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Increasing Diversity in Advanced Placement Classrooms Through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Chapter One will begin, after a statement about my cultural identity and connection with the ideas behind this project, with a statement about the purpose of this project and the importance of examining the central question to the project, which is: *How can AP literature teachers use culturally relevant pedagogy to make changes to their curriculum to increase diversity in their classes?* The focus will then shift to my personal connections with the larger concept of "challenge" and then move into my specific experience with teaching advanced materials to young people who would not traditionally be considered "advanced" or "gifted" learners. Chapter 1 will then move into the racial inequalities prevalent in advanced classes in high school and some reasons behind these inequalities. Finally, Chapter 1 will conclude with an overview of the remaining chapters and a brief description of the project.

My Social and Cultural Identity

I am a Swedish-German (White) woman who grew up in a small, working-class town in rural Wisconsin. I feel this is important in explaining my position on the subject. Growing up and going to college, I felt a sense of embitterment about the lack of opportunities my rural school had. I imagined how much further I could have gotten if I had a rigorous education, with course offerings that would have challenged me. My initial feelings towards students who have been in some way blocked from AP classes, whether through a lack of opportunity or a systemic process of separating out gifted students at a young age that usually falls along racial lines in diverse schools, is one of understanding. I wonder how the same system that overlooked myself and my classmates growing up in rural isolation can overlook

students of color. But when I reflect on my experiences in education, I know that while my school was often overlooked, what students of color face with the school system is not the same. Rather than being overlooked, students of color face active oppression from the education system.

The Inequity of the Gifted Label

Across America, schools work to meet the needs of a diverse and varied population of students. One manner in which schools do this is by placing students who test below their grade level into specialized services and classes that target their learning needs to get them back up to test at their grade level. Other students are viewed by their schools and teachers as having particular gifts and talents with school and are placed in groups that provide them with greater challenges and opportunities for academic growth. These "gifted" students often receive this label in elementary school and carry it with them throughout high school as they take Advanced Placement and other challenging courses (Peters et al, 2020). The gifted label tends to stick with students.

But there is a major fault in this system. The school system routinely produces classes of "gifted" students that are mostly White and Asian and do not reflect the diversity of their schools. Black and Hispanic students are severely underrepresented in these classes, especially in Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school (Lucas & Berends, 2007; Yonezawa et al., 2002). The purpose of this project is to examine how these racial disparities form in advanced classes and ask teachers to consider how they can make their AP classes more diverse. Because there is such a wide variety of AP classes, this project will discuss AP and racial divisions within advanced classes broadly, then focus specifically on how the class of AP Literature can be made more racially equitable. The main focus of the project will center around the question: How can AP Literature teachers apply culturally relevant pedagogy to make changes to their curriculum that increase diversity in their classes?

The Joy of Challenge

My first job out of college was working in a mental health rehabilitation facility for teenagers. The facility focused on Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and emphasized outdoor engagement as a pillar of balance in one's life. I love being outdoors. Most of the residents did not–at least, not when they first arrived. My place of work provided us with many unique opportunities to be outside, such as: hiking, rock climbing, kayaking, canoeing, paddle boarding, snorkeling, swimming, mountain biking, etc. I would enthusiastically introduce a new skill to my residents, then smile (with just a hint of mischief) as I would take in their panicked expressions. "No way, Meg!" They would protest. "No way you're getting me into that river/up that tree/into those skis/on top of that hill!" After some bribing, some cajoling, lots of pep talks, and a whole lot of assurances that I would catch them/rescue them/fight a shark for them should the worst happen, I would then get to witness my favorite part of my job. Watching a kid try something they were terrified of and succeed. They would laugh and tell the story of what they did for days afterwards. Often, these stories were featured in graduation speeches as a time when they realized they were stronger and more capable than they realized.

I know the feeling myself. A certified adrenaline junkie since birth, I love to push my expectations of myself and what I think I am capable of. This need for challenge extends beyond a joyride, though. Growing up in rural Wisconsin, my school was small and the opportunities were slight. But I liked a challenge and my school and teachers recognized this. I was labeled as "gifted" and though my school's gifted program was limited, this label translated into me and a select few of my friends taking the few AP classes my school had added by the time we were in high school. These classes were a window for me. I saw that school could be more than just knowing answers, but a means of which to give me an opportunity and language to express and form my ideas about the world. College continued to expand these ideas and opportunities within me and by the time I began working with my teenage

residents, I knew I wanted to offer young people the same challenges that helped me to develop skills, ideas, and open the door of possibility to me.

Working with my teenage residents wasn't just about outdoor adventures–they also attended school at the facility. Most of the classes were very basic and were sometimes more of a way for the residents to practice basic expectations of school behaviors. After working for a while, I saw that there was an unmet need in the way school operated at this facility. Being in a facility with no access to phones, personal computers, and only rarely television, residents often read very frequently. I watched residents devour books and discuss them at length with me. The residents were often below grade-level when tested for reading skills and as a result the readings they had for class were often simplistic. I decided to add programing on my unit to supplement the education the residents were given. We began learning about history (a subject not offered at the facility), social studies (also not offered), and we also had a book club. The club began simply with residents reading one anothers' favorite books, but expanded into discussing more and more challenging texts.

The desire to be challenged began in my residents after I had us all read a chapter from Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* not in our book club, but actually in the history curriculum I had devised. The reading was profoundly impactful on the residents. They wanted to read the rest of the book. I was concerned–this was before I made the transition into education and I had no experience teaching a novel. In order to really understand the novel I would need to teach residents symbolism, allusions, imagery, themes and subversion. How was I supposed to help residents who had very limited experience in school understand a novel that is often taught in college classes? We decided to read this novel for our book club and my inexperience in teaching was clear. I made many assumptions about how the residents were reading. However, a strength I had was that I knew these residents extremely well. I was able to talk with them to determine what was challenging and strategize how to read more

effectively with each of them individually. I didn't know it at the time, but I was applying practices of culturally responsive pedagogy into my teaching as well as scaffolding and differentiation. The residents continued to read their favorite books for fun, but I noticed how their conversations about their books included the literary elements we had discussed while reading *The Things They Carried*. We never did a novel as challenging as *The Things They Carried* in the book club, but the confidence and the skills the residents themselves picked up about the best ways they learned to work through challenging concepts stayed with them and inspired me to wonder–how many students are much more capable than their schools and teachers think they are?

Exclusion From Meaningful Challenge

There is an immense sense of accomplishment when we successfully tackle a challenge. In school, understanding challenging concepts and working hard to set high goals are ways that students can feel joy in learning. They understand that they are not in school to be babysat, but rather to engage in and *contribute* to a worthwhile learning experience. Students in advanced level classes often cite the challenge of these classes as a major factor in why they enjoy them–they feel that they are seen as more mature by their teachers and that their ideas are important. These students also report that the work they do in the classroom is relevant to life outside of school (Foust et al., 2009). But many students are barred from these challenging classes. Schools that can otherwise boast a diverse student population are racially segregating students through the use of advanced classes. Black and Hispanic students are overrepresented in remedial classes (Yonewaza et al., 2002). In these classes, students often miss out on the work of critical thinking that students in advanced classes are doing. Work in these classes tends to be more about completion than developing new ways of thinking (Masterson, 2022). The students are not typically seen as contributing to the learning experience–usually they see themselves as merely enduring the school experience.

Seeing All Students as Gifted Learners

The in-school segregation of students through the use of advanced classes and gifted labels is largely a product of larger systemic racial divisions in American society. Socioeconomic status and viewing academic ability in a way that favors Western conceptions of intelligence (Sternberg, 2020) are issues that extend past the school system and all contribute to racial disparities in advanced classes. The importance of this project is that in it, I hope to contribute towards a meaningful conversation about addressing these disparities within the classroom and create challenging classes that see all students as having intellectual gifts that can be cultivated through a variety of curricular strategies. By understanding cultural differences in intelligence and giftedness, we can structure classes around the strengths of a wide variety of students. When teachers stop viewing AP classes as a haven for students who have been on advanced or gifted tracks for most of their schooling, we can instead see AP as an opportunity for finding out exactly what each student brings to the table.

Conclusion and Overview of Following Chapters

The American education system is not racially equitable and perpetuates inequalities found outside of school. Individual teachers may not be able to change everything about the inequalities of the school system, however there are ways that teachers can perpetuate or diminish these racial inequalities in their own classes. This research project will center around answering the question of what teachers can do to increase diversity in AP literature. In the literature review of Chapter 2, we will look into some of the ways teachers can use culturally responsive pedagogy to increase racial equity in the AP Literature classroom. In order to develop a full picture of the issue of racial inequalities in AP classes, we will also examine the causes behind these inequalities and, because AP classes are designed around advanced learners, consider conceptions of giftedness and intelligence. It is important to consider conceptions of intelligence and giftedness and think about how some students' gifts are overlooked by

the school system. Doing so helps teachers to understand the myriad of talents each student brings to the classroom and set up their curriculums to allow a variety of talents to shine in their classes. First, the literature review will consider the advantages and disadvantages of AP classes, to understand the risks students face in taking AP classes and compare them with the benefits they receive.

