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## Together In Discussion: Creating Space And Inspiring Conversation To Support Underrepresented Adolescent Student Identity Development

Nicole Nicpon

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TOGETHER IN DISCUSSION: CREATING SPACE AND INSPIRING CONVERSATION TO  
SUPPORT UNDERREPRESENTED ADOLESCENT STUDENT IDENTITY  
DEVELOPMENT

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.

Hamline University

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Imagine that you are a five year old child at the park with your mother and brother. Your mother is ahead of you, and you call out, “Wait up, Mom!” A child is running by, a child you have never seen before, nor will ever see again, who stops dead in their tracks, looks at you with the most disgusted expression and says, “THAT is your mom?” You pause, caught off guard by the question, and answer with a timid, “Yes...” As that child is running back to go play and you catch up with your mom, still thinking about that question and why the other child was so surprised, you ask yourself over and over, why it was their business, what did their mom look like, why did they care if she was my mom. You come to a surprising realization: the other child did not know that she was your mom, because your mom is white and you are not. You realize, at the age of five, that this is not the first time someone has looked at you and your family funny, nor is this the last time you would have to explain to someone that your mom is your mom and your dad is your dad, no matter what the DNA says.

My life is full of dozens of stories like that, ones where I had to explain my life and my family. Let me clarify, I am adopted. My father is Polish and my mother is Polish/German. I am South Korean. At least on the outside, I am Korean; on the inside I am a true Minnesota girl that can make better Pierogi than Bulgogi. Most of my life, I struggled with which world I belong in, the world of the privileged majority, or the oppressed minority. Only recently did I come to fully understand that wondering is okay, that I can belong to both worlds, but the real world I belong in is the world of others that share my story: the few, the proud, the adopted. Coming to terms with this title has led to my research question: *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* In this chapter, I will share my struggles about growing up different

from peers around me, a short time where I felt I understood what it meant to be adopted, a time when I lost that understanding and finally the “a-ah” moment that has inspired this research and project.

### **Growing up**

In the local elementary school, there were about ten adopted students. One was my brother, and two were family friends. Two were in my grade and the rest were scattered throughout the school. Of the ones I knew personally, five of us were adopted into white families and one was a same race adoption. The topic of adoption was never discussed in school. For those of us that were transracially adopted, it was an obvious fact of life. Since it was a small school, the fact we were of a minority race was talked about more, rather than us being adopted. We were always picked to do the publicity photos, we were placed in the front of the concerts, and almost everyone knew our names.

However, my peers did not view me as “that adopted chick” or “that Asian girl.” In fact, to them I was just a normal student, their friend that they had known since Kindergarten. I was not my race, nor my adoption story. One time, when I was in seventh grade, my friends and I were walking into school from recess. I was walking quite quickly and a friend made a comment about it. I replied, “Sorry, I am so used to walking fast to keep up with my Dad, you know, I don’t have his long legs.” She looked me straight in the eye and asked, “That’s right, how come?” I stopped walking and looked at her to see if she was joking, she had known me since the third grade and had met my parents dozens of times and had even been to my house. She was not kidding, but the rest of the group also looked at her with “duh” expressions. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, but was really just a few seconds, she realized her mistake and apologized for forgetting. Did she really need to apologize? Was it a bad thing she had done? I was never

sure. Maybe if my peers had been educated about adoption, this conversation and encounter would have turned out differently.

### **Understanding**

Spending elementary school as one of only a few adopted people in my school made conversations about adoption hard. My mom would often talk about how she forgot my brother and I were adopted; we were just her children. And while I understood what she was trying to say, the message was mixed. On one hand, she loved me unconditionally, but on the other, I felt like I could not share my struggles with her about being adopted. It was not until my parents arranged a mentor from the adoption agency that I felt like I had someone to talk to. The mentor was an older adult woman (old to someone in elementary school, but really she was maybe twenty), who was also adopted from South Korea. I was able to talk about how I was feeling, what struggles I was facing, and what questions I had. I felt like I could talk to her about everything. She listened without judgment and without making me feel guilty for my feelings or my questions. She understood. Understood what I was dealing with internally, understood what I could not put into words, understood me.

Another place of understanding was my adoption peer group in high school. It was organized through the guidance office at my school and was run by a female guidance counselor and a female outside mediator. Come to think of it, I never really knew what her title was. She was there to keep the conversations moving along and to maybe inform the appropriate people if there were any red flags during the conversation. We only met a couple times a month, but it was nice to just sit and talk to other teenagers that shared some of the same experiences as I had. It made it seem like we were not alone on an island. Oftentimes, people joined by word of mouth from other members of the group. No one was forced to be there sharing their feelings while

holding a sharing stick. Most of the time, we just talked about how much homework we had, or what teachers we liked, or other mundane teenage things. The conversation about adoption was so naturally embedded into our other conversations that it became a place just to gather and understand and support each other. Sometimes the mediator would ask direct questions about our adoptions or what we were struggling with about adoptions, but usually she just let the conversation flow naturally. There was a group understanding that it was a respected place and conversation flowed and everyone was accepted.

### **The Loss of Understanding**

As I went to college and found my first teaching job, I was so confused about which group I fit with. I did not feel comfortable hanging out with the Asian students at my college. They were all way more Asian than I was, they had their own understanding with each other, and I was never going to find the understanding I craved in them. Most of them were Hmong and grew up in Hmong families, celebrating Hmong traditions and language. I did not have that. I grew up with Polish traditions and only spoke one language. I could not relate to their conversations about growing up with Asian parents in diverse communities and they could not relate to my past. During a period when people are supposed to be figuring out their lives, what they are going to do, who they are; I was questioning everything. Who was I? What was my identity? Where do I fit in?

When I arrived at my first teaching job, I was still questioning. The environment of the school was unstable. There was a major push from administration to make the school more diverse and inclusive. Because there was such a push from the top, there was a lot of frustration and mixed emotions within the general staff. A lot of the conversation was around the history of the school and how staff had treated Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC).



These conversations put everyone on edge. Much of the staff at the school were white. Long-time staff felt they were being targeted, and new staff felt too overwhelmed to say much. I was not sure which camp I belonged in. The BIPOC staff welcomed me and wanted to add my story to their experiences and fuel, and the white population felt uncomfortable when I was around. The teaching team I was with was a hard environment for me to be in, especially given my title (at the time I was an assistant teacher, and they were all lead teachers). The team of teachers felt that they were doing fine and that everything they were doing was inclusive. Like many other staff at the school, they were trying to figure out what being inclusive meant.

