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## **Guide to Establishing a Classroom Library - with Racially Representative Considerations**

Julie Sieben

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Guide to Establishing a Classroom Library -  
with Racially Representative Considerations

by

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

### Introduction

#### Background

I am: A White (middle-aged) woman; Christian, (Baptized Missouri Synod, Confirmed ELCA Lutheran, Converted over 20 years ago to Catholicism); born and raised in Minnesota, mostly in the western Twin Cities suburbs. I graduated with a large class (over 600); however, a largely White student body. Even though I lived in this space with very few people of color, I have always thought we were equal.

My perceptions blurred with recent and tragic deaths of young Black men, while simultaneously attending Hamline University's initial teaching licensure program. I still believe I am no better than anyone else; with growing clarity, I have come to realize, I certainly have had it much easier. I have also lived in an area, gone to school, married, even watched TV - all in a White space or lens. Everywhere I go, I walk in a space, along with others, who look like me, especially in elementary literature, social studies and other subjects. Now as an educator, I am wondering - *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

#### What's Ahead

Throughout Chapter One, I will explain from my point of view, what it is like to be racially represented. I will also explain my personal and professional experiences in regards to being represented in literature, including social studies and other subjects. In addition, I will describe insightful events that also lend themselves to establishing equity in the classroom. A detailed, analytical review of literature will come in Chapter Two, which will dive deeper into racial representation and inclusive classrooms. In Chapter

Three, I will describe the capstone project, including the rationale that emerged from the literature review, as well as time implications and setting. Chapter Four will summarize the entire capstone project, as well as, provide a reflection of the product and the process.

### **Underrepresented**

I can pull any book off the library shelf: classic literature, current realistic fiction, non-fiction, even fantasy, and can be certain my race will be represented in that book, story, or article. After obtaining elementary education teaching licensure, I taught in a large school district - some of the elementary schools more diverse than others, while just recently I took a teaching position at a Catholic parochial school, kindergarten to eighth grade. I have primarily taught intermediate grades, fourth and fifth. This year, I have a diverse class, by that I mean, every race category of the US Census is represented, even if that means one person per race, except for American Indian. In total, four of twenty students are students of color.

A friend posted the picture below on Facebook a couple years ago, and it has been etched in my memory ever since. This small person found someone who looked like her, reflected back from a TV image. She was represented. It mattered. I take this for granted every day, in every book I see and read.



© 2022 Representation Matters – Representation Matters is committed to changing the face of power by standing with and supporting progressive Black women and women of color candidates running for elected office. (website)

Look at that smile. This is what I want to see - every race/ethnicity, especially those in my classroom, represented in books, school subjects, text books, and especially, social studies. As educators with increasingly diverse classroom populations, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

### **From the Beginning: Personal Background and Importance of this Research**

To be honest, I'm not sure when it started. My upbringing. No, my grandmother. She was very instrumental in my beliefs. I admired her for believing in others, and mostly her treating others how she would want to be treated. It was even more than that. She knew at a basic human-cellular level, that all people are created equal. *All* should be treated with dignity and respect. I have held that in my heart, my whole life.

In addition to that early belief, shortly after my parent's divorce, at approximately the age of 12, my mom started seeing a man who seemed opposite of my grandmother. At the time, even in my young mind, I saw how he treated people who were different from him. I heard him say unkind things about people of color, primarily about Black people. I was a shy, timid kid, but I could not take it. I stood up for my fellow humans. However, my conviction started and ended with "we are all the same." My favorite - "there's one race - the human race." Here was the problem: I lived in a community of White people. How was my "stand" taking a "**Stand?**" I wondered this even more after watching a TED Talk by Mellody Hobson, a Black CEO of a large publicly traded investment firm, titled, "Color blind or color brave." Hobson stated that researchers coined the term, and also acknowledged that color blindness "is very dangerous because it means we are ignoring the problem" (TED, 2014).