After the literature review, Chapter 3 will consider some practical additions and changes to AP literature curriculum that aims to diminish these racial inequalities and set up a classroom that is welcoming to diverse thought and skills. Chapter 3 will also introduce the project, a six week unit themed around how societies view lawbreakers and the rationale behind the major features of the unit. Chapter 4 will reflect on the creation of this unit of study, as well as the research, and also comment about what future research will be needed to aid in increasing diversity in advanced classes.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Schools are in the business of preparing students for life after graduation. For many students, this means preparation for further study in college. One way schools have begun preparing students for college coursework is through advanced classes that require students to think critically and learn valuable skills necessary for higher education. Unfortunately, inclusion of these advanced classes in schools leads to in-school segregation, with White and Asian students primarily enrolled in advanced classes and Black and Hispanic students primarily enrolled in remedial classes (Kolluri, 2018). The focus of this capstone project is to examine and attempt to answer the following question: How can teachers change class curriculum to increase diversity in Advanced Placement, specifically Advanced Placement literature, classrooms? This literature review will cover the reasons why Advanced Placement (AP) classes are beneficial to students, then examine why these classes contain racial disparities. Next will follow an examination of intelligence and giftedness in students and how schools perceive and use these qualities to determine students' futures. Finally, the literature review will conclude with ideas teachers can implement in their classrooms to increase diversity in an AP Literature classroom.

Advantages and Disadvantages to Advanced Placement Curriculum

Introduction to Advanced Placement

Beginning far earlier than high school, students are encouraged to think about their post-secondary options. Once students arrive in high school, the thoughts about their future become concrete steps for them to take. Students are given options to take classes that will directly impact their future college careers. A popular and growing option for many students is

to take AP courses, an option that purportedly offers high school students the challenge of working through college level courses and to earn college credit for those courses, under the condition that they pass an exam given at the end of the course. College Board, the entity which designs and delivers these AP courses, states that 34.7% of graduates from the class of 2023 took at least one AP exam during their graduating year. (College Board, 2023). Yet despite the widespread implementation of these courses, they receive a mixed review from teachers, students, and scholars examining the efficacy of the classes. This section of the literature review will cover the advantages and disadvantages of AP courses through the topics of the effects of enrolling in AP classes on students, college preparedness, and the overall effects of providing AP classes to schools.

Students in Advanced Placement

AP classes are challenging courses that typically require students to study much more than they would need to in a typical high school class. Why are over a third of American students drawn towards these classes? Undoubtedly, many students who take these classes tend to be highly motivated students with ambitions of attending and graduating college (Warne, 2017). Yet, for many students, the benefits of taking AP classes extend beyond the academic. In addition to considerations about college credit and preparedness, the benefits and challenges of Advanced Placement classes on students include: Social-emotional benefits and detriments; changes to perceptions about themselves and their ability to succeed; and more immediate impacts to their future, such as their high school GPA and graduation.

Before students enroll in AP classes, they must decide if the trade-off between the benefits of potential academic success and challenge is worth the heavier workload (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Students who enroll in AP classes report spending more

time studying, reading, and preparing for their AP classes than they have in previous classes, sometimes as much as 2 hours per day for each AP class (Foust et al., 2008). This level of intense study takes a toll on students' social and private lives. Students enrolled in AP courses report sleeping less, sometimes going nights with no sleep at all in order to stay on top of their course load (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). AP students also report a decrease in time spent socializing with friends outside of class (Sharman & Illingworth, 2020). AP students are not just motivated learners, they are also growing adolescents who require their physiological and psychological needs to be met. Chronic sleep deprivation is associated with decreases in mental health, physical health, and ability to access short-term memory, which can affect grades and school performance (Sharman & Illingworth, 2020). Likewise, adequate time for socializing is also important for teenagers. Time to socialize increases positive relationships with peers and family. These positive relationships are associated with lower levels of depression (Chue & Yeo, 2023). AP students may miss out on this valuable socialization due to studying commitments.

The environment within the AP classroom can also take its toll on the mental health of the students. By bringing together so many motivated students, the environment in an AP classroom can sometimes be highly competitive. Students may see their classmates as competitors for a limited number of slots for college acceptances or for ideal placement on a grading curve. In a study accounting for all death types amongst American teenagers, there is a correlation between expansion of AP classes and higher teenage suicide rates (Rindels, 2021). Even students who do not reach the extreme point of taking their own lives face other negative mental health factors, such as increased levels of stress and a decrease in the students' belief that they would do well in college (Conger et al., 2021).

There is another side to the social-emotional effects of AP on students. Students enrolled in AP classes report enjoying their classes much more than they enjoy their general education classes (Foust et al, 2009; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). Students in these classes tend to demonstrate more prosocial behaviors within the classes themselves, such as bonding with their peers, encouraging one another, and reporting feelings of "belonging" within the AP class environment (Foust et al, 2009). Students in AP classes generally also report increased confidence in themselves and a sense that they are doing important and meaningful work (Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008).

A factor in this feeling that their studies are more meaningful comes from how they are treated by the teachers. Students enrolled in AP courses report more positive relationships with their teachers and feel that their teachers are more invested in their students and classes (Foust et al, 2009). They also feel that they are more respected by their teachers and seen as more capable and responsible for the advanced levels of critical thinking they are being asked to participate in (Foust et al., 2009). This can create a more meaningful student-teacher relationship.

This level of higher engagement in their classes, as well as better relationships with peers and teachers can impact students' overall interest in school and their futures. Students taking AP science classes demonstrate an increase in their overall skills in science as well as an interest in pursuing a career or degree in a STEM related field in college (Conger et al., 2021), which shows how exposure to advanced classes can lead to a future career.

Role of Advanced Placement in College Preparedness

The surge in student enrollment in AP classes has called into question how many students are actually being provided with an education comparable to a college-level course. As enrollment in AP classes increases in areas where advanced classes have not historically been

offered, such as rural and inner city schools, many more elite schools have actually moved away from these course offerings (Kolluri, 2018). Additionally, as these classes lose their prestige, many colleges have increased the minimum score they require to accept credit from the exams. Some colleges no longer accept Advanced Placement for credit at all (Byrd, 2007). This section of the literature review will discuss the effectiveness of AP classes on preparing students for college using the following criterions: effects of taking AP classes on college graduation, college GPA, and employment income after graduation.

Research from College Board suggests that students who enroll in Advanced Placement classes tend to graduate faster, with better grades than their general education counterparts (College Board, 2023). However, research independent from the College Board indicates that these claims may be limited under closer examination. Students who complete even one AP exam are, indeed, 3% more likely to graduate college in 4 years. This effect doubles to 6% if the student received a 3 or higher, generally considered the passing score (Beard et al., 2019) Passing two exams increases this likelihood to 8%, but the effects beyond passing two exams are marginal (Beard et al., 2019). Research appears to support College Board's claim that AP does improve college graduation time, but that this effect is limited and the effects of taking multiple AP exams do not significantly increase college graduation time further (Smith et al, 2017). Additionally, students who enroll in an AP class but choose not to take the exam that allows them to earn college credit for their work do not increase their odds of graduating on time (Smith et al, 2017), revealing a limitation of AP classes for students who may struggle with the material.

Even without passing an AP exam, students still reap the benefits of participating in the challenging curriculum. Students who enroll in advanced classes of any kind increase their likelihood of graduating high school by 25% and are 45% more likely than their general

education peers to attend a 4 year college or university (Woods et al, 2018). Similar to the effects of multiple classes of Advanced Placement on college graduation time, there is a diminishing return on the effects of taking many advanced classes in high school. Taking one advanced class increases that student's likelihood of graduating high school on time by 9.5%. Five or more advanced classes increases their likelihood further by only 1.7% (Woods et al., 2018). These advanced courses, however, may come at another cost: high school GPA. Though some high schools weigh grades to favor students who have taken advanced or accelerated courses, students who take AP classes tend to have a slightly lower GPA than their counterparts (Conger et al., 2021), which may reveal a reason why some students do not enroll in AP.

A common complaint about the AP program is that the courses tend to focus on a broad range of material without much depth. Critics wonder if college material can actually be adapted for high school students effectively without losing rigor (Byrd, 2007 & Kolluri, 2018). How closely an AP class resembles a college class varies by the type of AP class as well as the individual teacher offering the class. The AP English Literature course tends to be rated favorably by college English professors, as it focuses on building the writing skills students use in college classrooms and includes challenging readings. Conversely, the AP sciences tend to be looked upon less favorably, as the courses tend to focus on learning a broad range of content without much critical thinking involved (Byrd, 2007). This raises the question: Is AP actually preparing students for collegiate material?

If students are participating in AP courses that closely resemble college courses, it stands to reason that they will be better prepared for college than their general education peers and thus receive higher grades. There is some evidence for this. Students who took AP Literature received a higher GPA than their general education peers their first year in college (Woods et al,

2018). The effects of the AP advantage quickly lose traction, however, and this higher GPA advantage evens out during the second year (Woods et al., 2018). This demonstrates that AP does offer students a chance to get ahead of their peers, but the advantage may not be long lasting.

Effects of Providing Advanced Placement Classes on Schools

The concept of Advanced Placement classes began in the 1950s, when faculty from elite private schools became concerned about gaps and overlaps between the courses they were offering students and the courses those students would take in the colleges they went on to attend. These private school teachers began working with the colleges most of their students would go on to attend to create curriculum that best prepared their high school students for college success (Byrd, 2007). Since that time, AP slowly made its way from the elite private schools to traditional public schools. While the program began with a handful of schools, by 2017 there were 22,169 schools offering AP classes (College Board, 2017). Critics of this rapid expansion of a program once meant for the most gifted students of elite schools argue that this expansion is not to be celebrated. They argue that the courses exacerbate racial segregation within schools, divert financial resources from course offerings that may be more effective, and separate the school's most gifted teachers from the students who may need them most. This section of the literature review will examine each of these claims.

Critics of AP often worry that these classes are creating segregation within schools. Schools often use methods of "tracking" students (largely based on perceived giftedness based on state test scores and previous grades) to decide if those students should enroll in advanced classes, general education, or remedial classes. This often leads to Advanced Placement classes being largely White (Kolluri, 2018). This tendency to push White students into advanced classes

and reluctance to do so with students of color creates a space in a school in which gifted students of color who qualify for advanced classes may feel uncomfortable in joining (Kolluri, 2018). In addition to having predominantly White students, AP classes tend to have predominantly White teachers. Though 82% of public school teachers are White, AP classes tend to have an even smaller fraction of teachers of color (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). All of this results in an effective segregation within schools, where White students are separated from students of color through the use of advanced or gifted classes.