History at that school was that BIPOC students and teachers were treated very rudely and often asked inappropriate questions and overall judged because of their minority status. When I arrived there, the administration was trying to shift and was really pushing for racial education and inclusive training. These training sessions and conversations were difficult for me, because I still did not understand which group I belonged to. I was turned to as an authority on the viewpoint of a BIPOC person, but felt I was speaking falsely. I wondered if everything I said was being written down somewhere and would be used against me someday.

During these conversations, I kept thinking about the students- the invisible students, the ones that shared a similar story to me. How were they feeling with the current climate? Did they feel conflicted about which camp they belonged in? Did they feel understood? Was someone telling them their feelings were acceptable?

### **A Shift in Perspective**

It was not until my fourth year at the school that I was able to attend a National People of Color Conference (POCC). One of the elements to this conference is that there are affinity groups that participants can join based on their self-identity. The choices are, Black, Asian,

Hispanic, and Transracially Adopted (TRA). I am not going to lie, I had to look up what Transracially Adopted meant, and after I read the description and the self administered questions, I knew this was the group I was supposed to be in. My first meeting with them, even though it was virtual (due to COVID), was a game changer. I realized what had been missing from my life; a group of like-minded individuals that shared an understanding of what being adopted really meant. This particular group also shared being adopted into a family that has a different race from yours, so during the challenging times our country faced in the last year around the subject of race, it was so amazing to have a group of people that understood the conflicted feelings I was feeling. All the questions I had, they had the same ones and some even had answers for me. They shared their experiences and I felt understood once again. We could just talk, and the conversation felt natural. It felt like we were old friends, like family, even though this was my first time meeting them.

After talking and listening to the other TRA members, I was inspired and excited about my research question: *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* I was also inspired to create a curriculum for teachers and other school staff to help foster conversations with underrepresented student populations and give extra support to these students as they develop their identities. I do not want students to have the same lingering questions I had. I want them to know that there are people who understand them and see them for all their parts, not just the outside image. I want them to feel accepted.

## **Summary**

After a history of feeling conflicted about where I fit in, I found a group of people that inspired me and helped me view the world differently. I want students who share parts of my story to have that, too. I want to research how teachers and school staff can better reach students

with invisible needs in the classroom and in conversation. In the next chapter I examine research enveloping student development both academically and socially, focusing on the impact adoption has on mental health and the academic achievement of adopted children. Using this research, I created a curriculum guide to help facilitators and teachers guide the development of adopted students.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

A curriculum guide that engages staff and students in meaningful conversations encompassing difficult identity topics is not something that any educator should take lightly. The goal of the curriculum is to help teachers or staff interact with adolescents during a time in their lives where change is the only constant they face.

In this chapter, the research question *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* will be examined. To help examine this question, I will first show research on the stage of development that the teens are facing and find information that helps educators understand how identity is formed. It was important to gather and understand what research is out there that supports student groups, as well as research that shows why some student groups that are meant to be a “safe space” are ineffective. My research will also look at underrepresented populations found most commonly in the school system.

The first section looks at what research and literature is out there with a goal to help teachers understand the complex development of adolescent students. It will look at influential theorists and what they see as the biggest influences in adolescent development. The research found will share how theorists view the timeframe of adolescence and share how they explain how adolescents develop during a time when they are being asked to make life-impacting decisions.

The second section discusses how self-identity is formed and influenced. It will show what research methods are being found to have the greatest impact on adolescent identity development and what psychologists are suggesting schools do to impact identity development.

The third section defines and explains what different types of spaces and groups already exist within the school setting to help students reach their full and most authentic selves. It will also define what “self-identity peer group” means.

The last section will discuss the most common underrepresented populations found in a school setting and how schools impact their identity development in both positive and negative ways. This information will help educators use the curriculum created in the next three chapters by giving them a strong base of information, a common language, and an awareness of possible misconceptions they may hold about these populations.

### **Adolescent development**

Ask the average person what they remember about their teenage years, and the answers will vary from “the worst time in my life” to “the best time in my life”. Adolescence is a stage of development that all humans must face. Adolescent youth are typically individuals who are thirteen to nineteen years old (Powell, n.d.). The body is changing at a rapid rate (Spear, 2002). New chemical reactions are happening in the brain, some areas in the brain are developing faster than other parts, making for some interesting choices (Tough, 2012). And while all these physical changes are happening, teenagers or adolescent students are getting ready to make some decisions that will impact the rest of their lives.

### **The Adolescent Brain**

The adolescent brain can be a scary place for some non-educators to think about. However, the brain itself is a wondrous muscle that must be developed like every other muscle. This section discusses the adolescent brain, all the pathways being developed and what chemical reactions are happening that causes adolescents to behave in the way that they do. Knowing this

information will help the educator take these physical developments of the brain into account while facilitating conversations about life-choices and identities.

Research has shown that there is a qualitative shift in the way adolescents think: they become more self-aware and self-reflective (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Most adolescents also develop a capacity to hold more multidimensional concepts and are able to think in a more strategic manner (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Recently, more research is being done on the adolescent brain as a whole, but this research is still fairly new.

In the 1950s experiments on animals showed that the brain did go through “sensitive periods” during which the social environment played a role in the development of certain areas, suggesting that humans might also go through time periods when the brain is more susceptible to the environment (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). In the 1970s and 1980s it became apparent that experiments done with the human brain showed that certain areas, like the prefrontal cortex, continued to develop after childhood, into adolescence and early adulthood. The prefrontal cortex is often linked to functions that influence attention, impulse control, memory creation, and cognitive flexibility (Murray & Nowicki, 2020). Research found that the transmission speed of neural information (or how the brain communicates) increases throughout late childhood and into adolescence (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Another fascinating change that happens in the brain is that the intricate network of connections or synapses between neurons sees a large amount of change (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). The adolescent brain is continuously developing, research on the brain shows that. Schools should be a social environment where students are allowed to expand their thinking and have conversations that will impact later development and relationships.