### ***Color Blindness***

For the last decade, researchers have studied the effects of color blindness across the United States and Europe (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020). What they found was young children recognized both race and inequities (Boutte et al., 2011; Yi et al., 2020). The research conducted by Yi and colleagues was designed to find a correlation between color blindness and the lack of addressing prejudice. A decade earlier, Boutte et al. (2011) suggested that teachers and others be upfront in talking about race in order to counter prejudice. Even in 2014, Hobson was saying it is time to have uncomfortable conversations about race.

Additional color blindness research by Neville (2013) and several academic colleagues across many midwest colleges, found the idea of a collective ‘we are all the same,’ added to racial tension instead of reducing it. Furthermore, they used the term, CBRI, which stands for “color-blindness racial ideology,” a combination of two thoughts. One is color evasion, which means people are the same regardless of race; and power evasion, where the thought has been racism can not exist if there are equal opportunities (p. 455). Neville and colleagues went on to say, the more a person tries to incorporate an ideology of “sameness,” the more prejudiced and discriminatory they would be toward people of color (p. 456). In addition, practicing CBRI “is unrealistic and even harmful to disregard another’s race or to not see color in a society that is as racially stratified as the United States,” and only adds to the prejudice and “racially insensitive behavior” (p. 456).

According to Hammond (2015), “focusing on culture seems counterintuitive” ( p. 21), after many in the 80s, including myself, had a philosophy of avoiding seeing color -



believing everyone was the ‘same.’ Even when I saw people of color, I missed the implicit bias, systemic racism, and discrimination they faced each day. While still others were openly seeing stereotypes, marginalized people of color, and perpetual racism. Since I did not relate to their status or trials, nor did I see their problems or struggles.

Enter Hamline - a lens changing education - not just the opportunity to become an educator - but of life perspective(s). I learned that my implicit bias affected my interactions with all people; it affected how I treated people. I did a lot of self reflection during my Hamline studies - a different mindset and lens in my 40s than when I left high school for college. My education would be ongoing, as Minnesota became the epicenter of centrifuge - the melting pot of implicit bias, apathy, and blatant racism as well as systemic racism in early 2020. At the same time, actually all through my Hamline education, and even now, a friend helped me navigate these new lenses. I learned that all the self-reflection work was just the beginning; if I am to be part of establishing and incorporating equity in literature, as well as the classroom, then that means helping dismantle racism. In order to make that happen, I also need to be an ally.

### ***Ongoing Education***

Soon after receiving my elementary education licensure in 2019, I was fortunate to work for a district that implements cultural proficiency practices. They devote professional development to this important work. In early 2022, I was able to attend Jason Sole’s *Educators as Allies* professional development, 3-hour webinar. This educator training was born out of Sole’s experience with his own education. From there, he has gone on to create additional professional development opportunities for educators,

speaks across the country in support of young Black men, and dedicates himself to *moving* change.

In getting to know Sole, he stretched and continues to stretch my thinking. Each time, I feel I have learned something and grown as a person, I find out there is more to learn. By the end of the Educators as Allies training, I could no longer deny the call to be an ally. I feel compelled to fight for racial representation; to fight for equity in literature, as well as all elementary subjects. With that call, I now ask, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

### **Raising Consciousness**

Since 2020, we have moved the needle a little toward understanding. First, people started to recognize bias and discrimination. I feel I have done that. Since I feel called to be an ally, my goal is to bring it to other's attention. Now that my consciousness has been raised, I want to help foster change. One way to start is with racial diversity in classroom books. The US 2020 census (census.gov) showed people of color make up 17-47% of the population, depending on the state. However, in children's literature, they represent only 11% of main characters according to the organization, Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC, 2014; Crisp et al., 2016). Consciousness needs raising again. We need to provide books and resources in the classroom that are as diverse as the population. Crisp et al. (2016) ends the journal article by saying, "All children deserve to see themselves and the people they love represented...in the books we bring into our classrooms" (p. 40).

I know many have been ready for the next step for a long, long time. I have been ready. It is imperative, on its own, but also with the increasingly diverse student populations, to have Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) equally represented

in literature, both retail and in schools. The importance of finding oneself represented in a book, to have themselves mirrored in literature, to be able to actually picture themselves in current realistic fiction, matters, simply put.