Another effect AP can have on a school is a diversion of financial resources towards these classes. Some argue that when large numbers of students who are not prepared for the rigor of AP enroll in these courses, they are diverting themselves and school resources away from classes that may actually help them succeed in college (Warne, 2017). Schools who receive funding from their state governments to push students into taking AP courses by offering to cover exam fees often see no results from this money, as most of the exam subsidies are given to students who do not pass the exam (Warne, 2017). A school's financial resources are limited and schools must decide if AP classes are worth the expense based on how effective the classes are at preparing students for college.

Finally, a school's best teachers are often drawn towards teaching an AP or other advanced class (Warne, 2017). This means students who are already gifted have the benefit of learning from high-quality teachers, while students who struggle with grade-level coursework may be placed with new or inexperienced teachers. Schools often focus on providing as many resources as possible, along with their best teachers towards advanced or gifted classes.

Advantages and Disadvantages of AP Conclusion

AP was once viewed as a way for students who demonstrated a gifted ability in high school to earn college credit and ensure the road between high school and college is a continuous route. As the benefits of AP classes became known, more and more schools began implementing these classes. Now, thousands of American students enroll in AP classes and take AP exams, and the benefits of AP have trickled down to students who have not previously had access to these classes. This has led to a decrease in passing rates for the AP exams and concerns that the material for AP classes is becoming less of a preparatory experience for college. Effects of AP on students, the actual effectiveness of preparing students for college, and the effects of having AP classes on schools are important elements to determine some of the advantages and disadvantages of continuing to enroll students in and teach them AP materials. Whether or not a student is *able* to take AP classes, however, often depends on how their school perceives them–specifically if they are seen as gifted and/or highly intelligent by school standards.

Perceptions of Giftedness

Introduction to Giftedness

Because of AP's nascent association with students at the very tops of their classes who were not challenged enough by traditional high school material, AP classes continue to be seen as "reserved" for particularly gifted students. The idea of a "gifted" student, or even person, can be challenging to define. Schools across the country tend to define gifted students as those who score well on standardized tests or who earn exemplary grades. These students are often identified in elementary school and carry the label of "gifted" throughout the rest of their schooling (Peters et al., 2020). This is contrasted with students who struggle in class and are put onto a different, remedial track. Both of these tracks tend to follow students. Students who are

placed into categories of "gifted" or "struggling" end up in classes that fit those descriptions as they enter high school, the former often choosing to take AP classes. Because of AP's challenge, many students do not enroll in AP largely because they are afraid to fail; they do not see themselves as academically gifted and are, therefore, not capable of the work required of AP. This section will examine the perception of giftedness through a comparison of intelligence to perceived giftedness and an examination of this perception as a barrier to inclusion.

What is Intelligence?

As covered earlier, AP was designed to meet the needs of highly gifted and intelligent students. But what does it mean to be "intelligent"? First, intelligence is a product of both genetics and environment. An individual may inherit traits that support intelligent behavior from a parent as well as be raised in an environment that supports development of these traits. The concept of intelligence exists as a way to scientifically explain and examine human behavior. The mathematical formula to find intelligence for an individual is to find out what age the individual's mental state is at, then divide it by their actual age, then multiply that number by 100 to get their Intelligence Quotient (Kranzler & Floyd, 2020). This is a measurement of an individual's cognitive ability, or general intelligence. Researcher's measuring intelligence also consider adaptive intelligence, or how well an individual is suited to thrive in their environment. There is no one formal test for this type of intelligence, however, so it can be challenging to measure and compare (Sternberg, 2017). The conversation about how to measure intelligence is an on-going and ever-evolving one

A "traditional" view on intelligence focuses on an individual's ability to reason, problem solve, and think logically. However, this view is often contested as truly representing an individual's overall intelligence (Kranzler & Floyd, 2020). Other considerations of intelligence

include: judgment, creative or abstract thought, and other factors unique to the culture of the individual. Human intelligence is separate from animal intelligence in that human intelligence is highly relative. Culture plays a major role in determining how a person views intelligence (Sternberg, 2020).. First, the emphasis on the importance of intelligence is somewhat unique to Western culture. Westerners are more likely to view their successes as a result of their own abilities, and consequently a lack of success to an innate inability (Sternberg, 2020). These cultural differences in intelligence will now be compared to gain a broader picture of the problem with using one method to measure intellect.

What is seen as intelligent behavior varies from culture to culture. Many cultures view skill ability as an important form of intelligence. Hispanic culture, for example, emphasizes social competence skills. Working through problems as a group is considered intelligent behavior (Sternberg, 2020), therefore tests that force individuals to work and think alone do not accurately measure this culture's intelligence. Western culture places an emphasis on speed of mental processing as an indication of intelligence. Other cultures consider readily available answers somewhat suspicious–answers given too fast may indicate deception or a lack of depth (Sternberg, 2020). Other cultures view practical, hands-on skill ability as the best indicator of intelligence. Yup'ik culture (a tribe native to southern Alaska) for example, views individuals skilled in hunting and gathering as intelligent (Grigorenko et al, 2004). Nishnaabeg (of the Great Lakes area) culture sees intelligent action as that which supports and benefits future generations the most (Simpson, 2014). Around the world different cultures will define intelligent behavior differently, which leads to the question of how schools with student populations from multiple cultures can fairly assess the intelligence of these students.

How Do Schools Measure Student Intelligence?

Testing all school children for their general and adaptive intelligence would be extremely challenging. Instead, schools and states rely on standardized tests to examine how well teachers have taught state standards and how well their students have learned them. Though these exams do not measure intelligence, they are meant to perform a similar function (Henry, 2007). These tests give schools the ability to sort students into certain classes and groups. Largely based on these tests, schools will give students labels that will follow them for the rest of their schooling (Henry, 2007). Cultural differences in intelligence are not taken into account when schools rely on these standardized tests.

Similar to how conceptions and tests of intelligence can be seen as favoring one culture over others, so standardized testing can be seen as favoring White students. Schools and state tests are focused on measurable academic success, which creates a need for objectivity in grading and testing (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). This need for objectivity results in tests and school work that does not measure areas of intelligence such as judgment, critical thought, clear thinking or reasoning, and leads to a measurement only of a student's ability to reproduce classwork (del Carmen Salazar, 2013 & Henry, 2007). These tests tend to favor the cognitive skills most valued by White culture and do not measure the wide variety of intelligence that exists in a diverse population of students.

What Factors Other Than Intelligence Make a Student "Gifted"?

Aside from testing, there are other factors that go into consideration when labeling a student as "gifted". Behavior is an important indicator in whether or not a student will be labeled as gifted. A very low percentage of students who receive disciplinary referrals in elementary school are enrolled in advanced classes in high school, sometimes a decade after their referral.

(Ricciardi & Winsler 2021). Another factor is an individual's "emotional intelligence". This is their abilities to understand and perceive emotions as well as use these emotions to facilitate decision making. Schools which implement programs to increase students' emotional intelligence see an 11% improvement in academics (MacCann et al, 2020). Gifted students aren't just the kids who can score the highest test scores–generally schools reward students who conform to the idea of the "ideal student" (Starck et al, 2020). This "ideal student" is not necessarily the most intelligent student, but rather the student more willing to follow rules.

Perhaps the most important factor in determining whether or not a student will be labeled as "gifted" is motivation. Motivation is determined through a student self-report of ambition and intention, as well as how much work they are willing to put in to achieve their goals. Students who rate highly on motivation also rate highly on social support both outside and inside of school (Wentzel, 1998). These motivated students have friendships with high achieving peers as well as involvement in extracurricular activities (Suldo et al, 2018). Schools often place highly motivated students into gifted classes because as much as schools claim that giftedness is a measure of a student's ability, many times giftedness is a measure of future potential (Kranzler & Floyd, 2020) . This then begins a cycle of a motivated student being placed into advanced classes, learning more than their peers, then continuing to be motivated to do well in school and be challenged by curriculum..

The idea that high test scores and good grades serve as a sort of "entry" into AP classes in high school is seen when students discuss why they chose not to take AP or other advanced classes. Students report that a fear of failure in advanced classes is a leading reason why they choose not to enroll in them (Francis & Darity, 2011). Teenagers also tend to underestimate their own intelligence. This may be because teenagers tend to view intelligence differently than the

adults who measure them; the tests measure reasoning ability and value abstract thought, while teenagers tend to associate intelligence with verbal readiness and long-term memory recall (Zajenkowsk, 2021). These qualities the teenagers value in intelligence are highly associated with the skills taught in school to do well on exams, standardized tests, and homework. Thus, students see grades and tests as a measure of their intelligence and place themselves into categories of "intelligent" and "not intelligent", often incorrectly judging their own abilities.

Students are not alone in using test scores or previous grades to justify not enrolling in AP or advanced classes–teachers and administrators also see both as important elements in AP success. Though testing is done often in schools, labels can be hard to shake. Students who are labeled as gifted often maintain that label throughout their schooling. They are placed in higher classes, even ones in which the subject is in a different area than the one they tested well in. Schools see "gifted" as a permanent label, though achievement is fluid and a student's needs change from year to year (Peters et al., 2020). Similarly, students labeled as "troubled" as young as preschool tend to carry that label with them–behavior in preschool is a predictor of later enrollment in advanced classes (Ricciardi & Winsler 2021). Labels, both positive and negative, tend to be easy to earn and difficult to shed when it comes to schooling.

