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Supporting Multicultural Mental Health with Culturally and Linguistically Relevant Practices

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Supporting Multicultural Mental Health with Culturally and Linguistically Relevant
Practices

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

The past four years have been filled with people struggling with their mental health after living with the challenges of COVID-19 in addition to other trials of life. Though teachers are not licensed counselors or therapists, learners require more and more emotional support and with the increase in need the school I work at is in a reactive holding pattern and we are trying to find our way to being proactive to support staff and learners. The need for mental health support for youth is so severe that in October of 2021 the American Association of Pediatrics partnered with other organizations to declare “a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health” (AAP, 2021). This need continues to show up in the classroom.

This chapter is about how my own experiences with mental health and my time in the classroom have inspired the desire to support fellow educators as they guide multicultural learners through many emotions and mental health needs. Multicultural learners are people who are from or exist within multiple different cultures and function within those cultures' various languages, traditions, and beliefs (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.). The goal of this overall project is to curate a website with resources to respond to the question: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?*

Personal Experience

Growing up as a white middle class female from an English speaking family I saw the need for mental health support but most members in my family just grinned and bore

their emotions. It took me until age 23 to see a licensed therapist for anxiety and by that time I had made it through a year living in Sweden as a part of a family of 12, graduated college, and was on my way to becoming a full time ESL teacher. In hindsight, there were many moments in my personal life when I should have noticed something was off and sought support instead of pushing through the day and dismissing my emotions. With my own mental health becoming a priority, I wanted to be open about having a therapist and seeking help as a way to encourage family and friends to care for their own mental health. As I continued teaching I learned that many of my colleagues are also medicated for anxiety and depression. On top of caring for ourselves and our families, as educators, we also care deeply for our learners and their mental wellbeing which can weigh on teachers even after the school bell rings.

Professional Experience

Teaching with each year of my career thus far tainted by covid amplified both learner needs and my ability to see those needs. The privilege of working with learners year after year allows me to build relationships with the learners and their families. Following learners through multiple grade levels means I observe changes in their behavior from year to year and have the knowledge of their history when I approach their guardians and classroom teachers with any concerns. Spending 2-4 years working with a learner also means that I observe the long term growth they make and that growth may be academic or social emotional growth. Working with learners in grades kindergarten through 5th grade allows me the opportunity to walk with them through achievements and challenges.

Learners at the elementary level have shown that it is a challenge to pinpoint how

they are feeling, why they are feeling a certain way, and what they have the power to do about it. Learners need support learning the vocabulary to describe what they are feeling and then to figure out what may be causing that physical or emotional response. For example, a stomach ache is something learners want the nurse for and the nurse is helpful in discerning if that learner is physically sick or if they frequent the nurse's office so much that the school counselor might be able to help them with what could be school avoidance or anxiety. When a learner needs support it is imperative that school and home are able to communicate clearly. There are some families who beg for mental health support while others prefer to deal with any emotions within their own homes. I know that even in my own family it is easier and more acceptable to have a broken bone and work hard at recovering muscle than it is to accept that mental health is an up and down journey and in no way is a person broken if their mental health isn't perfect. Knowing my own experiences and culture surrounding mental health helps me learn about other cultures' beliefs surrounding mental health in order to communicate with parents and guardians. Even when guardians see their learner is struggling, guardians may not know what resources are available to help or how to connect to those resources. I experienced this with a parent whose language is not primarily English and once we were able to connect through an interpreter we were then able to work together to get her learner the support she needed. Overall the covid years did not pause life's other hardships of housing, illness, academic concerns, or social interactions, instead covid amplified many of these issues and even children of elementary age must deal with the emotions of all they have lived through.

Despite only getting less than a full credit of training in counseling, teachers bear

much responsibility for identifying and supporting learners' mental health. Conversations I had this year with the school's counselor, behavior specialist, contracted out of district psychologist, principal, and special education staff have shown a light on the increased learner need for emotional support. Although I work primarily with speakers of other languages at my school, all multicultural learners deserve extra support to thrive at school and their educators deserve the resources to support each learner. Multicultural learners live their lives across multiple languages and cultures and those languages and cultures may not be affirmed and valued in their world outside of their homelife. Guardians of multicultural learners deserve more opportunities in connection with school staff which could include staff reaching out with an interpreter or sending a positive check in email home. This group of learners deserves extra support because they face challenges of underrepresentation, biases, and different lived experiences from their white European only English speaking peers.