When looking at the numbers Crisp et al. (2016) reported from the CCBC, I realized they were from a decade ago; I looked into the current numbers. First, according to the CCBC website, they “are a noncirculating examination, study, and research library for Wisconsin school and public librarians, teachers, early childhood care providers.” In the organization’s 2022 Media Kit, they provided information gathered from over 3,400 books they received that year for review and the counts of main characters depicted: 29% were White; compared to 22% animal; compared to 12% Black, 9% Asian, and 6% Latinx. Interestingly, they now also report numbers for Indigenous (1%), Arab (.6%), and Pacific Islander (.3%) (CCBC, 2024. School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison). The numbers for people of color being main characters have increased since 2014; however, we still have a ways to go.

Even though it would be a much smaller sample size, I decided to count the books in my classroom. This would give me a better idea of the numbers and percentages of people of color represented in the ELA (English Language Arts) curriculum. This does not include the books on the classroom library shelves, which students are allowed to borrow and take home.

### ***ELA Classroom Materials by the Numbers***

The school where I teach just invested in a new ELA curriculum. In my classroom alone, I have roughly 120 new titles, mostly picture books (for the purpose of read alouds or think alouds). Excitedly, I perused these new books last fall, and was prematurely

ecstatic at the representation of people of color (Black, Asian, Hmong, and Pacific Islander). Upon a second look, most of the books featuring Black people were from decades ago - Civil Rights Movement time or before. There was virtually nothing reflecting Black people *today*. Additionally, if Black characters were from present-day, they were about people *in* Africa. The books referring to Asian characters, for the most part, were set in *Ancient* China or Japan. There were virtually no American Indian or Middle-Eastern main characters. The largest discrepancy was actually the lack of BIPOC authors.

This led to quantifying the classroom ELA materials in order to not assume a mis- or underrepresentation - in total, 118 books. Each book was cataloged in a spreadsheet, listing: race of main and supporting characters, as well as, the race of author and illustrator, if applicable. Notes were made about the time period of each book, cross-referenced by race.

Within the 118 picture books, of the characters represented, more than one-quarter (27%) were White; both Black people and animals were main characters 20% of the time (each); and 17% of the characters were Asian. Latinx, American Indian and Middle-Eastern characters were less represented (7%, 3%, and 2%, respectively). I was expecting a large discrepancy in the number of White authors compared to authors of color; however, I was surprised to find White authors wrote nearly three-quarters (72%) of the books. As mentioned earlier in the CCBC study, it was also eye-opening how people of color were represented in these 118 books. Most BIPOC characters were from decades, eras, or even a different time period all together.

Lastly, it was interesting to note the lack of Indigenous characters, especially being in Minnesota, with a large American Indian population. Further, with the Minnesota Board of Education adding additional standards in American Indian curriculum - there was only one book by an Indigenous author. Of the four books about American Indians, one book talked about a famous female - the Buffalo Bird girl. The book was written from the frame or lens of the Buffalo Bird Girl - and what she may have been like. The author also included real facts and history about the girl. She lived in the late 1890's and was from the Hidatsa tribe. They lived in the Great Plains, mainly near the Missouri River. Even though the majority of the ELA books were written by White authors, this book was written by an Indigenous author.

Since I initially was curious about the books with main characters being Black, I took a closer look at the 24 out of 118 books written with the main character being Black. More than half of these books were about people from decades and events long ago, e.g., the Civil Rights Movement. Further, the books written about Black people present day, showed the characters resided *in* Africa. In addition, Asian people depicted in 17% of the books were largely shown in Ancient - temple - times, definitely prior to 1800s. Lastly, there were very few books written about Hispanic or Latinx people, 7%.

**Multicultural Authors.** One note about BIPOC authors. Again, many of the books were written by White authors, 72%. In addition, even if the books were representing a diverse culture, a different race and/or person of color, the books likely were written by a White author. Conversely, if the character was of BIPOC population, the illustrator often was also a person of color, even when the author was White.