Intelligence Conclusion

Intelligence is a challenging concept to adequately define. Human behavior can be challenging to measure, but human thought is even more challenging to quantify. Intelligent actions are defined differently throughout culture and other identities (Sternberg, 2020). This makes determining which students are gifted challenging as well. Schools and states rely on assessing student ability into a handful of numbers for quantitative measurement. Yet these numbers don't always tell the full story of a student's capabilities. Approaches to how we

measure intelligence and define gifted students are constantly evolving and adapting as American society changes. What appears to matter more than the nebulously defined cognitive abilities of students when deciding what courses they should take in high school, however, is the school and student's *perceptions* about their abilities (Peters et al., 2020) These perceptions tend to label students who conform to school expectations about behavior and test expectations about content recall as "gifted" and leave behind students who don't measure up to these expectations (Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021). Analyzing concepts of intelligence is necessary to determine the challenges of determining a single standard for measuring intellect. Likewise, giftedness is challenging to quantify and often biased. In order to increase diversity in AP classes, schools' and teachers' ideas about giftedness must be examined and culturally inclusive. Currently, many schools' perceptions about student giftedness tend to leave out students of color. The next section will cover the racial disparities in AP classes–how the disparities formed and why they still persist.

Racial Disparities in Advanced Classes

Walk into a racially diverse high school general education class in most any American city or suburb and you're likely to see a class that represents the school's population. Wait a bit for that class to end and the teacher's AP class to begin and you will likely see a mostly White and Asian class (Meyer et al, 2024). Where did the diversity of the general education class go? As discussed in the section about some of the disadvantages to AP classes, Kolluri (2018) describes how advanced classes can create in-school segregation; dividing students by race into advanced and general education classes. The more diverse a school population and the more AP classes offered, the higher this racial segregation will be (Francis & Darity, 2021 & Lucas, & Berends, 2007). This section will explore how these racial disparities form by examining the

role of tracking in schools, unequal access to resources, and a curriculum that isolates students of color.

Tracking in Schools

Though outdated and not formally used in schools, tracking in schools refers to the process in which students are separated into groups by ability and take classes sequentially that match these abilities. This method of sorting students has been seen as controversial and discriminatory towards students of color (Francis & Darity, 2021). While some teachers and administrators argue that homogenous abilities in classes allow for easier instruction (Decristan et al, 2017), the cost of this is often racial stratification within schools (Yonezawa et al., 2002). This, in turn, leads to fewer opportunities for the students of color in the lower tracks of the system, which leads to disparities in job opportunities and exacerbates racial income inequality (Lucas & Berends, 2007). Public schools typically do not officially have academic tracking policies, yet the system of tracking remains strong in schools. Tracking is able to persist in schools through institutional means of school policies as well as bias in teacher recommendations for advanced classes.

Student Choice

School policies continue to group students by ability, though now the students are seen as the ones responsible for selecting or not selecting advanced classes. Since students are off an "official" tracking system, students of color are often blamed for their own lack of representation in advanced classes. Often, these students of color are blamed for not selecting advanced courses because they don't want to "look White". This idea of oppositional culture, that students of color attempt to maintain their identity by resisting education, is not supported by research (Francis & Darity, 2021). Rather, students of color do tend to view advanced classes as "White"

spaces (del Carmen Salazar, 2013 & Yonezawa et al., 2002), but rather than avoid these classes in an attempt to resist Whiteness, they instead avoid these classes due to a sense of isolation and lack of feeling they belong (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These students of color are not rebelling against the school system, but rather reacting to it. They feel that any contributions they may have to this predominantly White class will not be valued by their teachers or peers and thus tend not to enroll in the classes in the first place (Yonezawa et al, 2002). This may help to account for the fact that Black students are 40% less likely to enroll in AP classes when compared to White peers who demonstrate a similar level of content mastery (Ricciardi, & Winsler 2021). Both groups of students are equally capable of AP classes, but Black students often receive both subtle and overt signs that these classes are not for them.

Unofficial Tracking In Schools

Additionally, there are still official barriers in place that prevent these students from these classes. Factors such as hidden prerequisite courses and selective flexibility in admittance to classes prevent many students of color from access to advanced classes (Yonezawa et al, 2002). Students may wish to sign up for AP Calculus only to be told that in order to truly succeed in the class, they should have taken trigonometry. And in order to have taken trigonometry, they should have taken Algebra I and II and geometry, which in turn they should have been taking in middle school, but did not because they were not placed in the advanced class in eighth grade. Here the school is not officially preventing students from leaving their educational math "track", but students who did not test well in 7th grade math are not able to access more advanced classes as seniors in high school (Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021). Student success in reading and math as young as the fifth grade is significantly connected with later enrollment in advanced courses in high school (Yonezawa et al, 2002). This demonstrates that

though students appear to have the choice to take advanced classes, this choice is heavily negated by a system that continues to make determinations about a student's future as young as elementary school.

Another policy schools implement which keeps students on academic tracks is selective flexibility in admitting certain students into advanced classes. Some classes have clear prerequisites that include previous classes taken, some may even require a certain GPA. School officials are more likely to admit White students who do not meet all the requirements than they are students of color, largely because White students tend to have parents or administrators who advocate for them to have access (Yonezawa et al., 2002). This lack of advocacy on the part of Black parents is largely due to a lack of information about advanced classes on advanced classes. Black parents tend to value a highly involved home life and tend to be less visible in schools, making them less informed about school policies and opportunities. Schools tend not to reach out to these parents to make them aware of these opportunities, thus leaving Black students without advocates for them to push them into advanced classes (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). Advocacy from parents can be the difference between a student being allowed or denied entry into advanced classes.

Advocacy from teachers is another factor in tracking students in education. Teachers may recommend students to an advanced class through official means, or they may simply push students themselves to enroll in an advanced class. This also contributes to a lack of students of color in advanced classes. Teachers often see themselves as progressive and beyond prejudice (Starck et al, 2020). They believe they treat students of all races equally, but research doesn't support this idea. When measured for explicit bias, that is a measure of an individual's expressed "feelings of warmth" towards racial groups, teachers scored slightly lower than the general

public (Starck et al., 2020). Implicit bias, on the other hand, refers to an individual's unconscious notions about race. This bias is measured through a test to see how readily a person will associate "White" with "good" and "Black" with "bad". In this test, teachers scored nearly exactly the same as the general public (Starck et al, 2020). This demonstrates that teachers *express* less racial bias, yet are in fact as similarly biased as the general public. This can lead to teachers misreporting information about students and advocating less for students of color to take advanced classes.

Unequal Access to Resources

The illusion of student choice remains a pervasive narrative as to why students of color do not enroll in AP classes. However, when controlling for poverty and economic gaps, Black students are actually *more* likely to enroll in AP than similarly skilled White classmates (Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021). Despite a willingness to take advanced classes, the resources to take these classes are not as available to students of color as it is to White students. The racial disparities in advanced classes in schools with highly diverse populations has already been discussed, the examination of these disparities will now continue with a focus on differences between predominantly Black and/or Hispanic schools and predominantly White schools.

A contributor towards future enrollment in advanced classes is enrollment in a high-quality preschool. Students who live in areas without affordable preschool or within school districts that do not have preschool tend to be Black and Hispanic students (Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021 &Vega, et al, 2015). This places students of color at a disadvantage for high school classes before they even enroll in elementary school. Yet the disadvantage begins even earlier than that. Socioeconomic status is highly connected with student enrollment in AP classes (Ricciardi & Winsler, 2021 & Xu et al, 2019). Black students are more likely to grow up in areas of poverty

and thus be enrolled in impoverished schools. These schools tend to have inexperienced teachers, poor funding, and a lack of resources to assist students (Vega et al, 2015). Research has shown that AP enrollment is increased when schools have highly qualified teachers, intensive academic support, and robust connections with parents (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004), all of which impoverished schools tend to lack.

Isolation In Curriculum

White students who are placed into gifted curriculum in elementary school tend to elect to remain in advanced classes throughout high school (Yonezawa et al, 2002). Their Black counterparts tend to leave gifted education and not remain in advanced high school classes (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Black students who qualify for advanced classes tend to feel that advanced classes are not spaces for them or that they will be made to feel inferior in these spaces (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). What then happens is a cycle of upper class Black students not taking advanced classes due to not wanting to be "the" Black kid in the class, then Black underclass students seeing a lack of representation in these advanced classes and deciding these classes are not for them. Changing the racial makeups of AP classes changes this. A 1% increase in Black upper class students taking advanced classes leads to an 11-22% increase in the odds that an eligible Black under class student will take an advanced class later in their schooling. The low end of this calculation is for schools with a diverse population and the high end represents Black majority schools (Francis & Darity, 2021). To create diversity in the AP classroom, there must first be a space where students of color feel they belong and see themselves represented in the class (Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008), which doesn't happen when schools continue to produce the same patterns of unofficial tracking which leads to a lack of students of color in AP classrooms.

Racial Disparities in Advanced Classes Conclusion

Not all students have the same opportunities. Majority Black and Hispanic schools have higher rates of poverty and less opportunity for their students to take AP classes (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Students of color who attend diverse schools tend to also have less opportunities to take AP classes due to the legacy of academic tracking that persists in schools. These disparities result in AP classes that lack diversity (Kolluri, 2018). Examining how racial disparities have arisen in AP classrooms is essential to determine how to address and reduce these disparities. Many of the reasons why students of color do not have access to AP classes are systemic and beyond the reach of teachers. Even though an individual teacher cannot change the entire education system on their own, understanding the reasons why students of color are underrepresented in AP classes prepare teachers for understanding the importance of advocating for students of color in their AP classes. However, there are some aspects of AP teaching that teachers can improve on to increase diversity in their AP classes, which will be discussed in the next section.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pedagogy

"The purpose of the system is what it does."-Stafford Beer

Schools and teachers often wonder what they can do to increase diversity in their AP classrooms. The American school system has a long history of racial injustice that has not been repaired by numerous attempts to achieve racial equality (Picower, 2021). The fact that Black and Latino students do not receive equitable education through truly equal access to advanced classes is not a failure of the school system–it is a function of it. To achieve equal access and all the benefits of advanced placement classes, a major overhaul of America's school, social, and economic system is required. But small steps towards equality are steps in the right direction

and are achievable by any individual with a commitment to equality and justice. This section of the literature review will examine three areas in which teachers of AP Literature can increase equity and make AP Literature draw in students of color. These three areas include: differentiation, curriculum that fits a variety of learning styles and cultures, and a multicultural reading requirement. Though some of these areas will be specific to AP Literature, there are elements of all of them that can be applicable for other AP classes as well.