In addition to working in a school of a majority white learners of European descent, the majority of educators I work with at the elementary level and as a district wide team of English teachers to speakers of other languages are white women. For most of my day I am the only white person working with a group of learners of color. I recognize that I do not have the same lived experiences as my multicultural learners and I have not experienced racism or microaggressions as some of my learners have. As educators in my school we have noticed an uptick in the number of racial slurs and microaggressions being used between learners. No matter the one on one conversations with learners, the classroom level discussions, and grade level discussions, learners are still being unkind to one another both with and without the consideration of

multiculturalism. These instances of racism in a space that is meant to be a safe schooling environment pulls the focus from an academic setting where learners can express themselves and take risks and instead turns the space into one of uncertainty and negativity. Each learner deserves to have school as a safe space to grow and learn instead of feeling targeted and put down.

Rationale

In my experience as an educator, multicultural learners need additional support because they are faced with finding their way between cultures, hearing racist comments from peers, and finding a way to an identity they can be proud of that honors all parts of their cultures and languages. With some learners I see their families acknowledging, or not acknowledging, emotional struggles in different ways. Some learners I work with may have a more open dialogue with the adults in their home, while others have adults who are trying to show up in so many ways that showing up for mental health ends up at the bottom of the list, to no fault of their own. I also am noticing families who need more support in navigating the U.S. healthcare system as they are reaching out for help for their child but language and cultural barriers are preventing them from fully explaining or understanding what is happening thus making it harder to get the needed treatment. This medical support families are seeing is both for physical needs and for mental health support. Some of the health information must then also be communicated to the school so the learner can be safe and healthy at school but what must be communicated and why it must be shared is not always clear between the guardians and the school. I know I have so much more to learn about how to support the multicultural learner population in my school so that when behaviors are occurring, learners are struggling with peer

relationships, or learners are struggling to complete academics I can approach learners and their guardians with options and solutions to support learners instead of only problems. I want to gather research and resources into a website to offer to other educators as they also support the multicultural learner population so we can better understand challenges multicultural learners face and how to communicate with families when working to lift the learners up. It is for those many reasons that the question stands: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?*

Conclusion

Moving forward research will be gathered pertaining to supporting elementary multicultural learners in their mental health needs. Mental health needs span from Adverse Childhood Experiences and racial trauma to social emotional learning and culturally responsive learning environments. Chapter one reflected on my personal mental health journey and my experiences working with multicultural learners in the K-5 grade levels which inspired me to pursue the topic of supporting multicultural learners with their mental health. Chapter two will delve into research related to culturally responsive teaching, social emotional learning and youth mental health. These topics will be examined with the consideration of learner well being and the goal of supporting each multicultural learner with their mental health. Moving into Chapter 3, a plan will be created to develop a website targeting elementary educators in my school district. This website will be an opportunity to gather resources, available services, information about mental health values in different cultures, and ways to affirm learners' identities as multicultural individuals. Finally in chapter 4 I will reflect on the process of developing the project, the effectiveness of the project, and steps for moving forward with the goal of

responding to the question: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?*

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the current literature related to multicultural learners and their mental health. First, culturally responsive teaching will be discussed with a focus on racial trauma, linguistically responsive teaching, family and community communication, and teaching as a white teacher to learners of color. Second, social emotional learning will be examined with specific focus on building learner identity. Finally, research surrounding learners' mental health, with an emphasis on learners of color, will round out this literature review. Though there are many more considerations when researching multicultural mental health I will be focusing on cultural and linguistic supports for mental health. Each of these topics will support the process of answering: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?*

Youth Mental Health

A report published to the Centers for Disease Control website February 2022 states “mental health encompasses a range of mental, emotional, social, and behavioral functioning and occurs along a continuum of good to poor” (Bitsko et al.). The cdc website also describes mental health and mental illness not as two sides of the same coin but that mental disorders within children are “serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, which cause distress and problems getting through the day” (Center for Disease Control, n.d.). Concerns over mental health in both youth and adults continue to grow and in 2021 the U.S. Surgeon General released a Youth Mental Health Advisory detailing the background of the issue and sharing his

own concerns relating to the growing issue, especially with Covid-19 as an additional factor (Murthy, 2021). The Surgeon General's advisory also details various groups of youth who may be in need of additional support for mental health (Murthy, 2021). The next subsections will detail youth mental health statistics in the United States as a whole and in the state of Minnesota. One subsection will also look into how race plays a role in youth mental health.