## Theories on Adolescent Development

There are many different theories on what influences the development of adolescent youth. Laurence Steinberg and Amanda S. Morris boil it down to “parents, problems and hormones” (p. 61) in their 2001 article *Adolescent Development*. In that same article, Steinberg and Morris talk about adolescence as a time when youth are exploring themselves alone, without the influence of parents or peers. They stop comparing themselves to peers and think about their own beliefs (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Adolescents are learning about self-image, self-esteem, social expectation and academic achievement (Powell, n.d.). In other words, they are trying to figure out who they are by separating themselves from their families, and they are also working to discover their place in the world.

A leading theory comes from Jean Piaget, a Swiss developmental psychologist who studied children in the early 20th century. Piaget (1936) broke down the development of youth into four different mental stages. The two that talk about adolescents are Concrete operational and Formal operational. During Concrete Operation, youth ages seven to eleven are working on solving problems or thinking about things inside their own heads without having to process them out loud. They also do not have to physically encounter problems; they are able to think about them in abstract terms. In Formal Operations, adolescents are able to fully understand abstract concepts. Adolescents can think about multi outcomes and hold on to multiple variables and come up with solutions based on previous encounters. According to Piaget, this last step begins at age eleven and carries on into adulthood.

Adolescent youth begin to develop an awareness of self, and some of this self-awareness is based on gender. David G. Perry and Rachel E. Pauletti (2011) from Florida Atlantic University concluded that while the differences between genders is subtle, there is enough of a

difference that more research needs to be done on this stage of development that distinguishes between the genders. Perry and Pauletti state that one of the differences between the genders is in the area of mental health, specifically depression. Females are diagnosed with depression at a higher rate than males and are also more likely to suffer from eating disorders, commit self-injury, and have different forms of depressogenic thought, such as self-blaming ( 2011). However, this article only spoke about gender in regards to cisgender, it did not include genders that are self-expressed, for example, transgender or gender fluid.

Another influence that gender has on adolescent development is the relationship that females have with their female primary caretaker (Powell, n.d). Female adolescent youth are beginning to separate from their female caretakers and are beginning to form their own personalities. The main conflict that females have with separating from the female caretaker is that they are trying to separate while still staying close or connected. This process is different for males because often the primary caretaker is a different gender and the relationship is not as complex (Powell, n.d). Gender does play a role in adolescent development, but it is not the only role.

Erik Erickson, a German-born American psychoanalyst and leading theorist on adolescent development stated, “The adolescent mind is essentially a mind or moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult” (1963, p. 245). Erickson created the eight stages of psychosocial development, the fifth of which is about teenagers. It is called the identity vs. role confusion stage. This stage takes place in humans from about 12-18 years of age. During this stage, adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals (McLeod, 2018). Generally, adolescent



development theory is not based on one lone theory, but rather many different “mini-theories” that come together to explain the development of adolescent youth (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Just as adolescent development theory is a complex mix of theories that are the product of different influences, an adolescent’s identity development itself is the product of many influences.

The next section will discuss adolescent identity development, as it is important to understand how researchers and theoreticians describe the way adolescents develop their identity and sense of self. The section looks at possible factors that researchers say play a role in the development of identity.

### **Adolescent Identity Development**

To help answer the question *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?*, it is important to first define what identity is and how adolescents come to understand the development of it in themselves.

Canadian clinical and developmental psychologist James Marcia theorizes a four station continuum that adolescents go through on their identity journey. Marcia explains that adolescent youths face many different situations and events in their lives that he refers to as “crises.” These crises serve as catalysts which help adolescents truly develop their identities (Morelli, n.d.). The four stations are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium and finally, identity achievement.

1. Identity diffusion is when an adolescent has not explored nor committed to any particular identity. These individuals are passively experiencing life and dealing with crises on a case by case basis. They have not created life goals, nor are they struggling with who they are.

2. Identity foreclosure is a station where the adolescent has accepted the identity of their family, community or culture, without exploring their personal beliefs and values. They do not question what they have been taught about who they are.
3. Moratorium is the third station. Moratorium is almost the opposite of identity foreclosure, meaning that the adolescent is doing a high level of exploring and questioning, but there is very little commitment to a set of values and traditions. These adolescents are facing what some would call an “identity crisis”, trying different things to see what feels right for them.
4. Identity achievement is the fourth station. Adolescents in this station have done a high level of exploration and have a high level of commitment to beliefs and values. They have set life goals and know what they need to do to achieve them. They are confident in their goals and their beliefs.

Marica explains that while not every adolescent youth will experience all four of the stations, most will face one before arriving at identity achievement (Morelli, n.d.). While adolescents are transitioning during these stages, they begin to develop a more abstract characterization of themselves. They may describe themselves in discrepant ways and will eventually form a more consonant self-view (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). James Marica’s identity stations are just one theory on how adolescents develop their identities. There have been a few published studies that explore what other influences youth face before they accept their identity.

One such study came from Germany. Linda Juang, Maja Schachner, Sharleen Pevec and Ursula Moffitt took the *Identity Project* curriculum and applied it to seventh grade students, following their journeys from 2018-2019 and another group of seventh grade students from

2019-2020. They published their study in 2020 in an article called “The *Identity Project* intervention in Germany: Creating a climate for reflection, connection and adolescent identity development”. The *Identity Project* is an eight lesson plan school based intervention that was created to critically engage adolescents in conversations involving historical and contemporary issues of ethnic, racial and cultural diversity with a goal to promote and support individual ethnic-racial identity exploration (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). Juang, Schachner, Pevec and Moffitt, sought “to create spaces and classroom climates for youth to better understand their own and other’s diverse backgrounds and identities” (2020, p. 66). After the study, by comparing pre-and post-intervention, they found that the seventh-grade students, now eighth-grade students, had a better understanding not only of their own heritage identity but also a more positive view of individuals with different cultural backgrounds (2020). Juang, Schachner, Pevec and Moffitt concluded that by giving the students a structured and supportive climate to discuss such “taboo” topics, students had a better chance to explore these issues in a less stressful environment which allowed them to form their own views ( 2020, pp. 79-80). Having a chance to discuss topics and situations in a structured conversation is one influence that lends itself well to adolescent identity development.