## Summary

We are beyond ready for a change. It is time for all races and cultures to be represented in books. From my limited and privileged perspective, to the research, to the impact of representation, they all show representation in literature is not only right, it is needed and beneficial to all. The next chapter will dive deeper into the research, publications, and peer reviewed journals showing the importance of diversity in literature. Additionally, the literature review will show why it is beneficial to students of color, for sure, but also for White students. Then in Chapter Three, I will describe in detail the capstone project based on answering the question: *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* Chapter Four reflects back upon the project as a whole, including the experience and knowledge gained.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I reviewed relevant literature pertaining to racial representation in classroom literature and how that impacts the classroom. There has been a lot of research in the area of equity in literature. I set out to locate research that shows the importance and the connection to the amount of diverse books available to children. Then for the classroom itself, the question I sought to answer is: *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

#### *Examination of Racial Representation in Children's Literature*

In exploring the question of making considerations to establish a racially diverse selection of books in a classroom library, the literature review considered racial representation, as well as, multicultural education. Within the subset of these articles, I also looked at the importance of multicultural authors.

Based on the systematic review of literature and the racial representation broadly discussed within, three subcategories emerged: misrepresented, underrepresented, and selective inclusion. In addition, another theme was reviewed - Social Justice. Several articles were reviewed either by the pioneers of multicultural education: Banks, Gay, and Ladson-Billings, or by more recent academia researchers and authors: Hammond (2015), Ahiyya (2022), and Ebarvia (2024). The pioneers called out teachers to be allies in the classroom - to advocate for racially representative classrooms, while also working toward inclusion. In addition, they encouraged teachers to be willing to have courageous conversations in and out of the classroom.

Moreover, while researching articles regarding racial representation in the classroom, this theme of culturally responsive teaching kept emerging. After reading several authors, past and present, discuss the importance of culturally responsive teaching, it became clearer the connection between inclusivity and a racially representative classroom. Furthermore, in order for a teacher to have a library that is representative of a diverse classroom population, it really requires cultural immersion that goes beyond just books.

Nonetheless, in order to answer the question of ensuring racial representation of children's literature on classroom bookshelves, it was still worth examining the inventory of what is currently available; the importance of being represented; and what academia researchers have said and written in education journals about racial representation.

### **Racial Representation in Children's Literature**

According to Lathey (2022), history is documented in books. "Children's literature reveals our conceptions of social class, race, and the role of education in a given historical period" (p. 28). Students have access to classroom and school libraries, and educators rely on children's literature to aid in teaching, not only reading, but other subjects such as social studies, science and even math (Crisp et al., 2016). This same author started the research summary, found in *The Journal of Children's Literature*, not mincing words, "The world depicted in children's books is overwhelmingly White," (p. 29). Further, academic researcher, Professor Gailey, stated children's literature largely includes Whites, both characters as well as authors, and also stated the "rare children's books that did address race tended to represent Blacks as servile or caricatures" (Moser, 2021, para. 7).



### ***Misrepresented in Literature***

According to the counts of the ELA (English Language Arts) books in my elementary classroom, there were only four books about Indigenous peoples (*out of 118*). Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi and Adams-Campell (2016) claim American Indians are also often misrepresented by being mis-labeled “Indians,” based on the outdated Columbus narrative (p. 655 ~ footnote). They continued by describing one of the most common examples of misrepresentation: the “First Thanksgiving” story. Often depicted as a harmonious and “first” celebration between Indigenous people and first settlers or colonists. They further elaborated, Indigenous peoples had been celebrating similar “thanksgiving” type feasts or celebrations for long periods before European settlers arrived.

In addition, the literature, and thus social studies textbooks and curriculum, continue these storylines and stereotypes (Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi & Adams-Campell, 2016). Diving deeper, Crisp et al. (2016) claimed these same classroom reference materials often and still use the term “Indians” versus the more accepted term, Indigenous peoples (Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi & Adams-Campell, 2016; Crisp et al., 2016). Continuing to use the term “Indian” promotes the “Native appropriation and ‘playing Indian...’” The researchers acknowledged this is an “ongoing issue(s) in children’s literature and popular culture” (Crisp et al., 2016, p.32).