The Mindset Of The Inclusive AP Teacher

Before beginning a closer look at the specific ways an AP Literature teacher can create a more inclusive classroom, it is important to first consider the mindset of an inclusive AP teacher. First, teachers should be open to examining their own ideas about race and perceptions they may have about their students. No one is immune to bias and examining one's own bias can help to recognize situations that may require reflection or a second opinion (Picower, 2021). Next, teachers must be willing to adopt a mindset that is committed towards anti-racist pedagogy and consciously adding it into the curriculum. This means looking for ways to address the biases and prejudices of students and specifically challenging these ideas through the curriculum texts, writing prompts, and discussions (Borsheim-Black, 2015).

Finally, the mindset of the inclusive AP teacher must focus on the classroom as a community. They must develop reciprocal relationships with students and work to develop a positive relationship with each student in their class. The focus of each day of class should be on collaborative learning. Rather than having the teacher be the center of attention and the holder of all the knowledge, the classroom should be a space of active and social learning. Students will collaborate with the teacher to critically analyze ideas together (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Once the teacher has a mindset that is dedicated to examining their own prejudice, committed to

anti-racism and to community building, then the work of equitable teaching can begin. This is not the end of the challenge to build a diverse AP classroom, however. Little practical advice is given to teachers about how to create inclusive classrooms (Fuentes, et al., 2021), however there are some practical measures that will be examined next that may help achieve this goal.

Differentiation

Welcoming students who have not previously experienced advanced classes into the AP classroom will undoubtedly change some of the classroom dynamics and teacher expectations for students. Some students will arrive in the classroom with a decade of advanced education behind them. Others may have no experience in advanced education, or even some experience with remedial classes. This will result in a variety of abilities within the classroom. Teachers hoping to create more equitable classrooms should not view their students as a monolithic group and be prepared to differentiate instruction. Most teachers do not receive education in how to differentiate AP classrooms, as differentiation is typically seen as a general education classroom skill that mostly helps students who are behind their peers. AP teachers, however, can also use differentiation to both challenge students to whom the material is easy as well as to students who struggle with advanced material (Garland, 1998). This level of challenge is not the only way teachers can use differentiation in the classroom.

Another way to use differentiation for AP teachers can be to teach to multiple levels by creating small groups that have a variety of skill levels and assigning roles for each student within the group that best fits their abilities. Ensuring that these roles are flexible and can be changed depending on the needs of the group encourages growth and an asset-focused mindset for students (Meyer et al., 2024). Homogenous groups do not produce better test scores, while heterogeneous groups lead to a more constructive and social classroom (Decristan et al., 2017).

Another way to differentiate the classroom would be to assign an additional choice text. If the entire class has read a Shakespeare play, teachers can encourage interest and improve understanding in the play by assigning students to watch a film version, read a graphic novel, or watch a recorded live performance of the same play (Shoemaker, 2013). This not only allows for students to increase their choice in class and pick something of interest to them, but allows students to determine what kind of challenge they want to set for themselves and what works best for them.

Multicultural Required Reading

This idea isn't new–many teachers add books from Authors of Color into their curriculum. The College Board also encourages AP teachers to construct thematic units that set up multicultural books in "conversation" with one another (Greenblatt, n.d). Yet the required reading of both classrooms and the recommended books on the essay portion of the AP Literature exam both tend towards White authors. On the 2023 exam, of the suggested books for the free write section, 54% were authored by White authors (College Board Exam, 2023). If over half of recommended reading is White, is that truly representative of a diverse literary selection?

The problem of representation is not solved by simply adding more books by authors of color to the curriculum. There is a tendency in teachers to either ignore the role of race within novels by authors of color, or to only focus on this aspect of the novel. This turns a novel meant to explore universal human themes into simply a "Black book" that is applicable only for Black people (Price, 2017). A major problem is that teachers tend to not be as well-versed in multicultural literature or history as they are in White literature. They feel uncomfortable teaching something they may not understand very well (Picower, 2021). What AP teachers

should do is educate themselves on multicultural books and find ways to use the literature to discuss the socially relevant themes as well as the universal, human themes (Price, 2017). Additionally, a way to make challenging literature accessible to more students is by giving clear objectives to students as they read (Bromley, 2007). This is often done with the general education classes, but is an effective practice for all readers that could be applied to AP. Finally, ensure the literature is truly diverse. Teachers should not randomly throw together some works by Authors of Color into an otherwise White reading list (Fuentes, 2021). AP teachers should ensure that a commitment to diversity in the literature is adopted throughout the year.

Multicultural Curriculum

Creating an equitable classroom means doing more than adding in some books by authors of color. The talents and cultures of students of color tend to be overlooked, particularly in advanced classes. One way teachers can create a multicultural curriculum is to explicitly add anti-racist pedagogy into it. This can be done by engaging students in dialogue that challenges students' perspectives and involves students challenging the author's perspective (Borshiem-Black, 2015). These conversations should be structured to encourage students to think about and examine their own identities and how they intersect with the books they are reading. This practice helps students to think critically about what their own assumptions about the world and those around them may be (Borsheim-Black, 2015). Teachers should also be mindful of how they approach examples of racism in texts. Teachers can implicitly enforce the ideas that no one is to blame for racism, or that it was all in the past and that the morality regarding racism in the past should be seen as relative to the times of that era (Picower, 2021). This is another example of why teachers should examine their implicit biases, to ensure they are not passing them along to students unintentionally.

Another major piece of the multicultural curriculum is teaching African-American Vernacular English, or AAVE. AAVE is often seen as "less educated" and writing done in this style is often considered "poorly done" (Baker-Bell, 2013). This is a form of linguistic racism. Teachers can demonstrate racial equality in the classroom by directly addressing this. In addition to addressing negative associations with AAVE, teachers can go even further by including a lesson on AAVE when doing grammar with students. This helps to legitimize AAVE (Baker-Bell, 2013). One more way teachers can legitimize AAVE is by including literature that utilizes this language (Baker-Bell, 2020). By selecting well-crafted prose that utilizes AAVE, teachers can demonstrate that this language expression is a legitimate form of both communication and art.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pedagogy Conclusion

Schools and teachers recognize that racial disparities exist in advanced classes such as AP classes. Yet there are few programs that address this issue specifically. As a result, the disparity is not systematically addressed and many high schools continue to see in-school segregation because of AP classes. Yet there are steps that individual teachers concerned about this lack of support from the school system on the part of students of color can take to increase diversity in their own classrooms. AP Literature teachers can use multicultural curriculum and readings to create a place of belonging for students of color. They can also differentiate the instruction to scaffold challenging ideas for students who have not had prior experience in advanced classes to feel comfortable with making the leap from general education to AP level challenge. Understanding specific steps the AP Literature teacher can take to change curriculum in a way that promotes diversity in the classroom is the focus of this project and is a relatively new area of study and focus. These aspects of curricular change will hopefully fulfill this

project's research purpose to determine what changes to the AP Literature classroom will increase racial diversity within the class.

Conclusion

The benefits of AP classes come with set-backs. For all of the preparation for college and opportunities for challenge in school, there are numerous set-backs. Chief among these set-backs is the in-school segregation which results from current implementation of these classes. How teachers and school systems determine which students are deemed gifted and/or intelligent for advanced studies tends to be based on Western notions of giftedness and intelligence. This results in race-based disparities in advanced classes at a young age, which often precludes students of color from attending AP classes. The causes of this disparity is largely systemic, yet there are some ways teachers can change their curriculums to create places of belonging and opportunity for students of color. The next section of this project will detail what these changes will look like in an AP classroom and how they can help to achieve equitable advanced education. Chapter 3 will examine the project I have designed that utilizes the research detailed to promote equity in the classroom. Finally, Chapter 4 will conclude this thesis with a reflection of the process of research and project creation.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Overview

Introduction

An enormous body of research has demonstrated that the overwhelming problem with gifted education and advanced classes in America is that it is essentially a form of in-school segregation (Kolluri, 2018). Students of color are noticeably absent from AP classes and do not receive the opportunities for academic challenge that their White peers receive. Though this is an issue much larger than the classroom, teachers can take steps in their own classrooms to address this disparity. In this chapter, I will detail a unit of study that seeks to answer this project's question: *How can teachers change class curriculum to increase diversity in Advanced Placement, specifically Advanced Placement Literature classrooms?*

Chapter Overview

First, the chapter will begin with what the project looks like and a rationale for the way the unit of learning is structured. Because AP classes, particularly the literature class, tend to be less structured on state standards of learning and more on providing guidance for the test, I will be referencing both Minnesota's standards on English Language Arts for 11th and 12th grade as well as previous AP Literature exams published by the College Board. Next, this chapter will discuss the school for which this project is designed for and the student demographics therein. This will lead into the following section, the intended audience for this project. Fourth, the chapter will discuss the details of what this unit of study will look like and the essential learning questions that will be asked. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a timeline that describes the creation of this project before transitioning to Chapter Four.