Elizabeth Cassidy Parker, an assistant professor at the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University, published a study in 2014 about social identity development. Parker took adolescent choir members and studied the way their social interactions, or what they referred to as “team” dynamic, influenced the social identity of its members. However, belonging to a specific social group based on arbitrary factors, such as shared interests, are not the only factors that adolescents have that influence their social identity (Jans, Postmes & Van der Zee,

2012). Parker's study also concluded that “important others, such as parents, teachers, and friends, played a considerable role in the participant’s identity development” (2014, p. 29).

It is not always a self-guided journey that the adolescent must take; it can be guided by influential people, such as peers and teachers. A literature review published in 2018 by Monique Verhoeven, Astrid M. G. Poorthuis and Monique Volman, wrote that schools play an important role in adolescents’ identity development. They divided their findings into three different categories: how educators unintentionally/negatively influence development, how educators successfully influence development, and finally, how meaningful learning experience and a supportive classroom climate can also directly influence adolescent identity development (p. 55). By ignoring the influence that schools can have on an adolescent’s identity development, we are missing a key timeframe and social setting’s influence on the individual's identity development.

### ***Relationships with parents***

Relationships also have an influence on the identity development of adolescent teenagers. Modern media is full of teenagers and the rocky relationships they can have with their parents. Relationships are very important and they provide supportive roles in the identity development of males and females (Powell, n.d). In the 1990’s there were several studies done to examine the relationship adolescents have with their parents in particular. Due to this research, several theories have emerged about what impacts the relationship between the two parties. There are four namable observations that Steinberg and Morris share in their 2001 article:

1. Increase in squabbling and bickering between adolescent youth and their parents.

There is no clear theory as to why this time period is full of disagreements between the two parties.

2. Increase in mild conflict and a decrease in closeness. The largest factor given to this change is time spent together.
3. Parents having a hard time adjusting to the new adolescent's identity and need for individuation.
4. The disequilibrating is typically followed by a relationship that is less contentious and more egalitarian. (p. 88)

These four observations on the parent-adolescent relationship can have a major impact on the adolescent's identity development. Baumrind (1966) did some research on types of parenting styles and the effect each had on adolescent-parent relationships. Baumrind found four different types of parent-adolescent relationships: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglecting (Lee, Daniels & Kissinger, 2006). Many other researchers have done studies to find which style is the most beneficial to the development of adolescents. It has been generally concluded that the most effective style is the authoritative parent (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). An authoritative parent is a parent that is warm and firm; this type of parent-adolescent relationship leads to a wider range of psychological and social advantages for the youth (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). It is important that adolescent youth feel connected to those around them. A sense of belonging is a key factor for an adolescent to develop a positive self-identity (Powell, n.d.).

The next section takes what was previously discussed about how adolescents develop their identities and suggests some spaces where this development might be better influenced within a school setting and by trained educators. First, it is discussed by examining peer-group influence on development and defining what kind of peer group the research question is referring to, and following that discussion, there will be three different settings that educators can use to help assist identity development in a safe and thought-provoking way.

## **Peer Groups**

Much of the average adolescent's school life is found in social settings. Research has shown that adolescents choose friends with similar behaviors, attitudes and identities (Akers, Jones & Coyl, 1998). However, the research question: *How can same identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* is not referring to the adolescent's friends. It is rather referring to a group of peers that share a common identity that reaches beyond shared age, interests, and social characteristics. It is not necessarily a social network, either, a social network is when an individual is connected to another group of individuals by means of a specific individual ( Bell, 2021). This type of peer group has a connection greater than a characteristic that is easily observed. They are connected by a shared identity. In some peer groups, the unifying identity factor could be race; in others it could be shared personal choice, such as in a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning plus group (LGBTQ+), or even shared personal history, such as a group of students that is adopted. In any specific peer group, the shared identifying marker could be an invisible one to the mainstream population. There are different ways that a peer group could impact an individual during adolescent development. Three different "spaces" that can impact adolescent identity development are brave space, and safe space, and through the use of an affinity group. These three methods are very different in their development and overall purpose, but all can serve as an influence on adolescents' development.

### ***Safe Space***

A safe space is defined as a place intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations (Merriam-Webster. n.d.). A safe space must be a place where adolescents feel secure and comfortable (Butler, Kane & Morshead, 2015). They have the freedom to explore and express their individual identities in a way that is

non-threatening and non-confrontational. One important factor in a “safe-space” is that the other individuals in that space may not share the same identity as you. A safe space protects individuals from psychological harm and helps to make sure that they feel emotionally safe to share, free from judgment from peers (Brazill, 2020). A safe space uses diversity not as an obstacle, but as a potential way to create unity (Jans, Postmes & Van der Zee, 2012). To really create a safe space, an environment must be characterized by openness from both adults and adolescents in order to give adolescents a chance for ownership in the conversation and finally a sense of belonging for all parties involved (Butler, Kane & Morshead, 2015). Safe space serves as the foundation for a brave space (Brazill, 2020).

### ***Brave Space***

A brave space is defined as a tool to specifically discuss controversial and sensitive issues regarding diversity and social justice (Arao & Clemens, 2013). It focuses on the responsibility of people involved in the space to reach outside their comfort zones and contribute to group discussion (Brazill, 2020). Brave spaces allow adolescents to take risks when discussing difficult issues by creating a supportive learning environment (Brazill, 2020). A brave space is that space just on the edge of an individual's comfort zone, when they are vulnerable. It provides a chance for huge personal growth (Ashlee & Ashley, 2015). It allows youth to share perspectives and gives them the chance to engage in conversations that challenge and perhaps make them a little uncomfortable, but will lead to personal growth in the end (Brazill, 2020).

### ***Affinity Group***

An affinity group is defined more by the people that are part of the group. An affinity group is a formalized group of individuals that share a common background (ACS, n.d). They have historically been created for non-mainstream or underrepresented populations, however,

their formation can be based on almost anything (ACS, n.d.). The main goal is to share experiences, offer mentorship and to not exclude anyone. By learning and sharing with peers, adolescents can overcome obstacles, meet challenges, listen and offer advice and build long-term relationships (ACS, n.d.). “Affinity Groups play a vital role in ensuring an inclusive environment where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed” (Garland, n.d.). Affinity groups are most commonly found in schools and are the format for which this project is based upon.