### ***Underrepresented in Literature***

Crisp et al. (2016) referenced the lack of diversity in children’s literature, from multiple sources, one of them being the CCBC (Cooperative Children’s Book Center) - mentioned in Chapter One. They cited numbers from what CCBC counted and released in

2014. The authors found only 11% of the over 3,500 books received were focused on BIPOC populations (Crisp et al., 2016). That year, they used the racial categories of the US Census, including: American Indian, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White (census.gov). In the numbers referenced most recently in 2022, the CCBC now includes additional racial categories: specifically using Indigenous, Arab, and Pacific Islander (in previous years, listed in combination with Asian) (CCBC 2022 Media Kit).

Tonya Duncan Ellis, a Black children's author of primarily middle-grade chapter books, also cites the CCBC. In March 2021, she posted on her website after compiling numbers from the CCBC, that of the books collected in 2019 and analyzed, there were more books written about animals (29%) than Black people (12%), as well as Asian (9%) and Latinx (5.3%) (Ellis 2024 - See Figure 1). Knowing representation matters, she posts newsletters, as well as suggestions on how to do better, that is, make diverse literature available in the classroom. More of her suggestions will be laid out in coming chapters.

### ***Selective Inclusion: Does it Matter?***

Within the understanding of the importance of being represented, does it matter who and how the characters are depicted in children's literature? I wondered that question when my school bought new ELA curriculum materials. As mentioned in Chapter One, I was ecstatic for the possibilities of new picture books for read alouds; however, I was surprised by the amount of books with people of color that were from time periods in decades or centuries past.

According to the APA Inclusive Language Guide (American Psychological Association), the term inclusion means, "An environment that offers affirmation,

celebration, and appreciation of different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences, thus allowing all individuals to express their whole selves (and all their identities) and to demonstrate their strengths and capacity” (APA, 2021). Thus, regarding the ELA curriculum picture books, within the 118 books, all US Census race categories were represented; the percentage of races represented were similar to the findings of the latest CCBC numbers (Table 1 in Appendix). Moreover, the inclusion of certain races followed this conclusion by Lathey (2022): if the characters were people of color, they were represented in terms of the past and most likely, represented by stereotypes.

Diving more deeply into representation, Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi and Adams-Campbell (2016) stated although books are a form of entertainment for children, they often learn many social norms and historical information. They continued by saying, for centuries, “American children’s literature promotes Eurowestern worldviews and societal norms, while sanitizing or erasing ethnic diversity” (p. 656). They concluded by saying part of the problem was and continues to be a lack of multicultural authors, especially Indigenous authors. Thereby, even when people of color have been included in literature, they have been represented through a selective lens (Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi & Adams-Campbell, 2016; Lathey, 2022).

### ***Summary***

The systematic literature review showed a lack of racial diversity in children’s literature - either misrepresented or underrepresented (CCBC, 2022). In addition, the count of the new ELA curriculum books in my own classroom showed a lack of diversity, as well as a lack of author diversity, when only considering race. Further, when there were people of color as main characters, the time periods, content and historical basis had

a selective lens. Based on content found within the literature review, just pertaining to racial representation, there appears an opportunity to explore answering the question:

*How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

In the next area of the literature review, articles pertaining to multicultural education were included in order to gain an understanding of how that might accomplish the goal of answering the above research question. The articles were reviewed from the lens of incorporating inclusive learning materials.

### **Multicultural Education**

Hammond (2015) refers to James Banks as the “father of multicultural education” (p. 89). Banks (2022) suggested that if students of different races, cultures, and languages were given a multicultural education, they needed to be encouraged through “a transformative education, meaning ‘students develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions into effective personal, social, political, and economic action’” (p. 131).

Conversely, according to Hammond (2015), pioneers to culturally responsive teaching, Gay and Ladson-Billings, described culturally inclusive education in more of an emotional teaching ideology, combined with cognition or higher order thinking. Further, their thinking was that culturally responsive teaching combined these two traditionally separate pieces into a working strategy. Additionally, Hammond laid out groundwork to delve deeper into the neuroscience she calls “brain-based learning,” (p. 4). Even though Hammond stresses neuroscience and higher order thinking throughout, she agreed with Gay in that building “relationships are as important as the curriculum,” (Gay, 2010;

Hammond, 2015, p. 72). This is important because in trying to answer the research question - *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* - the classroom library appears to be just one element of inclusivity. Thou, it seems a place to start. However, for a teacher to establish a classroom that is racially represented goes beyond the library and falls into creating a culturally responsive classroom.