Rationale

Curricular Design

I decided to use curricular design for my project because I thought it would be a practical way for me to cover the gaps in my own teacher education as well as help AP Literature teachers who want to increase their multicultural instruction in their classrooms. I wasn't taught how to create advanced classes or design AP units and I knew that by researching this subject and finding out how to create AP Literature curriculum, I would lay a foundation for myself to know how to structure AP Literature content. I also know that there are other AP Literature teachers who were never explicitly taught how to create multicultural AP lessons and could benefit from this research and project design.

Summative Assessment

Because I want to both challenge students to improve upon their own strengths as well as prepare them for the AP exam, there are two summative assessments. One of these is a choice between two different assessments that allows students to select the one that best matches their academic strengths. The first choice is for students to write an essay. They will have three questions to choose from to base their essay around. Having choices helps students to think their writing process through and decide which question they can write most effectively on, helping students to build their metacognitive skills in regards to writing (Walker, 2021). The next is a project in which students will complete a character analysis poster. This allows students to demonstrate their learning of characterization and archetypes through writing without having to write a fully realized essay.

The other summative is an ungraded practice AP Literature exam. While it is ungraded, it is still a reflection of the whole unit learning and will help students to know which skills they need to practice for the exam without having to worry about their grade. This will be useful for students to whom AP classes are new–one barrier students of color face when it comes to AP classes is a fear of not achieving a good grade due to previous inexperience with advanced classes (Francis & Darity, 2021)

Formative Assessment

This class will be very discussion heavy. Large group discussions will be formatted like a Socratic Circle and will be graded. Students will receive a rubric about what their expectations will be to earn a particular grade during the discussions. While everyone will be expected to speak at least twice to earn a B grade, the expectation will be that students focus less on how often they are speaking and rather on how well they are contributing towards meaningful discussion. Grading discussions allows students who have an academic strength outside of writing to share their ideas and improve their grade in the class, which promotes academic equity (Fuentes et al, 2021).

Other formative assessments include weekly reading checks. This is largely to keep students on task with their reading goals, but also serves to check in with students on how they are comprehending a variety of literary elements. There will also be a variety of ungraded assignments that allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the topics. These ungraded assignments include a reading guide, an archetype handout, and a symbolism journal. Students are used to having lots of structure and support in general education classes. Most of the time, AP classes rely on students to take their own notes and take responsibility for their own

learning. By having these ungraded assignments, students will still have the structure they are used to, but with the responsibility and impetus of learning remaining on them.

Discussion

The typical arrangement of a classroom, particularly an AP literature classroom, involves a teacher delivering a lecture or lesson to students, who are expected to copy, retain, and repeat the information they are given. A culturally-responsive classroom changes this dynamic. In this model, both students and teachers are viewed as having knowledge to contribute to the classroom and both are asked to engage in the learning process; both are "creators" of knowledge and understanding (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this project, there will be an outline for the types of questions teachers can choose to engage students in. These questions are designed to spark conversation and offer students a chance to express their opinions. However, these questions should not be the only method used in engaging students in discussions. The project will include a section about introducing students to engaging discussions through the use of well-thought out questions, but throughout the unit there will be opportunities for the teacher to include a meta-cognitive practice with students to teach them how such questions are developed. This process will eventually result in students creating their own deep and meaningful discussion questions. In this way, students are learning not only how to reflect on and answer thought-provoking questions, but also how to ask those questions themselves. This will help to empower students and create knowledge alongside the teacher.

Setting

This project was designed for a large suburban school in the Midwest. An essential part of this project is understanding that the higher the diversity in a school, the more likely it is that AP classes will have few students of color (Lucas & Berends, 2007). This school is one of these

highly diverse schools, with student demographics as follows: 49% White, 19% Black, 15% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 8% two or more races, and the remaining 1% is shared between Native American and Pacific Islander students. Of these students, 56% took at least one AP exam in 2022 and 35% of students passed one AP exam that same year (U.S News, 2023). Within the AP Literature class, there are 26 students. The demographics for this class are as follows: 8% Black, 8% Hispanic, 19% Asian, and 65% White. Every student except for one has taken an AP class in the past and all but this one student have also taken at least one AP exam prior to this class.

Audience

The target audience for this project is for teachers of AP literature who want to create a classroom and curriculum that draws in students of color. The goal of this project is to make AP literature a class for all students and asks teachers to question what it is about the AP literature classroom that is currently preventing students of color from joining. The literature review in Chapter Two highlights many of the systemic barriers students of color face that prevent them from joining AP classes, but it is also important that AP teachers reflect on themselves and their curriculum and observe if any of their teachings, behaviors, attitudes, or course content may also be a barrier of entry for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2021) One single unit of instruction may be a building block to creating a more equitable classroom, but the foundational aspects of a teacher's classroom must be examined first. This unit was designed to offer students the foundational skills they need to do well on the AP literature exam and as such is meant to be used early in the school year.

My hope is that this project is also useful to any literature teacher who wants to create a curriculum that is challenging as well as equitable for students of color. While this unit is designed with the goal of increasing the skills students will need to pass the AP Literature exam,

most of the content will be appropriate or easily adapted for an 11th or 12th grade English Language Arts classroom. This unit can be used at any time in a school year, though it would perhaps be most appropriate for a general education classroom to reserve it for the end of the year in order to teach the foundational skills students would need to fully understand this unit.

In teacher education, there is rarely any formal training on how to design an effective advanced class or AP class (Garland, 1998). This can be exciting as well as frustrating and intimidating. There is a certain freedom in AP Literature–not having to follow a strict guide results in teachers being able to teach to student needs as well as select their own texts. However, this freedom is mitigated by pressures to ensure students are passing the exam and having to adjust teaching to ensure students are learning the skills they will need to do well on this test (Byrd, 2007). A gap in teacher education is learning how to create advanced classes that continue to emphasize the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy that teachers are taught to use in general education classes. This project seeks to aid in filling that gap by providing examples and practical guidance of how to make AP Literature more multicultural.

Project Overview

This project will be an sixt week unit centered around the following essential questions: *What standards do societies use to decide what is moral and what is immoral? Do the laws these societies construct reflect these moral values? How does society view those who violate these laws or morals?* The College Board recommends that AP Literature classrooms design units around these types of "big" questions, then set up texts that are in "conversation" with one another around these questions (Greenblatt, n.d). Because I want my AP Literature class to feel like a college class, I've decided to give names to each of my units as well. This unit is called "Cowboys, Gangsters, and Outlaws: How societies abhor and adore rulebreakers". I decided on

this theme because I felt that ideas about morality and feelings about those who do not follow conventional or societal rules about morality are extremely varied and relative to an individual's experiences. I know there are lots of texts on these subjects that appear on College Board exams (College Board, 2023), so teaching this unit will also provide students with necessary background for the exam.

Texts

This six week unit will cover one full length novel, three short stories, and four poems. To create a multicultural curriculum, teachers must first be sure that the voices in the texts they choose are diverse and representative of many different backgrounds and cultures. The text selection for this project has been focused around the idea that AP Literature should arrange texts so that they are in "conversation" with one another, centered around a topic that concerns humanity in general (Greenblatt, n.d). Students will also be expected to analyze an additional work of their choice–a poem, a song, a movie, or a television episode. The novel I have selected is *Sula* by Toni Morrison. This novel features a Black woman living in mid 20th century America who actively seeks to break the conventions of her small hometown by sleeping with married men. There are also several other characters who either break the law or other social conventions. The novel explains how ideas such as law and social conventions are developed and maintained in the insular Black community the novel takes place in and how the titular character Sula tends to break these laws and norms. This novel was chosen for its relevance to the unit theme, appearance on previous AP exams, and for demonstrating the perspective of a Black female. Morrison's lyrical prose and overt use of symbolism will also prepare students for writing on the AP exam using an analysis of these literary qualities.

The short stories I have selected include “Spider the Artist” by Nnedi Okorafor, “Three Ten to Yuma” by Elmore Leonard, and “Mummy and Honey” by Shahriar Mandanipour. All three short stories represent unique perspectives. Leonard is a White American man, Mandanipour is an Iranian journalist, and Okorafor is the only international perspective as a Nigerian female author. All three short stories are related to the unit theme and each is a different genre. I have selected these three texts for these reasons of diverse perspectives and thematic relevance as well as the fast paced nature of all three and interest to high school students. I tested all three out on the teenagers I work with and received a high degree of interest from them, as well as engaging discussions. These short stories also have many elements open to interpretation, which works well to engage students in writing defenses of their own interpretations.

Finally, this unit will also examine four poems. I have decided to allow students to select their own poems to analyze for this unit that relate to the theme of how society views lawbreakers. The students will be asked to think of one song that relates to this theme, then use poetic devices to analyze the song. The teacher will then select three students’ songs and have the class analyze them together and compare the different ideas, identities, and perspectives demonstrated in the songs as well as the different poetic devices utilized. Ideally we will be analyzing songs that demonstrate a variety of genres and cultural identities. The rationale behind this is to include elements of student choice in this unit and to use the principles of Ladson-Billings to “create” knowledge of textual analysis as a class.

Unit Outline

The first week of the unit will introduce the concept of the unit, the novel *Sula*, and the concept of archetypes. The main focus will be on characterization and the setting of the novel.

The second week will build on ideas about characterization and add the concept of symbolism into the learning. Students will also read the first short story and compare the short story to *Sula*. During this week we will also review the process of creating a thesis statement and paragraph. During the third week, students will write their first ungraded AP essay and switch gears to poetry analysis. Students will learn techniques and terminology to analyze poetry and select their own poems to analyze individually and as a class. After the essays have been scored, students will also turn in their corrections to their essays for a grade. The fourth week will then introduce the concept of "author's style" and an examination of another short story. During the fifth week, the learning will be much more student centered. Students will fully lead discussions and review all of the information the unit has covered. This week we will also read our final short story and compare all the texts the class has read. Finally, the sixth week will be dedicated to students completing and sharing their summative writing or projects and then reflecting on the unit as a whole.