### ***History of Affinity Groups***

The idea of an affinity group was born in the late 19th century during the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Anarchists would gather with a small group of friends at local cafes and plan attacks and share ideas with each other. Later during the war, these groups of friends, called tertulias, became the main foundation for the Anarchist Organization of the Spanish Region. The idea of large scale affinity groups did not come to the United States until 1977. During the anti-nuclear movement, individuals organized themselves to protest nuclear plants and used affinity groups to share ideas and plan together. Since then, affinity groups have taken a tamer meaning, and have been used as a support for underrepresented groups to find each other in mainstream situations or places of work. It was not until the last decade that they started to move into schools to offer support for students needing to separate and find space from the mainstream population. (Historical account taken from the Organization for Power website, n.d.).

### **Underrepresented Population Identity Development**

Adolescence is a time for youth to explore and discover their identities (Erickson, 1963; Marica, 1980). Youth from underrepresented backgrounds also have to navigate the complex identities related to their racial/ethnic group memberships (Phinney, 1989). Kristia Wantchekon



and Adriana Umaña-Taylor (2021) found that adolescent youth must face many different dimensions before they are able to fully commit to an identity.

Ethnic-racial identity is a multidimensional construct that encompasses both the developmental process through which individuals explore and develop clarity about their ethnic-racial background, as well as the beliefs and feelings individuals have about their ethnic-racial group membership. (p. 1333)

There are many different theories as to why these populations have such a hard time committing to their identities. One theory suggests that racial discrimination and racial socialization impact identity development among underrepresented youth (Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez & Sellers, 2012). This theory states that while racial discrimination is a risk factor and can impact ethnic-racial identity negatively, it is actually an “antecedent of identity development because exposure to racial discrimination [and racial socialization] might result in further identity exploration and resolution among underrepresented adolescents” (Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez & Sellers, 2012, p. 448). Adolescents that engage in false self-behavior because they devalue their true racial identity have a greater chance of suffering from mental health issues such as depression and hopelessness (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Prior to the 1990s, very little research was done on the development of underrepresented adolescent youth. It was not until Jean Phinney, a Professor of Psychology, developed a model for how adolescent youth from underrepresented populations develop their identities that social scientists had a need to separate the two groups. The four stages Phinney describes are: Diffuse, Foreclosed, Moratorium and Achieved. These four stages are defined by what level of exploration and understanding the individual has about his or her ethnic identity (p.38).

Diffuse and Foreclosed are often combined into one step because of the shared level of exploration. This first step is alternatively labeled the “Unexamined Ethnic Identity” by modern day theorists. Individuals in this step have not explored their racial identity and may be disinterested in doing so. They mostly have accepted the attitudes and beliefs of the dominant culture. Personal feelings about the individual's ethnic group may be based on the socializations of dominant cultures. If the dominant culture's expressed opinions are positive, that individual will have a positive view of their ethnic group; the same goes for negative socialization (Phinney, 1989).

The second stage is the “Ethnic Identity Search”. Individuals in this stage may have encountered a particular situation or crises that has caused them to explore their ethnic identity. This stage is filled with confusion and some strong feelings about the particular ethnic background and dominant culture socialization. There is a search for the meaning in one's own ethnicity (Phinney, 1989). This second stage is where cultural socialization has the biggest impact on the adolescent's ethnic identity development (Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez & Sellers, 2012). Cultural socialization is when parents or other influential adults with the same cultural background as the adolescent will teach the adolescent about his or her racial/ethnic heritage and history while also promoting cultural customs and traditions.

The third and final stage of ethnic-racial identity development as defined by Phinney is “Ethnic Identity Achievement”. After a long stage two, adolescent youth will hopefully develop into stage three. In this stage individuals have a secure and clear understanding of their ethnicity (Phinney, 1989). They have resolved ethnic identity conflicts, accepted membership into the racial/ethnic heritage culture and are ready to have positive relationships with the dominant cultures. They have fully accepted their ethnicity and have a strong sense of self-esteem.

Much like the discussion in the previous section about adolescent identity development, not every youth will reach every step within their adolescence; for some it may be a longer journey. And while schools hope to influence their development in a positive way, sometimes there are not the right tools in place to support underrepresented youth. This includes adolescents with not only race and ethnicity-based needs, but also adolescents struggling with socio economic status and family dynamics that differ from the dominant culture they are surrounded by. Research has found that if adolescents assimilate into dominant culture and reject their own culture they may feel estranged. This same research suggests that if the adolescent is able to maintain ties to both cultures they can have better psychological adjustment (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). However, there is one underrepresented population that there is yet very little research on: the adopted population.

### ***Adopted Population***

According to the Adoption Network, over 135,000 children a year are adopted in the United States. A percentage of that number are minority children that have been adopted by white families. This type of adoption is labeled a transracial adoption or TRA. This term was first published in 1994 by a Child Welfare Information Sheet. This sheet details some of the factors that might affect TRA children, but it does not detail the lasting impact on his or her development.

Research about TRA adoption started in the 1970s. However, it was not until the 1990s that research about TRA youth and their identity development emerged (Lee, 2008). Lee attempted to gather information about how TRA adolescents described their ethnic identity. Unfortunately, as the following review reveals, the actual relationship between the racial and the ethnic experiences of transracial adoptees and their psychological adjustments is not directly

addressed in the studies. In addition, none of the studies used reliable and valid measures of racial/ethnic identity. Instead, researchers relied on projective measures of racial preference, open-ended questions, and on occasion, parent reports of the children's interest and involvement with their birth culture. In the context of these limitations, the research suggests that transracial adoptees exhibit a great deal of variability in their racial/ethnic identities (p. 715).

One conclusion that Lee came to was that the age of adoption impacted which ethnic identity that individual expressed. Individuals that were adopted later in life self-identified with their birth ethnic group, and those that were adopted younger self-identified with their parents' ethnic identity (Lee, 2008). Age also played a part in the social-emotional development of the TRA individuals. The younger they were, the more likely they were to not be aware of their difference, and as they became older, they were more likely to express conflicting emotions (Lee, 2008). Lee also states that while this field is growing in research interest, more must be done to fully understand the developmental impact that TRA has on adolescent youth.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed what research and theorists are saying that give some responses to the question: *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* The first section presented research that suggests adolescents are going through many changes in their brain chemistry that impact their decision-making abilities. Some areas of the brain develop faster than others, and their bodies are experiencing change, too. Theorists like Erik Erickson shared that adolescence is a time for youth to discover their self-identities.