Youth mental health statistics

Statistics relating to youth mental health in the United States include considerations for age groupings and specific mental disorders assembled across multiple federal data collection systems to then be organized by multiple researchers as an overall report. The "Mental Health Surveillance Among Children" looked at data between 2013-2019 and found that much data relies on parents taking children to a doctor or other health care provider to get a diagnosis and then reporting the diagnosis during data collection, but access to health care may have barriers including health insurance, transportation, and access to interpreters (Bitsko et. al., 2019). Another observation made through the data collection was that anxiety and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder were the most common diagnosis made for children ages 3-17 between the calendar years of 2013-2019 and that girls were more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety than boys (Bitsko et. al., 2019).

According to the Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health ADHD, anxiety, and behavior problems are most common among youth ages 3-17 between 2016-2019 with the percent of prevalence ranging from 8.9% to 9.8% for those disorders (Center for Disease Control, 2022.). The statistics also share that "1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2-8 years

(17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder” (Center for Disease Control, 2023). The statistics mapped out indicate both a need for mental health support and for an examination of changes in children’s mental health as they progress through school ages. Statistics similar to those of the whole United States are shown within the state of Minnesota which shows that schools across the U.S. and in Minnesota need greater mental health supports for learners.

Mental health of Minnesota Learners

The Minnesota Department of Education facilitates the Minnesota Student Survey to learners in grades 5, 8, 9 and 11 every three years with the most recent completed in 2022 (Minnesota Student Survey Statewide Tables by Grade, 2022). In 2022 learners were asked whether they had been treated for a mental health, emotional, or behavioral problem and of the 5th graders 14% marked yes for receiving treatment in the past year and the percentage saying yes to treatment in the past year increased to 21% when inquiring the 11th graders (2022 Minnesota Student Survey Statewide Tables by Grade. p. 30). That question was the one question in Table 23 of the tables by grade level where all four grade levels were asked that question (p.30). When learners were asked to reflect on finding good ways to deal with hard things in their life 33% of 5th graders reported they do so “somewhat or sometimes” and 43% of 5th graders reported “very or often” in response to that question (p. 37). 5th graders were also asked to reflect on the past 30 days and respond as to whether or not they agree with the statement “I sometimes feel sad without feeling why” and to that 48% of 5th graders responded either “strongly agree” or “agree” (p. 41 table 29B). That particular question was not asked to the higher grade

levels. This data is self reported by learners in their school settings. The statewide data combines all learners but there are options to examine the data disaggregated by race.

Mental Health of Learners of Color

When looking at disaggregated Minnesota statewide data between white learners and black learners there are differences in the self reporting for certain questions. On the question posed to 5th graders “Have you ever been treated for a mental health, emotional or behavioral problem,” white males, white females, and black females had 14% who responded “yes, during the last year” while black males had 17% report “yes, during the last year” (Table 23, 2023). For the statement “I feel valued and appreciated by others” 34% of 5th grade black males reported “Not at all or rarely” or “somewhat or sometimes”, 37% of black female 5th graders reported “Not at all or rarely” or “somewhat or “sometime”, 29% of white 5th grade males chose those same answers, and 32% of white female 5th graders chose those responses (table 28C). These discrepancies between the self reporting of the black and white 5th grade learners indicate that learners of color, specifically black learners, are feeling less validated and are being treated for more mental health disorders. Mental health needs must be addressed as a whole but with consideration for learners of color and learners with multicultural backgrounds.

Racial Trauma

The definition of race is “any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Racism is defined as “the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, definition 2a, n.d.). Moreland-Capua (2021) states;

Racism as a powerful social construct has been demonstrated to have toxic impact on persons subject to it. There are multiple fears operating in the case of racism - there is the fear (constructed, perceived, and very real to them) of the perpetrator of racist views/ideologies/practice (fear of losing status, identity, position) and the fear (toxic stress, physical, psychological, and economic harm) of those subject to racism. (p. 107)

Hargons, Malone, et. al., researchers interviewed black college learners about racial trauma and the learners needed to define racial trauma which they defined as “stress that sticks with them, severely affecting how they think and feel, based on the number of times they experience or the intensity of racist stressors” (Hargons et.al., 2022, p. 1).

Racial trauma does not have an age limit for how young a person can be when experiencing such stress. In addition to discussing the relationship between fear and racism, Moreland-Capuia (2021) details the history of educating children in the United States based on race and gender. Moreland-Capuia (2021) questions what the system of education in the United States is perpetuating within a system built to connect with other structures which have historically perpetuated stereotypes of people of color and people experiencing poverty such as the school to prison pipeline (pp.79-90) .

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices

Hollie (2017) defines cultural and linguistic responsiveness as “the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for the purposes of building and bridging the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society” (p.23). Being able to validate and affirm a learners’ culture and first language allows learners to feel not only seen in their education but also lifted up as an individual.

Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2017) write that culturally responsive teaching is beneficial for students of color and linguistically diverse students, all of whom deserve to be challenged and achieve academically, but in my experience as a student the classroom is often centered on the white washed version of any story and English is valued above other languages. Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching requires educators to delve into curriculum and also into overall classroom environments in order to support learners' emotional and academic growth. By examining one's own biases educators are able to reflect on how personal identities impact personal life experiences and then educators can think outside of their own experiences in order to accept and affirm the experiences of their students, thus validating their students' lived experiences.

In order to build a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom, teachers must consider aspects of classroom management, academic language, school environment, and vocabulary, all while VABBing which stands for validating, affirming, building and bridging (Hollie, 2017, p. 27). The acronym VABB coined by Hollie (2017) speaks to the steps needed to support learners as individuals, as academics, and as community members. An example of how VABB would be put into action is the learners are welcomed into the classroom and validated for who they are when they step foot in the door. The learners' home cultures and languages are affirmed as assets which are then built on so the students can connect to the "culture of academia and in mainstream society" (Hollie, 2017, p.27). A part of being able to validate and affirm learners is keeping them safe and prioritizing the learners' lived experiences from the perspective of their identities instead of prioritizing the comfort of an educator whose identities (Hammond, 2015, p. 47). It is the responsibility of the educator to take into consideration

how their learners view and experience the world and allow learners to share those views and experiences in their own way with their own words.

Many learners experience and participate in society every day even though they are not yet considered full members of society when outside of their classrooms. The experiences of having less respect because of a younger age shape how learners see the world and how they think the world sees them. In the United States, an adult is considered a full member of society which may finally come with more respect, though who qualifies as an adult is not always clear. An article in the New York Times contemplated the age of adulthood writing “America has been inconsistent at best when it comes to deciding what 18- to 21- year olds are too young, or just old enough, to do” (Cramer, 2020). An adult can vote, they can join the military, and they pay taxes. Even when a human being is not an adult, a young learner is still a contributing member to society and a participant in the world around them because of how they exist with their families, their peers, and their communities.

Teachers must see each learner as an individual with great prior knowledge whose respect must be earned in order to learn alongside the learner. Hollie speaks to building a classroom culture The Three Rs: Rapport, Relationship, Respect details the connection, trust, and respect teachers must work to build with their learners so that their learners feel seen and thus choose to learn from that educator (p. 93, 2018). Hammond (2015) also expresses that building rapport and respect with learners is necessary for their feeling of safety and their ability to be seen and learn (p. 77). Each learner enters the classroom with their own abilities and opinions which can and should be affirmed prior to building

further learning. Some of the abilities that learners possess include the ability to speak languages other than English.

Linguistic Justice and Pedagogy

In addition to entering school with the realities of their home cultures, learners also arrive with their own linguistic skills, be it a type of English or language abilities in other home languages considering that in Minnesota alone 9.2% of students are English Learners (Minnesota Report Card, 2023). The linguistic knowledge learners bring from home must be valued and allowed to be linked to vocabulary learning within the classroom with the knowledge that learners enter school with plenty of knowledge already acquired (Hollie, 2017, p. 120). By linking their new academic language with prior knowledge learners are able to find synonyms, slang, and words in other languages, all in their journey to building a greater ability to communicate in multiple settings.

Bilingualism is an asset. Bilingualism could mean speaking a variety of Englishes and speaking Spanish in addition to other languages. One variety of English that has long been deemed as less than is Black English and McMurty writes that “when educators understand how BL is rule governed, multifaceted, and dynamic, they begin to realize that to deny its existence is to deny the humanity of a group of Americans who have been subjugated since this country’s inception”(2021). In addition to denying the asset that is Black English, Spanish speakers have also been denied the right to view their language as an asset when it comes to existing in multilingual spaces in the U.S. (Gonzalez-Howard & Suarez, 2021). The history of multilingualism as a demerit is why many educators who work with multilingual learners are urging for the switch to “more asset-oriented framing, like emerging (or emergent) bilingual students, or multilingual

students”(Gonzalez-Howard & Suarez, 2021). Justice for multilingual learners is validating the assets they bring into the classroom and affirming their languages.

To further support multilingual learners, educators can allow students to use their languages in the classroom. One way this can be done is when creating experiences for students to write about and reflect on and allowing them to do so in multiple languages (Siffrann & Harman, 2019). Having students connect a lived experience to language use highlights how “the body is integral to the production, analysis, and interpretation of language and meaning” (Siffrann & Harman, 2019). The concept of having a personal or group experience to live and then use to build language has been a key language teaching practice for over 30 years (Taylor, 1992) and continues to be a way for students to build their language in the four domains of language acquisition.