### ***Defining Terms***

Before exploring any further, the literature review encountered many variations of terms that are slightly different. However, in the end, the terms shared similar meanings.

**Culturally responsive teaching** ~ “the process of using familiar cultural information and processes to scaffold learning. Emphasizes communal orientation. Focused on relationships, cognitive scaffolding, and critical social awareness” (Hammond, 2015, p. 156).

**Culturally responsive pedagogy** ~ According to an article by Will and Najarro (2022) in *Education Week*, - this teaching pedagogy has these three necessary parts: student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

In addition to teaching pedagogy, it is worth noting the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). The article then ends with an explanation of the differences; however, there are mainly similarities:

“It’s important to remember that these asset-based pedagogies - culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustainable, among others - are not in conflict with each other. While their frameworks vary, they all have the same goal of dismantling a deficit

approach to educating students of color and focusing instead on their strengths, assets, and communities in the classroom” (2022, para. 26).

Basically, Hammond (2015) states that culturally responsive teaching is “a mindset, a way of thinking about and organizing instruction to allow for great flexibility in teaching” (p. 5). Will and Najarro (2022) give Django Paris and coauthor, H. Samy Alim, credit for naming culturally sustaining pedagogy. When they interviewed the authors, they “told *Education Week* that culturally sustaining pedagogy ‘positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive, rather than subtractive, as remaining whole, rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. ... As such, CSP explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining—rather than eradicating—the cultural ways of being of communities of color’” (Will & Najarro, 2022, para. 23).

To finish the article, Ladson-Billings also was quoted saying that she would continue to watch culturally sustaining pedagogy in that it takes her “culturally relevant pedagogy” up to another level of fully being racially inclusive in the classroom (Will & Najarro, 2022).

**What it is Not.** In my limited experience, culturally responsive teaching has been labeled as an asset for classroom management strategies - or has become synonymous or interchangeable. Nevertheless, Hammond (2015) warned that this is short-sighted. She again states the importance of building relationships and trust with the students; this means learning about different cultures; learning about the students in the classroom; and simply, caring about them (p. 73).

### ***The Neuroscience Behind Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Based on Hammond's research in neuroscience and how it impacts teaching, she often cited Banks, Gay and Ladson-Billings, as stated earlier, pioneers of culturally responsive teaching (from this point, referred to as CRT). In her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*, she cited not only the research connection to the brain - neuroscience, but also the science behind "how" we think. Furthermore, why our brain is wired to "think" a certain way (2015).

Utilizing Hammond's own experience, her neuroscience research, as well as her own literature review of CRT, she referred to a framework to best capitalize CRT in the classroom. Hammond (2015) stated four ways to practice CRT: Awareness; Learning partnerships; Information processing; and Community building. Within each of these learnings, she described how the educator can benefit from a culturally responsive lens and help students be successful.

In order to do that successfully, Hammond (2015) along with Ahiyya (2022) suggest that educators need to look at their own culture and any biases, including implicit bias - defined as "bias that results from the tendency to process information based on unconscious associations and feelings, even when these are contrary to one's conscious or declared beliefs," according to Dictionary.com.

Next, Hammond (2015) explained the educator works to build a relationship through trust by taking advantage of the neuroscience behind the desire for connection. Through this process, the teacher works to build trust, even through differences, to facilitate a safe learning environment where the students are held to high standards.

In the third area, Hammond (2015) suggested focusing on higher order thinking, using neuroscience as a base of understanding the brain's capacity to learn. Later in her book, she explained how the brain utilizes culture to help process large amounts of information (p. 19 and 48). In addition, she stated teachers can learn how to "use brain-based information processing strategies common to oral cultures" (p. 19).

In the fourth practice area - community building, Hammond stressed the idea that CRT is not a one-size, plug-in answer. Contrary, she stated the importance of creating a safe environment where all students feel safe to share their stories as well as take risks. She further explains the number one brain mechanism is to "seek to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others in community" (2015, p. 47). That being said, students of color are occupied with navigating implicit bias, microaggressions, and stereotype threats (Cohen & Garcia, 2012), before being able to build relationships and make connections (Hammond, 2015).