The second section discussed what factors impact adolescent identity development and what psychologist James Marcia describes as the four stations that adolescents must face before forming their identity. It also shared what studies are being done to show the importance of

adolescent identity development. Countries like Germany are doing active research to see how adolescents respond to taking part in a school based curriculum that supports identity formation. And other researchers are examining how peers and teachers influence adolescents' identity formation.

The third section defines what the research question is referring to when speaking about “peer groups” and shares three different methods that can be implemented by schools to help adolescents create atmospheres of healthy discomfort and safe discussion.

The fourth section discussed the identity development process of underrepresented populations found in the school setting and how schools can influence students that self-identify with these groups in their identity development.

In order to answer the question *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* we must first consider what factors and influences these teens are facing daily and in an organized school setting. We need to create a base for shared language moving forward and define terms that will be used throughout the next three chapters. The end goal is to create a curriculum that will help educators facilitate meaningful conversations with adolescent youth to assist the growth and development of their identities.

Chapter three will feature an explanation of the curriculum and a guide to answering the question *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* It will share the intended audience for my curriculum, provide background and context for the project and describe the main theories and methods used to guide the curriculum.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

This project is focused on the research question *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* This question stems from the gap in high school settings for students from underrepresented populations to have their identity developmental needs met. The previous chapter discussed how adolescence is a period of great change in young adults. It also explained how experts believe that self-identity is formed and how identity development is different for persons from underrepresented populations. A space for students to explore their identity without judgment and having to explain their perspective to their peers would benefit students from these populations; They would have a stronger sense of self which could impact their mental health needs in the future.

To help group facilitators create and maintain these types of spaces this project will create a curriculum and question guide for facilitators to use with adolescent teens from underrepresented populations within a school setting. The 9 lessons follow a similar format and will include a guide at the end for extra support. There will also be a follow up lesson to help keep conversations moving and keep students feeling the support from the group and facilitator. Since this is a curriculum for meetings and conversations, there is no formal assessment at this time. Rather, it is encouragement to keep doors open and conversations flowing.

This chapter explains the project's rationale, describes the project in its entirety, and shares the intended participants and school setting where this type of project would be the most beneficial for students. Later in the chapter I discuss the learning framework behind the lesson formation, how to conduct follow up interactions, and the intended timeline for this project.

## **Project Rationale**

Adolescence is a time when emotions seem to be flowing non-stop. There are so many changes happening and there is added conflict in the home between some teens and their guardians. Adolescents spend much of their time at school; according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), teens spend over six hours a day in school. If a student is struggling with their identity and they are not able to have conversations about this struggle within their home, schools need to be a place where those conversations can happen in a safe and empathetic space.

Affinity groups in school settings are growing in popularity, but at the time of this research project there is no formal guide for how to start one nor how to run a productive meeting. The guide created in this project is for teachers that support adopted students in order to alleviate some of the pressure placed from starting this type of affinity group with no materials readily available to help support the beginning stages.

## **Project Description**

This project is a curriculum that includes nine lessons outlined with time intervals for each activity or conversation starter. They include an opening meeting message and a closing meeting message. Each lesson also has a beginning of the meeting greeting game, to help build community within the group. The following sections explain the format of the curriculum guide, give a sample lesson plan, and explain other components of the curriculum guide.

The main section of the curriculum guide includes nine lessons formulated with a morning meeting structure and activities or conversation starters. These lessons are designed to support the facilitator to begin conversations and give routine to the format of the meetings, but

allow for flexibility depending on where conversations flow and where students need extra support. Below is a sample of a 40-minute lesson.

***Sample Lesson***

Lesson Three, Total Time: approx. 40 minutes		
Lesson/Meeting objective: By the end of this meeting, students will have a better understanding of what it means to act one way in society but feel a different way under the surface. They will understand that this “act” is okay and that sometimes it is necessary to feel connected to those around you.		
Time Frame	Lesson Activity	Description



10	Opening Meeting	<p><u>Greeting:</u> Sit in a circle, someone starts by saying “Zoom” to the person next to you. The “Zoom” goes around the circle until everyone has been zoomed. Once that round has been played, add the word “eek”, that means it (the zoom) goes in the opposite direction. Play this way a few more times.</p> <p><u>Message:</u> Good (morning/afternoon),</p> <p>I am glad that you all are here. Today we will be looking at self-esteem and what that word means and its impact in our lives. Let us take a moment to share any news we may have. It can be any kind, positive or requesting support. [Allow time for news sharing, if a student needs support, see if anyone in the group has advice or a solution to the problem].</p> <p>Thank you all for sharing and listening. For our activity today, we are going to be looking at some photographs. After you take time to look at the three photos, I would like you to write your reactions to them in your journals. You may either write about them individually or a shared reaction to all of them at once. Notice the emotions the people are feeling and what kind of emotion they bring to your surface or just explain what you see.</p>
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10 (3 for observation, 7 for writing)	Photograph reaction/ journal writing	<p>The photographs can be found in the back of this guide on page a.d 3. If it works better for your group/space to have individual photos or large ones on a wall, do what will work best for your students. Give students time to write their thoughts, warn them when they have 7 minutes remaining and again at 5 minutes so that they have enough time to write their reactions and finish up their thoughts. The main photographs I would suggest using for this lesson are the girl with half her face/ body in native regalia and the other half done in jeans and a t-shirt. The other photograph I would use is the boy laughing with his friends but in his shadow you can see the same boy hiding in the corner.</p>
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5	Share reactions in group discussion/small groups	<p>It might be a good idea to allow students to share in small groups first. This will give some the confidence to share their ideas and reactions outloud. If time does not allow for this extra step, ask if there are any students willing to share their reactions. If no one wants to share, ask specific questions about what they notice about each picture. How do they relate to each other? Do they relate to each other? After the conversation has seemed to move off topic, bring the group back by saying: “Thank you all for sharing your reactions. These are powerful images that could say a lot about these individuals. And even if we do not know their story, we can see the emotions they may be feeling within the image. I would like to move forward to the next part of our meeting”.</p>
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5	Question and discussion	<p>Question: These two images show someone acting one way in public, but may be feeling things very differently below the surface. Why do you think people do this? What might have happened in their life that led them to behave this way?</p> <p>Discussion Note: Allow discussion to flow. Emotions of embarrassment, wanting to fit in or not knowing how to act so you act like others around you are just some examples of what might come up in conversation.</p>
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5	Question and discussion	<p>Question: Have you ever been put in a position where you felt like you had to act a different way?</p> <p>Discussion Note: Some points students may make are: they want to be accepted by friends, they feel like they have to act one way at school and one way at home or they are ashamed of their birth ethnicity so they try to hide it.</p> <p>Question: When you felt like you had to hide who you are, what effect did it have on you?</p> <p>Discussion Note: This is a hard question for some teens. To think abstractly about an event that happened in the past and if it did not have a major emotional impact, they might not remember.</p> <p>Encourage stories, allow them to feed off each other.</p> <p>End conversation with a note of encouragement that wanting to fit in is totally normal, but remember to honor how you are feeling, too.</p>
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5	Closing Meeting	Ending message: Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and stories. And for those of you that did not share outloud, thank you for your presence today. If you have any more reactions or need anything from me this week, my office hours are [...share office hours when students can come see you on their own] or you can email me and we will find time. Our next meeting is [...share date and time of next meeting, if the location must change, please share that, too].  Thank you again for coming and have a great day.
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This is just one example of a lesson found in the curriculum guide. The curriculum guide is not meant to offer concrete solutions, but rather to offer tools to facilitate self-understanding and growth for the student individually. Each student will need something different and providing the space and language for conversation is part of helping them come to conclusions on their own. This curriculum only lays out nine meetings; however, it will be beneficial to keep an ongoing relationship with these students. The curriculum has a section about possible follow up topics and activities to keep in touch with the students and keep building community and support.