In Minnesota, WIDA standards and assessments are used when working with multilingual learners and the consortium has guidelines to support language acquisition in reading, writing, listening, and speaking (WIDA, n.d.). WIDA focuses not just on language for communicating with peers or in the classroom but also focuses on the language for science, language for language arts, language for mathematics, and language for social studies (WIDA, n.d.). In each language area students can test out their language via hands-on activities and lived experiences in order to gain understanding in their languages.

A learner’s ability to communicate in oral or written form in multiple languages is an asset for that learner. A way to affirm a multilingual learner’s strength is through translanguaging which welcomes the usage of both languages by the learner in any given school lesson and the origins of translanguaging have been traced from a Welsh word in

the 1980s to a pedagogy meant to maintain bilingualism in education today (Lewis et al., 2012, pp. 641-654). Celebrating learners' home cultures and languages within the classroom by encouraging the usage of multilingualism and display of cultures represented in the room are ways to show learners and their families that they have an ownership over their education and they are valued within the school.

In addition to the learning occurring within a school, learners are also learning from their families, communities, and peers outside of school. When learning about an individual, learning about their home culture can inform on what learners value and how they communicate with others. Connecting with families of learners' may be a part of generating trust with the learners and their communities; this could include attending community events where families may be in attendance, asking about their families while genuinely listening, or sharing about a hobby you may have in common (Hammond, 2017, p. 79). Finally, finding ways to authentically include learners' culture in the classroom allows them to feel ownership of their environment and then have the safety needed to take in new information.

Building identity

With the knowledge that each learner brings their own lived experiences, linguistic knowledge, and cultural history into the classroom, teachers must affirm those unique parts of a learners' identity and support them in understanding who they are as an individual in addition to who they are as a part of society. Teachers can share their own identities and then encourage learners to consider identity via writing, art, and music, as just a few examples of where to start when expressing identity because Hollie writes that

Culturally Relevant Teaching “means that teachers jump into the pool with the learners” as they are growing and experiences new things (p. 27, 2018).

A teacher in an elementary school in Toronto, Canada took the time to examine their own identity while also encouraging learners to embrace and explore their identities within the safety of their English classroom, which welcomed all languages and cultures within the class (Giampapa, 2010, pp. 407-431). Another teacher reflects on their role as a music teacher when it comes to acknowledging their own identity and how their views and experiences differ from those of their learners (Fitzpatrick, 2012, pp. 53-59).

Fitzpatrick echoes the need for varied perspectives and musical genres within her classroom in order to reflect the varied identities of learners represented in the classroom but also musicians represented in the industry through history (Fitzpatrick, 2012, pp. 53-59).

Finally, in an art context this time, English learners in six Australian primary schools are offered the opportunity to express themselves through visual art which allowed “student empowerment by encouraging choice and autonomy, promoting different responses and outcomes, encouraging risk taking in a non threatening environment, and providing supportive, scaffolded contexts where teachers were on hand when needed” (Wielgosz & Molyneux, 2015, p. 287). Each of these instances provided learners with settings to express their identities through a creative outlet in which teachers affirmed multiculturalism and validated the belonging of learners no matter their language or cultural backgrounds.

Social Emotional Learning

As learners' brains continue to develop and they continue to face challenges in their daily lives educators have been explicitly implementing lessons for social emotional learning. According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (n.d.), social emotional learning consists of 5 subcategories: self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills and social development (CASEL). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (n.d.) defines social emotional learning as follows:

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (Fundamentals of SEL, 2022)

Many educators incorporate SEL into their daily classroom routines, some special education teachers specifically use the Zones of Regulation to help learners process and recognize their own emotions (Welcom, n.d.). The next subsection will discuss work that has been done with SEL and multicultural learners.

SEL for multicultural learners

Multicultural learners may include immigrants, indigenous learners, multilingual learners, and learners of color when working to support SEL needs for multicultural learners. Colorin Colorado (2018) details ways to support immigrant learners with their social emotional needs and includes suggestions including maintaining routines for learners, giving learners language to express their emotions, observing changes in learner

behavior, and connecting with families about supporting learner emotions (section 2-5 ,9). “All SEL should be trauma-informed” which Colorin Colorado and Pawlo (2019) agree on the need for SEL to take into account that many learners bring their trauma with them to school, even if their teachers are not aware of the depth or breadth of said trauma, and how the combination of SEL and trauma-informed education can best support all learners (p. 37-41). Pawlo et. al. (2019) also emphasized that the need for the SEL must happen as an overall school climate with a focus both on learner and teacher emotional learning in order to adequately support learner need (Pawlo et al, 2019, pp. 37-41).