Objectives

The learning objectives for this unit are as follows:

1). Students will be able to draw connections between different works of literature on a similar theme. Students will also be able to describe how differences in authors' culture, gender, and life experiences may contribute to variations on this theme.

2). Students will be able to analyze poetry through the examination of a variety of poetic devices.

3). Students will be able to debate, articulate, and discuss complex ideas on the topic of people who break the rules of society. Students will be able to articulate their own ideas as well as those

of the authors and their characters and examine why their own ideas may differ from authors based on life experiences.

4). Students will be able to write compelling essays on the topic of laws and society through an examination of a variety of literary devices.

These objectives have been developed from both the College Board website on AP literature as well as the 2020 Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts for grades 11-12. These objectives were also created with the end goal of the project in mind, that is to create a more equitable classroom. The goals involve students examining both their own cultural identity as well as that of the authors we will be reading and drawing conclusions about how differences in these identities may result in different perspectives on the unit's topic.

Timeline For Completion

This project began in January of 2024. The first month of the project focused on finding out exactly what I was hoping to accomplish in this project by whittling down my ideas into a single research question. The following four weeks were spent researching AP classes, systemic racial barriers to advanced classes in schools, and what teachers can do to create a multicultural curriculum. Next, I decided to focus on how to use my research to create this multicultural curriculum. I spent two weeks selecting which materials I would use in the unit, then spent another two weeks thoroughly analyzing these materials and compiling questions, background information, and discussion topics that I could incorporate into the unit. I decided to create my summative assessment for this unit and spent 1 week creating the assessments. Because I want to both challenge students to improve upon their own strengths as well as prepare them for the AP exam, there are two summative assessments. One of these is a choice between two different assessments that allows students to select the one that best matches their academic strengths.

The other is an ungraded practice AP Literature exam. While it is ungraded, it is still a reflection of the whole unit learning and will help students to know which skills they need to practice for the exam without having to worry about their grade. Afterwards, I spent one week organizing the unit on a calendar and scaffolding the learning clearly. I then spent a further week breaking down the learning objectives for the unit, each week, and each day. Next came three weeks of writing lesson plans for each day that allowed for flexibility in instruction, depending on the interest and needs of the students. I also gave myself a week to offer students differentiation within many of these lessons to ensure all students understand the material and are being challenged to their fullest potential. I then spent another week developing 5 formative assessments to be used weekly in the unit. Finally, I spent one week reviewing the project and making changes as necessary with my content expert.

Assessment

The project's efficacy will be marked in three parts: How well the students perform on the practice AP exam at the end of the unit, how many students are able to pass the real AP exam at the end of the year, and the long term goal of seeing a higher enrollment of students of color into the AP literature class in three years. My rational on waiting three years to compare enrollment of students of color in the class is based on Francis and Darity's 2021 research, which concluded that a 1% increase in Black students in advanced classes will result in a 22% increase in the chances that an eligible Black student will enroll in at least one advanced class. Therefore, if this project is successful in creating a space in which students of color feel welcomed and successful, the next year there may be a slight increase in enrollment of students of color into the class. This slight increase will signal to other students of color that AP literature is a class that can be beneficial for them, resulting in greater enrollment of students of color into

the class over a period of time. If by the end of three years there is no change in enrollment of students of color in the class, the project will be reconsidered and feedback will be sought on how to increase its efficacy.

The other two points of assessment relate to student performance on the AP exam. Because students of color tend not to pass the AP exams as frequently as their peers, fear of failure is a factor in why students of color are underrepresented in AP classes (Warne, 2017). In Chapter 2 we looked into how students of color are often less prepared for AP classes due to systemic barriers that prevent these students from taking gifted or advanced classes early in school (Yonezawa et al, 2002). Scaffolding and differentiating lessons may help to correct this gap between students (Bromley, 2007) and increase the number of students of color who pass the AP exam. This will be demonstrated at the end of the unit when the students complete the practice AP writing exam. At the beginning of the year, students will take a practice AP literature exam to see where their skills and challenges lie. Then, students will take another practice writing test at the end of each unit to see where they have improved. This project will be considered a success if students of color improve their writing score by an average of .5 points out of a possible point award of 5. Finally, an easy way to measure the efficacy of this project is to determine if there is an increase in students of color passing the AP exam. The project will be considered successful if students of color pass the exam at the same rate as their peers.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been how to answer the question at the center of this capstone project: *How can teachers use culturally responsive pedagogy to increase diversity in Advanced Placement, specifically Advanced Placement literature classrooms?* Chapter Three introduced the project design and described an overview of the project as well as the rationale

behind the project. This chapter also described the setting the project was designed for as well as the audience I had in mind while designing the project. This project also included a timeline for how the project was created.

There is much about research that leaves out human qualities. This is perhaps necessary, as to create compelling arguments and rationales to support the ideas of the researcher or developer, a certain degree of objectiveness is necessary to demonstrate credibility. Yet objectiveness can often feel dispassionate and in a profession such as education, passion is usually what drives both the teacher and the students. This project was created out of passion. I see so many students excited about literature and engaging in deep discussions of human experiences. I myself am passionate about drawing students into such meaningful conversations through the use of literature. I am also passionate about creating a classroom in which more students of color feel that their voices are essential to these conversations. Chapter Four will review my experience with this research and capstone process and discuss the limitations of my research and my hope for the next steps in the movement for equality in advanced classes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

Overview

The central question for my research has been: *How can AP literature teachers use culturally relevant pedagogy to make changes to their curriculum to increase diversity in their classes?* I used this question to fuel my research, which in turn led to the creation of my project. Chapter Four will begin with a reflection of what I have learned as I have gone through this capstone process. I will begin with a reflection on my research process and writing, then reflect on my process of creating my project. For me, the process of research and the process of creating the project were two entirely different experiences, which is why I feel it is important to explain my process of each and what I learned during each step. Next, I will reflect on my usage of the research that I completed and how my research influenced my project. As I worked on my project, I realized that I had several gaps in my knowledge that I needed to conduct further research to fill. I also realized that while I was incredibly inspired by some of the papers and articles I had read, I was unable to use them practically for this particular project.

After reflecting on the process and research usage, I will then discuss some potential outcomes of my project. I am hoping that other teachers are able to put the content I have created to use, but I do think the work extends beyond the content of the project itself. I also understand that any project will have limitations and will then discuss the specific limitations of my project and what I am hoping comes next in the field of education. I am hopeful that my research and contributions towards the discussion about racial equality in advanced classes will spark ongoing conversations that result in more students of color in advanced classes. My project is far from the final step in this process and I will discuss my project's limitations further in this section.

Finally, this chapter will conclude with how I plan to communicate and use my project and the results I gain from teaching it as well as describing how the project will benefit the field of education. I think this work could be part of an important conversation that takes place not only in schools and classrooms, but also in teacher training and education programs. Teaching for racial equity was always a central tenet of my teacher education, but conversations about how to provide this equity in advanced classes was not part of my education. I believe that the field of education will benefit greatly from practical measures to increase diversity in advanced classes. All students have the ability to succeed in classes that challenge them.

Reflection on Research

I found the research process of this capstone to be far more challenging than I had initially expected it to be. I had assumed that there would be a plethora of information regarding students of color in AP classes and that there would already be many papers and conversations discussing this matter. Instead, I found that very few educators were talking about the lack of diversity in advanced classes, though the statistics I found clearly indicated that shockingly few students of color attended advanced classes. I was surprised by this, as on my first day of student teaching at Irondale High School, one of the very first things I did was attend a talk about how teachers and administration could get more students of color into AP classes. I knew that educators were having these conversations, but my research was showing me that little practical steps were being taken to address the issue.

I then went about my research in somewhat of a roundabout way–I determined why these students were not enrolled in these classes in order to determine how schools could better welcome students of color into advanced classes. My findings surprised me. I had been told and maintained the incorrect belief that students of color tended to avoid taking advanced placement classes in order to avoid “looking White”. My research suggested otherwise. Instead, I saw systems that pushed students

of color out of advanced classes as early as preschool and coursework that did not reflect the experiences or abilities of students of color as the major reasons why these students were not in advanced classes. This new mindset was my biggest inspiration to learn more about what could be done to best support students of color in advanced classes and inspired my project to reflect these learnings.

Reflection on Project

Working on this project was a unique experience from the other units I have created over my teacher career. Creating an AP unit is very different from creating units for general education classes. My research suggested that effective teaching practices in general education classes, such as scaffolding, clear expectations, and structured notes, would help students of color feel more confident in their abilities in advanced classes as well. Of course, there is a notion that AP classes must be much more challenging and tough than general education classes and impose the impetus of learning onto the student much more. I reflected on Ladson-Billings' model of the classroom as a place where both the teacher as well as the students are part of a formation of learning. I used this idea to create lessons that allow for many discussion based lessons. In this way the teacher becomes part of the learning experience alongside the students. I also created clear expectations and charted out a "path of learning" for students in order to "demystify" the AP experience. I believe that all of this work results in a unit of learning that is truly challenging while also very manageable for students.