### **Intended Participants and Setting**

This project was created for a Midwestern suburban school setting. The surrounding community and student families are middle and upper middle socioeconomic class. The students involved in the meetings and receiving the lessons are in grades ninth through twelfth. They have either been identified by other general classroom teachers as needing extra support in their

identity development, parents have expressed concerns, or the student themselves has sought this type of group out.

The total number of students enrolled at the school is around 1,000 students total, grades nine through twelve. The group itself will be made up of about 20 to 30 students, and gender is ideally evenly mixed. However, there may be more student participants that identify as female. The school community is open to allowing students to express their BIPOC/ LGBTQ+ identities. The school has a predominantly white teaching staff and predominantly white student population. School administrators have created a schedule that would allow for pull out of students from other curriculum areas to participate in this specific group. The school also has a room for these students to be able to meet privately with the facilitator.

### **Learning Framework**

The opening meeting is based on work by Ruth Sidney Charney and her Responsive Classroom Approach to morning meetings. Charney first published about Responsive Classroom in 1992 (The History for the Center for Responsive Classroom, Responsive Classroom website, 2021). It is a framework that encourages students to learn social and emotional competencies and believes that a positive community and effective management leads to an environment that gives all students a sense of belonging and significance (About Responsive Classroom, Responsive Classroom website, 2021).

The questions and discussion points are created using James Marcia's (1997) identity development research and Jean Phinney's work with underrepresented populations. The research from both these theoreticians can be found in the previous chapter.

### **Intended Timeline**

The intended timeline for this project varies. If the school already has student affinity groups similar to the one intended for the curriculum, they can implement the curriculum right away. However, if the school does not have a student support group similar to the one intended, they will need to get permission from proper decision makers. This could take time and effort. It would be the hope that a school could start a group like this at the beginning of semester or trimester, however the school runs its courses. The meetings could begin in September or January and run a semester long. The start time would depend on the decision makers' timeline. It would be hard to start this curriculum in the spring, as relationships between students and facilitators take time to build and become beneficial and meaningful.

The curriculum timeline is over a nine-week trimester. During the nine weeks, the group would meet once a week, every other week for a total of five meetings. Each meeting is timed to be at least 40 minutes; however, some meetings may take longer or shorter depending on conversation and schedule allotment.

### **Summary**

This curriculum will better equip school professionals with dealing with difficult topics that can be hard for the general population to relate to. It will also help these adults understand the question *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* It will help teachers and meeting facilitators create a brave and safe space in their classroom community and will also help foster conversations and relationships with students that might otherwise go unnoticed in their high school time. The intention is to help create self-esteem lessons that could benefit all adolescent students and help with their identity development. It will also provide a space to give voice to students that may need extra encouragement or support. This work is important in a modern classroom to help students understand and develop their identity. Chapter



four will focus on the reflection of the curriculum and showcase some ways schools can implement this guide effectively.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

Adoption, as referred to in this capstone, is defined as a child that does not share biological relations with the people in their home, however, they refer to these people as their family. Another key definition to know in this capstone is transracial adoption (TRA). This is defined when a child is a different ethnic group from the adoptive parents. Not having an understanding of these definitions can impact the context of the capstone.

This project examined the research question, *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* This chapter shares what I have learned while completing research and the project artifact. I include limitations found and came across while researching adolescent development, influences on adolescent development and effects on children adopted from birth or early childhood. I provide ideas for future research. This chapter will also include how results will be communicated and what the overall benefit for a project like this will be to the teaching profession. Chapter four will conclude with a summary of the artifact and capstone.

#### Major Learnings

I learned that implementation of affinity groups and brave spaces can serve as the only safe space for some teens exploring their identity development. There are so many different influences out there, educators need to be able to give them a safe and judgment free environment to explore these themes and thoughts that they have. This was a major contributing factor to the curriculum guide created.

The project is the perfect combination of a subject I am passionate about and the knowledge I acquired while obtaining my Literacy degree. It combines ways to lead meaningful

discussions, ways to incorporate different types of literacy and encourages students to think about what they see and read at a higher cognitive level.

Over the course of this capstone project I found different learnings that inspired me. I had always known that adolescent development included many changes that happen on and within the body of teens, what I did not know was just how complex social development was. I also never thought about identity development as having to be separate from general adolescent development, but now see identity development as its own exploration that all humans must face and explore. There are so many different theories to explain the development of adolescents, in the following section I discuss the ones that most influenced my project.