Summary

When supporting multicultural learners with their social and emotional wellbeing, their cultural, familial, and historical backgrounds must be incorporated in order to validate the learners’ lived experiences and to acknowledge the learners as individuals. K.A. Goodman (2021), who wrote about experiences of implementing SEL pedagogy in an area with a large indigenous population, argues that only using the western based CASEL approach to the whole child learnings would fail to include and honor Maori traditions and culture relating to the growth and learning of an individual (p. 296). Recognizing a learner’s or a communities’ multicultural background must be a part of SEL because a learner’s cultural background will play a role in the social and emotional expectations placed on them to develop at a young age (Hayashi et al, 2022, p. 751). Both Goodman and Hayashi maintain that learners’ cultural and historical backgrounds must be considered when implementing SEL because the western majority culture expectations for development, such as the necessity for eye contact, will not align to support the variety of cultures and lived experiences of learners in any given school.

Conclusion

Supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of learners in order to provide the environment for learning requires considering aspects of learners' cultural backgrounds, social emotional needs, and mental health statistics within the learner population.

Culturally responsive teaching, social emotional learning, and youth mental health are intertwining topics which all work toward supporting the development of early childhood and school aged children. The previous research available to educators will aid in the development of a project with the aim to answer the question: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?*

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to create a website with resources and information in order to respond to the question: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?* This chapter covers a description of the project including literature to support usage of a website aimed toward adult educators. It also details the setting and audience for the project and how long it took to create and implement the project. Finally, this chapter explains how the effectiveness of this project was evaluated.

Project overview

Over the past three years of teaching I have encountered many multilingual learners who require and desire additional mental health support. My colleagues in special education and multicultural education across the district I work in have also encountered a heightened need for mental health support and thankfully we have an administration that has been working to offer professional development in equity and mental health for our learners. This project is a website which includes both information and resources to support educators who work with multicultural learners and their mental health.

As for the content available on the website I cite information, connect links to additional resources, and organize the content by topic. The website has multiple pages for educators to refer to when wanting further support. Sections will include: U.S. mental health statistics, Minnesota demographics, mental health supports for learners, literature

for learners, further reading for educators, tools for communicating with multilingual families, and a reference page. Each of these sections are meant to serve as a touch point for educators so they can feel more comfortable when approaching communication with families and with learners.

The inspiration for using the format of a website is from the usage of google sites in my school district. In the district I work in, the equity coordinator sends out a monthly web page with resources and lesson suggestions. Our district literacy team has also created a google website with a lot of resources and materials to help us align our literacy standards and curriculum district wide. Additionally, a multicultural colleague created a website as part of her capstone project focusing on SLIFE which she shared with district multilingual staff and the high school staff at her building. Between the monthly equity pages, the literacy website, and the SLIFE website, an internet site is an accessible resource that can be consistently referred back to and can be digested by each educator at their own chosen pace. The Department of Health and Human Services wrote in a report about website use and design that “users will make the best use of Web sites when information is displayed in a directly usable format and content organization is highly intuitive” (p. 9, 2006). For these reasons I chose to create a website to host the information and resources to share with colleagues about the topic: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?* This is a resource educators can use independently or can be used when connecting with other educators who service the same learners.

Setting

This website was specifically designed with elementary educators in Minnesota in mind. Within Minnesota, as of the 2022-2023 school year, the student population is 62.3% White, 11.7% Black or African American, 10.6% Hispanic or Latino, 7.0% Asian, 3.2% American Indian, 0.1% Pacific islander or Native Hawaiian, 0.1% other indigenous peoples, and 5.0% of learners identify as two or more races (Minnesota Report Card, 2023). As for other enrollment criteria, 43.4% of Minnesota learners qualify for Free/Reduced priced meals, 17.6% of learners qualify for special education, and 9.2% of learners are English learners (Minnesota Report Card, 2023). While the learner population of Minnesota is 62.3% white, a 2019 report found that in the 2017-2018 school year 95.7% of teachers were white and 75.8% of teachers were female (Minnesota Professional Educator Licencing and Standards Board).

As shown by those data points, Minnesota learners are not being represented within the population that is teaching them. Minnesota is indeed a very white state overall but white and English speaking are not by any means the only race and language present in the school halls.

Audience

Educators spend time and energy doing much more than teaching content areas; educators take time to build relationships with learners and support the whole learner or help them get the support they need. These educators who seek to support the whole learner are the audience of the website. Considering the statics of who Minnesota educators are, it is mostly white female teachers, as I myself am a part of this group, who this website is aimed toward so that they can feel better prepared for supporting

multicultural learners as the learners deserve to be supported. When creating the website with educators, adults, as the audience the way adults learn must be considered.

