed and so have the needs now required of us teachers. This led to rethinking how I was creating the curriculum.

The central conflict in my curriculum creation was should I approach this curriculum with the assumption that the constraints of the realities of the pandemic were still with us. For example, what does it mean to create a curriculum when the students that I currently had in mind

for the 11th grade World History Curriculum have not been in-person or potentially even engaged with the school since their 9th-grade year. With this in mind, I decided to transition the curriculum I was creating to my 12th grade US Government class and include elements that consider the current realities of my students and that also acknowledge the need to integrate social-emotional learning in the curriculum.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to create this curriculum, I would have liked to dive deeper into implementing or even researching more topics around my research question. While my curriculum does seek to implement the research I have compiled, it would have benefited from more time and attention paid towards the scaffolding of literacy and support.

Future Usage and Recommendations

This project is for both myself and my students to interact with. I will continue to tweak and adjust this project as time goes on and as the situation in person continues to progress. I will share my findings with the members of the project-based learning academy I teach in, my PLC group. I will also share it with the members of the curriculum transformation group that exists at the district level which focuses on creating unit plans, bringing together resources, and identifying standards that can be used to effectively teach our students in the district in a way that values identify and restores marginalized narratives. For the wider readers, I want you to be aware of the fact that this curriculum was created with my students in mind. Apart from creating a culturally sustaining pedagogy, this curriculum is supposed to transform every time it's used in a different classroom with different communities.

In general, I believe that implementing culturally sustaining literacy and equitable literacy practice is essential for students. I have heard and seen that students feel more connected

to school and their community when this type of pedagogy is implemented. This approach does more to grow the skills and knowledge of students and I hope to lead workshops at either the class or the district level. I did such a workshop with my colleagues at the height of my research around the Historically Responsive Literacy Model in August of 2021.

Future research around this topic should focus on reframing the way we approach literacy at the level to consider the ideas of culturally sustaining pedagogy. This could involve researching how ideas around equitable literacy can be systemically from grade to grade at the secondary level. Additionally, I would suggest a partnership between ELA and Social Studies in research around a continuity in skill construction between the two subjects at the secondary level. As I discussed earlier, I would suggest researching culturally sustaining literacy practices as an exercise in acknowledging the intersectional nature of effective teaching. Because this approach to literacy in social studies seeks to disrupt eurocentric thinking around the separation of fields and subfields, it is also appropriate to do so while researching this topic.

Summary

During this process, I have learned a lot about the importance of integrating cultural identity and critical thinking in the field of social studies. As a newer teacher, I have benefited from the research that I have been able to compile during this process. I was able to revise, expand and reflect on previous lessons and units because of the creation of this curriculum. My clearest conclusion is that to be an effective teacher, it is important to be a consistent, persistent, and reflective researcher.

The curriculum I created is a part of a growing shift away from pedagogies and frameworks that ignore students and their communities in both the social studies field and across

education. I know that my curriculum will help students, colleagues, and more to learn an intentional way of literacy or approaching the concept of culturally responsive practices. However, like most things this curriculum is a work in progress because I will continue to research, learn from my students, and seek to become a better teacher in general. I hope that others use my curriculum or at least the principles behind it to cultivate a pedagogy that centers and works for their students.

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