### **Literature Review**

The research gathered during this capstone helped assist in the formulating of the paper and the artifact. The areas that had direct impact on the development of the curriculum were theories on adolescent development, adolescent identity development and underrepresented population identity development. These sections had the most impact on the curriculum and the format of the meetings and areas of discussion within the curriculum.

Of the many theories on adolescent development, the one that most influences how teachers learn how adolescents develop is from Erik Erickson (1950). He created the eight stages of psychosocial development, the fifth of which is about humans from age 12-18, it is called the identity vs. role confusion stage. Erickson defines this stage as the adolescents' search for a sense of self and personal identity through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals (McLeod, 2018). Another influence is from Jean Piaget. Piaget (1936) defined adolescence development as the difference between Concrete operational and Formal operational. The major

difference between the two operational mental stages is the ability to think about things and outcomes abstractly.

Identity is an important part of adolescence development. James Marcia (1997) explains that adolescent youths face many different situations and events in their lives that he refers to as “crises.” These crises serve as catalysts which help adolescents truly develop their identities (Morelli, n.d.). The four stations are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium and finally, identity achievement. Phinney (1989) found that for underrepresented youth to fully develop a sense of identity they must go through four stages. The four stages Phinney describes are: Diffuse, Foreclosed, Moratorium and Achieved. These four stages are defined by what level of exploration and understanding the individual has about his or her ethnic identity. While Phinney talks about these stages in regards to youth that are from a different ethnic background as the majority, they still share this background within their family. There is an implication that this is different for students that do not share the same background as their family. More implications are discussed in the next section.

### **Implications**

One implication that influenced this project is that teens that grew up not knowing their biological parents or family have an even harder time developing their sense of identity. The implication is that this may be the first time in their lives they are exploring who they are and thinking about how they are not related to their parents or these people they have known most of their life. There are questions that have not been answered yet and may never be answered.

While schools and staff work to help students with their development, there is an implication that they are not fully equipped to help students that do not share the same childhood experiences as them. It can be hard for an adult that has not experienced situations or feelings to

relate to a student that can only focus on these experiences. It can lead to a feeling of isolation on the part of the student. If a teacher that is adopted is not available, or another teacher of color; I suggest that a school counselor or school psychologist facilitate this group. They may not share the same personal struggles of the students, but they might have the best chance of creating a lasting relationship with the students and creating a space where the students feel comfortable and accepted.

Education is a field that asks its workers to do many different things, an implication of this capstone is that school staff are being asked to do a lot to support students within the walls of the school. This project's curriculum to support adopted students and teachers that are asked to facilitate the group are the brainchild of this implication. There are still limitations within a school to serve these students fully. Limitations are discussed in the next section.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations found during the literature review was the lack of formal research on adopted children and their adoptive families. This could be from a lack of funding available for such a specific type of factor or due to the fact that some families do not want to share with the general public that a child in their home is adopted. Not every school keeps track of students that are adopted, and unless a parent openly shares that information with the school or that child talks about being adopted, it is difficult to collect this type of information. Another limitation was a lack of research on affinity groups in the high school setting. Affinity groups started in the workplace and have migrated down to high school settings, however, this is still a new group format for high schools. There is not a specific criteria that has been set to say what qualifies as an affinity group versus a student support group.

Research on identity development is very narrow and there is less available for students and people of color. When referring to students of color, there is sometimes no distinction between students that share the same color as their parents and students that might self identify as a person of color but their parents would not. This disconnect makes gathering data difficult and sometimes may change the data represented.

### **Future Research**

In the future, it may benefit adopted students to do long term research on adopted students and how they develop their identity and examine data to see if they develop their identities differently from other adolescent peers. It would give schools more data on how to better serve and support these students if the data showed trends or themes.

It would be important to conduct interviews with children that are adopted and have been in a program such as the one outlined in this capstone and see how it impacts their feelings about themselves and other areas of influence. Interviewing adults that are adopted and perhaps had something similar or did not have access to this type of program to learn what they would have liked to know or how they could have been better supported growing up. I would take their suggestions and use them to update the curriculum guide and create more resources for schools to use, such as a database or website for teachers to use and pull materials from. Below it is outlined how to share the current project and research with those around me.

### **Communicating Results**

There are many ways to communicate the results of this project. One way to share the research is with peers that either have an adopted student or show an interest in how to support these students. By making the curriculum available to those that want it and by sharing it in the appropriate group settings and perhaps through social media is another way to communicate the

results. There is also a conference that has an adult affinity group for those that self identify as adopted. Some of them may have interest in this project, I am happy to share my curriculum with them along with any follow up they can offer so I can improve the guide to reach more students.

In staff meetings or in conversations with other teachers, I can advocate for these students. Sharing what these students are possibly going through and advocating for them is one of the benefits that will come from being able to communicate the research with others.

### **Benefit to Profession**

Advocating and giving these students a voice is one benefit from this research. Another benefit this project offers is for teachers that have been asked to create this type of group for students and have no time to fully research the most beneficial approach to support these students. It also creates a space where a hole existed before in regards to different affinity groups that already exist in some schools and gives more voice to students that would not feel like they have a voice in the general education setting. This project can also be a resource for general education teachers on how to spark conversations in their classrooms about different identity topics that would benefit all students as they navigate through adolescence and create their sense of identity.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed what was learned during my research and in the creation of this curriculum guide. I shared research findings that were the most beneficial and influential to the curriculum. The implications and limitations to the research and project were discussed. I talked about how I would like to expand my research and outlined how I plan to communicate the results to others. I also explained benefits to the profession that my curriculum offers.

Throughout this capstone I examined the research question, *How can same-identity peer groups impact adolescent development?* This capstone project is the answer. By using the

curriculum to benefit students, educators and schools can impact their identity development in a positive and productive manner. This was a passion project and one that made me really think about what I needed as a teen trying to find who I was while having so many questions about where I came from. Thinking about this project through a literacy lens was really beneficial. It gave me a chance to examine how to best foster discussion and how to get students to think about things on a non-surface level. I worked to incorporate more forms of literacy, not just books, the lessons include pictures, articles and probing questions. This capstone project allowed me to explore personal development, while keeping the objectives student centered. I look forward to implementing this curriculum with students and seeing how it impacts their development.



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