Adults choose to learn with the goal of meeting a need or learning something of value in their daily life which is why I must consider the informational and resource need for the educators I am targeting with this project (Howard, p. 94). The educators I am primarily aiming to support teach learners in kindergarten through 5th grade, desire ideas to implement to support their learners and people to aid in the act of supporting multicultural learners with their mental health.

Going forward this website will be the touchstone to refer back to while also offering myself to colleagues when supporting learner mental health and partnering with both educators and guardians of the learners. Howard (2005) writes that adult learners learn well when the content is able to be consumed via their own control of the process, the content has immediate relevance to their life or work, and when the information is broken down between the larger concept and the smaller details (p. 93). For those reasons I will need to consider how information is laid out on the website and how to label the titles of each section so that it is quick to navigate and find the relevant information an educator is looking for.

Timeline

Due to the academic calendar, this website was produced over the summer term when a majority of educators are on summer break. In June and July of 2023 I developed the website and curated its content. This development included making the website both accessible and aesthetically pleasing so that it feels welcoming to educators who visit the site.

Moving forward into the second half of July, the website was shared with my content reviewer who looked at both the usability of the website as well as the relevance and organization of the content. The content reviewer is someone who has created content on a google website for educators and she also has experience with multicultural learners, equity, and connecting classroom teachers with resources to support multicultural learners. I needed to edit the accessibility of some of the charts I included in the website.

When August arrived it was time to finalize the website for when the school year starts in late August and write up a reflection on the project thus far. With it still being the summer, educators will not be in school mode yet and thus I had minimal feedback from peers on my project with the school year not officially beginning until after Labor Day. During orientation week in August, I will share my website by emailing the link to staff in my building. I will also email my website out to the ESL staff across the district.

Assessment

As mentioned above when discussing the intended audience, my audience was not frequently checking email but I did connect with a few colleagues who are elementary educators to see their thoughts. The educators I shared my website with appreciated the literature for learners section the most out of the whole website. When the school year commences, I shall share it with my administration team which includes the principal, the counselor, the instructional coach, and the learner support specialist, all of whom support educators in instances of supporting multicultural learners with their mental health and could speak to the validity and usefulness of the website.

Summary

The capstone project responds to the question: *how can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?* It will be a website with links, resources, and content for educators to access at their leisure. Information on the website targets educators, adult learners, who strive to support their multicultural learners in a primarily white population in Minnesota. This project was developed over the summer term and distributed to a limited number of educators during the off season of the school year prior to being more widely shared once the school year starts again in September. Due to the timeline restrictions the feedback was minimal from the target audience of the project. All of this is in an effort to support the passionate hopeful educators who want to learn more about supporting multicultural learners with their mental health.

Moving forward, chapter four will present a lookback at the process of creating this project and implications for future research. I will reflect on my personal learning and consider the limitations of my project. Chapter four allows for the chance to plan possible future research or projects I could do related to the topic of my capstone project question: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?*

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

For the past six months I have lived with the question: How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health? This is a question I have wrestled with during my four years of teaching as I sit with learners and their emotions or when I listen to a stressed mother share her child's needs via a translated phone call. I shall continue to ponder and research this question as I go forward in my teaching career though perhaps not in such an academic setting.

This chapter will reflect upon what I have learned through this capstone project process, ways that the literature review supported my learnings, and some implications of my project. This chapter will also touch on the limitations of my project and ways to move forward with this research topic in mind. Finally, this chapter will reflect on how this project is a benefit to the teaching profession.

Key Learnings

I think the biggest thing I learned about myself from this process is that academia is not where I thrive or where I want to guide my career to. I love English and languages because of their storytelling and communication abilities. I do not love nitpicky grammar or deep analytical writing. As an educator I greatly appreciate those who are passionate about research and have the brain to dig deep into papers and pick them apart. A friend of mine has been getting her masters at the same time and she loves the research and may even go on to do a phd in education in the future but I myself have no interest in such a degree. My favorite place is right in the daily chaos of teaching, connecting with students and families to see first hand the growth they make and problem solving on my feet. I

have never loved academic writing and this process has once again confirmed that feeling. Perhaps in the future I will choose to go back to school for another teaching license but I do not see myself pursuing research at this level any further.