Another important aspect of designing this unit was that the class feel like a college course in terms of material while also maintaining the support of a general education high school class. I put a lot of thought into what I wanted my unit to look like. Did I want to teach poetry? Symbolism? Character development? Then I began to think like a student. Would I want to spend 4 weeks of my life just talking about symbolism? (Okay, yes, but then I asked my friends who are not teachers and understood that I am an outlier.) I thought about which classes in college had been the most engaging for me and

realized that the most interesting classes were the ones that had a theme and an important question about society. I thought about how the College Board suggested that AP teachers create units that put literature into conversation with each other. Then, it all came together when I was out for a run one day. A Johnny Cash song followed a Tupac one and I thought about how similar the two very different genres of country and rap were. Both songs involved a desire to be free from social restraint and pursue life on one's own terms. "Ah," thought I, "not so surprising they should be similar. Both are characteristic of the Outlaw Archetype." Here, inspiration hit me. What about a unit that considers why some people are driven to defy their society's norms? I could imagine my own students thoroughly engaged in such a conversation and decided I had found my unit theme.

Next came the process of finding literature that both fit my theme, were at the AP level, and reflected a diversity of authors. I had a notion that finding books that fit both of these qualifiers would be easy. Yet I spent weeks reading and researching different books. After I had assembled all of the texts I decided to use, I then decided what the learning focuses would be based on reading the entirety of the available previous AP literature exams. Finally, I wrote the lesson plans and created the materials that will allow me to teach this unit. I was surprised at how quickly this last step came together. Theoretically, this last step is my entire project that I am submitting. Yet I found that the process of getting to this step was much more time consuming than actually creating the unit. As I reflect on this, I realize that this is probably as it should be. As an educator, I want most of my time and energy to go towards thinking about what materials and learning outcomes will most benefit my students. Creating lesson plans comes easy when you know exactly what outcomes you are headed towards.

Literature Review Revisited

I found the College Board to be an important starting point in making choices about what I would need to teach my students. The goal of most students when they enroll in AP classes is to pass

the exam in order to earn college credit. Therefore, my primary goal as an AP teacher is to ensure my students are learning what they need in order to achieve the highest possible score on the exam. Greenblat's article on this was an important step for me in considering how I would structure my unit of learning. Studying literature becomes more interesting and meaningful for students when units are centered around a universal, human theme and use a variety of multicultural texts to explore a variety of perspectives on the theme (Greenblat, n.d). I used this as inspiration for creating the unit around a theme and then using that theme to teach other important literary elements to students. Additionally, as I created my unit of study, I found that I needed more information about what exactly was on the AP exam and how I could best teach these concepts to my students. I conducted further research using the College Board website and reviewed every available AP exam, which was very useful in helping me determine what the learning goals of my lessons would be.

Next, I found the work of Borsheim-Black to be very influential in how I wrote discussions for the unit. AP literature tends to be very writing heavy, which is helpful in that it prepares students for the exam, yet if a student is not a strong writer, they are likely to not enroll in this class due to fear of a poor grade. I want to create a unit that allows students to demonstrate their learning both through writing as well as through discussion–but I knew I had to be intentional and mindful about how I structured discussion. Classroom discussions that not only ask students to consider the perspective of the author, but also how students' own identities and perspectives influence their reading of a work of literature contribute to greater self awareness, literary comprehension, and cultural understanding (Borsheim-Black, 2015). I used this idea to create discussion questions that had students reflect on their identities and how the reading of the novel may challenge their ideas and beliefs.

As I worked on this unit, I was keeping the work I had read by Price in the back of my mind. In this article, Price talks about how it is not enough for teachers to simply add books by authors of color

into the curriculum. Often, teachers will include books by authors of color in an attempt to diversify their curriculum. However, teachers also tend to either ignore how race factors into the novel or solely focus on race as a central tenet of the novel and ignore the more universal themes it contains. Multicultural texts are most effective in creating a multicultural classroom when the texts are used to both show a racial perspective as well as a common human one (Price, 2017). I reminded myself of this as I thought about how I would teach *Sula* as a novel with both universal themes as well as a commentary about racial identity.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I found the work of Ladson-Billings to be extremely influential in determining *how* I will teach this material. While I have a vision for how I will teach this unit of study, I also realized while writing the project that incorporating the work of Ladson-Billings is very challenging to implement on paper. Students are most invested in their classes when they see themselves as contributing to the class. This is done by creating "concepts of knowledge", whereby which students and teachers work together to build ideas, rather than a traditional model of a teacher telling the students what they should know (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When I teach my unit, I intend to learn as much from my students as they do from me. However, getting this idea across on paper through lesson plans is challenging. I have included her ideas in my rationale portion of the lesson plans, but I believe it is up to each individual who teaches this unit to create an environment in which the learning process is a mutual exchange.

Conclusion on Reflection

My work on both the research and project creation was incredibly instructive and transformative for me. The research taught me about the need the education field has in terms of conducting research and providing support to students of color attending advanced classes. The project creation taught me about what the process of creating a unit of learning that is student centered entails. In the next section,

I will focus on what I was not able to do with my project and what steps come next for this project as well as the topic of students of color in advanced classes itself.

Implications

My short-term goal for this project is simply to teach this unit to a group of students who then go on to both pass the AP literature exam as well as gain insight into how literature provokes questions about society and identity within the reader. My hope is that other teachers review my project and are able to implement it in their own classroom. My biggest dream would be that my work helps to inspire more conversations about what teachers and administrators can do to increase diversity in their AP classrooms. I believe that this conversation goes beyond just the AP literature classroom and most of my research is applicable to all AP classes, even to most advanced classes. My research has shown me that there is a dearth of information about how to increase diversity in advanced classes, though I know that teachers do care about this topic. I am hoping that this project will lead to more conversation about what can be done to increase diversity in advanced classes before students reach high school.

Limitations

I am hopeful that my project will prove to be an asset to both the field of education and to students of color who hope to enroll in AP classes. I do, however, acknowledge that my project has limitations. First, if my goal is to increase diversity in all AP classes, as stated in the previous paragraph, one serious limitation is that my project is limited to AP literature. I do believe most of my research is suitable for a conversation about diversity in any AP classroom, however my project itself has a limited scope. Second, a limitation of any unit plan in literature is going to be that I cannot predict what direction students will take interpretations of the material in. This unit has a plan and a focus, but my research has demonstrated that AP literature should not be a static class. This project is not designed to be followed to the letter. Teachers must make room for students to lead discussions to places that

were not previously planned out. While I consider this to be a limitation in terms of what I can provide for this project, I do believe that the student-led nature of this project proves to be an asset to both students and teachers. Third, a limitation of my project is that even though I have written lesson plans and assessments for improving essay writing skills, I have limited research into effective techniques for teaching AP literature writing skills to students of color. My research suggested that the way writing is taught in schools tends to be based on the strengths of White students, but I found very little that relates to how Black or Hispanic students best learn to write essays for advanced classes. I will continue this line of thinking further in the next section as I consider what future research should be done in order to best support students of color in advanced classes.

Future Research

As I conducted my research, I ran into the same theme again and again. Articles would be written lamenting how schools and classrooms are designed around how White students learn best. An important reflection, surely, but I found very little research into how Black, Hispanic, and Native students learn best. I looked into cultural formations of intelligence, which was insightful in determining what different cultures consider intelligent behavior, but I found very little practical research into methods of teaching reading and writing skills to a diverse group of students. I would love to see more research into how to best teach advanced writing skills to students of color.

Additionally, further research needs to be conducted into how schools and administrators can prevent the in school racial segregation that occurs as early as elementary school through the use of gifted and remedial programs. Too often students of color are placed into remedial classes while White students are enrolled in gifted classes. Often, White students are placed in gifted programs at the behest of their parents and students of color are placed in remedial classes because their parents believe the schools when they tell them it is the best option for them (Francis & Darity, 2021). I would like to see

research into how schools can create equity by educating parents on the different programs their school offers so that every parent can advocate for their children's needs more effectively.

To conclude, there is much more research to be done to guide conversations about creating more opportunities for students of color to take advanced classes. Parental advocacy, systemic issues, and research into best practices for teaching to the strengths of students of color are important aspects to this topic. I know that there is currently limited research into how educators can get more students of color into advanced classes, but I do know that these conversations are happening in schools and I hope that these conversations turn into action in the near future.

Communication of Results

I plan to communicate my results by first implementing my project with my own students and reflecting on my findings. Planning out a unit is important, but I know I will have adjustments to make as I learn from my students what works best for them. I will then discuss both my research as well as the results of my project with other AP literature teachers that I work with as well as school administrators. I want to show other educators that there is a way to take action to increase diversity in advanced classes. I also want to draw attention to the lack of information about best practices for teaching students of color in advanced classes. I am hoping by having these conversations, other educators are inspired to conduct their own research and add to the conversation. Additionally, my research and project will be published for other educators to use and add their own ideas onto.

Benefit of Project

This project will benefit the field of education by sparking conversations about the practical steps teachers, administrators, and others involved in the field can take to end racial segregation within schools. AP classes offer so many benefits to students, but these benefits are unfairly distributed and tend to leave out students of color. I am hoping that my project inspires further research and

development into the topic and leads to systemic changes. When I first set out to create this project, I had my specific students in mind. However, as I have conducted my research and written my unit of study, my "students" have transformed into all young people who know they are capable of more. My project will benefit the field of education by proving that all students are capable of comprehending challenging materials when they are supported and given the resources that best help them succeed.

Conclusion

This project has been a work of passion for me. I strongly believe that all students want to be challenged in their school work and have a desire to share their ideas with peers. I also believe that a legacy of racial bias has resulted in an education system that leaves out students of color from classes that would challenge them and allow them to share their ideas and experiences in classes that foster these conversations. In Chapter Four I reviewed my process of researching and creating the unit of study on the topic of: *How can AP literature teachers use culturally relevant pedagogy to make changes to their curriculum to increase diversity in their classes?* I revisited my literature review and how it influenced my unit of study, then reflected on some of the limitations of my project as well as the next steps research into this topic should take. Finally, Chapter Four concluded with why this project will be an asset to the field of education. I am thankful for the opportunity I have had to research this topic and am eager to continue committing to equality and equity for all students in advanced classes.

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