Review of Literature Review

Though not my favorite aspect of my career as an educator, I did find the sources in my literature review helpful when creating my project, particularly the sources from the CDC(Center for Disease Control) and from the Minnesota Department of Education(Minnesota Report Card) which looked at statistics and demographics pertaining to U.S. learners. Knowing approximately the population of learners that my target audience could work with helped me curate the website. Another aspect of the literature review that was helpful was Hollie's(2017) work on validating, affirming, building, and bridging because it guided me to search for book choices that validated and affirmed students' emotions and lived experiences.

Implications and Limitations

When searching for literature for learners for my website I found that there were many social-emotional and mental health books with fluffy animals or white children as the main characters, but fewer children of color as the main characters. The books I found with animal main characters and white main characters still had good content and messages but it was not the representation I was looking for and it took longer to dig through bookstore websites and library recommendations to find what I needed. From my search for literature for young learners I see that there is still progress to be made in the publishing world with publishing more diverse books so that all children are represented.

Another challenge I encountered was when writing about mental health resources for learners both in school and outside of school. From my experience at working at 3 different schools in my career I know that not every school is equipped with the same staffing and resources to support learners and families when it comes to mental health. Some schools I have worked in have school social workers while others have school counselors. Some schools have family support workers while others have multilingual liaisons. While I wanted to write about mental health resources in schools I knew that each school has a different system and different staffing for providing support. I also know from personal experience that outside of school mental health support can vary based on the type of health insurance, if a person has health insurance, the wait time for seeing a provider, and maybe needing an interpreter for an appointment. Those experiences are why my mental health support page on the website is very generalized and lives off of maybes.

Being aware of the need for mental health access for youth I think that implications for the future should be wider health care access for children so they can access the health care they need when they are dependent on parents and guardians and teachers for support. Another implication is that school districts should work to have a baseline of support in each of their schools. What I mean by that is each school should have a similar offering of support such as each elementary school in a school district has a principal, a school counselor, and a student support specialist. This is so that should a student switch schools within a district they would have access to the same level of support. This is something that the school district I work in is attempting to do whereas

before each elementary school did not have the same level of support. Next, I will discuss personal goals that align with my capstone project.

Future Goals

As I move forward in my career I plan to collaborate with my school counselor and school student support specialist to help learners with where they are at with their mental health. I am going to be on my school's equity team this year and hope to be a person that coworkers can come to when they want support for their multicultural students or incorporating multicultural texts in their class. I am thankful to work with a staff that makes strong connections with their learners and incorporates diverse texts and traditions into the classroom and I look forward to continuing to support that. I have already shared my website with the school student support specialist and she found the book list to be helpful so I hope that she is able to use some of those book recommendations when working with students this year.

The other goal I have moving forward is to build stronger connections with my students' families. I find that the year gets away from me and I often only contact families with reminders or concerns but I want to connect with them for positive things and to check in with them. I learned last year that parents and guardians may have a lot to say but may not reach out first. I hope that the section of my website that discusses communicating with multilingual families encourages classroom teachers to make connections with the families for themselves. Of the teachers I work with there is a range of comfort levels when communicating with multilingual families and while I am happy to support that communication I also know that sometimes families would prefer to talk

directly to the classroom teacher. I hope that encouragement is just one of the benefits of this project.

A Beneficial Project

In addition to supporting educators with feeling more comfortable communicating with multilingual families I also think that the book list section is beneficial for educators. Each year my colleagues look for new books to incorporate into their classroom and I think that the collection of titles I assembled offers a variety of known authors and lesser known authors that teachers can look into. The list of literature for learners can also be used by educators to explore other books by the same authors. In my opinion, picture books are not just for elementary students and can still be teaching tools in secondary schools. The website is also beneficial because it allows educators to look at the statistics for youth mental health in the United States compared to the self reported mental health of students in Minnesota. This website is a conversation starter and resource for educators which is why it has been a beneficial project.

Summary

Throughout this process I thought a lot about the population of students that I work with as an English as an additional language teacher and I thought about the mental health needs I have seen in many students in the school I work in, even if they were students I don't directly work with. I created this project with my students and my colleagues at the forefront of my mind and it is for them I hope this will be beneficial in the coming school year. Though academic writing is not and never will be a passion of mine, the topics I researched continue to be of interest and I will continue to learn about multicultural education, social emotional learning, and other topics in my literature

review as I continue my teaching career. There is so much more that could have been included under the umbrella of multicultural mental health, but I am satisfied with the direction I went with my studies.

While I do not know the full answer to the question: *How can elementary educators support multicultural learners with their mental health?* I do know that this project is a strong start to providing support and understanding to multicultural learners. May all educators start the 2023-2024 school year with more hope than we ended the previous year with and may we feel more prepared to respond to mental health needs instead of reacting out of survival instincts.

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