Additionally, she stated that while it is important to create an aesthetically pleasing classroom environment, it is also important to recognize the lens on which it is created and decorated, meaning it most often is a reflection of the classroom teacher's culture (2015, p. 19). The ultimate goal then would be to have a teacher that integrates, and thus represents, all cultures. In addition, once the room is set up with cultural representation and a safe environment has been established, the higher order learning and thinking can begin (Hammond, p. 50). That being said, the brain also needs to combine prior knowledge to newly acquired information. Thus, lastly, the brain "physically grows through challenge and stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning" (Hammond, 2015, p. 49).



## ***Summary***

This section of the literature review looked at multicultural education, namely through the lens of culturally responsive teaching (CRT); multiple variations and definitions of CRT - from the educator researchers who developed them; as well as diving into how the brain connects to CRT and learning in general. This systematic review shows CRT has an instrumental role in helping all students, as well as students of color be successful. That is, where students of color do not have to worry about being marginalized for their race, but in fact, can focus on higher order thinking. With regards to the research question: *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* - the literature review was saying in order to accomplish a racially representative library, the teacher should practice at minimum, CRT. Additionally, Hammond (2015) and many others claimed CRT is a state of being. For a teacher to be connected to a racially represented classroom population then, goes beyond the books the teacher needs to have. Thus, “It is our responsibility to create the right conditions for optimum learning” (Hammond, 2015, p. 50).

## **Social Justice**

So now what?

That is the question of the last half century, if not century. There’s a Black population that has been marginalized through Jim Crow, through the first Black US president, through the growth of diverse classrooms, yet representation in children’s literature remains stagnant, at best (Crisp et al., 2016; Hammond, 2015). Included in the stagnation is an entirely ignored Indigenous population (Adare-Tasiwoopa ápi & Adams-Campbell, 2016). Basically, according to Crisp et al. (2016), literary works have

historically included White characters. Through professional development, we learn about this, but seemingly nothing is put into place to *change*. This is where social justice plays a part in establishing multiculturalism.

### ***To Go Forward - We Look Back***

Even within this review of literature, it only skimmed the surface. There is still so much out there to consume, read and understand. One of the areas briefly mentioned was implicit bias. What is it? How does it impact others? How does it affect teaching?

### ***More Research***

Among many, DiAngelo (2016 revised ed.) has asked what it means to be White? How does it work to be White in a space that claims it doesn't matter - similar to color blindness or color evasion (as stated in Chapter One, this means denying race and encouraging "sameness") (Neville et al., 2013). In the background section of Chapter One, Neville's research was explored in relation to color blindness. The researchers used the term color evasion (2013).

More recently, in 2020, another group of researchers set out to examine what was important in creating a welcoming classroom through the use of multicultural education, while attempting to encourage cultural diversity through "contact and cooperation" (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020), yet avoid a culture of color evasion. Their theory was that following Neville's research, color evasion led to increased prejudice, so it should be avoided. However, Schwarzenthal et al. determined the environment that best met the needs of students was a combination of all three: multicultural education (or multiculturalism), "contact and cooperation" as well as color evasion. That is, students are best served, especially students of color, when they receive education from a

multicultural lens; are in direct contact with students of color (Lathey, 2022), and combined with some aspect of color evasion - as in “we are one.” Moreover, they determined that some (not all) elements of sameness aided in the greater humanity - we are one. The researchers concluded, “that all three aspects of the classroom climate are uniquely related to aspects of adolescents’ intercultural competence and that none of them may be sufficient on their own” (Schwarzenenthal et al., 2020).

In another study, Kempf (2020) researched the impact of implicit bias - both in a secondary study, similar to a literature review, and a year-long primary study. First, Kempf described the “current” atmosphere of and impact of implicit bias with some historical information. Based on biology and neuroscience, both Kempf and Hammond discussed how implicit bias is “automatic and unintentional, and therefore more likely to manifest in a hurried moment. Reflection and ‘thinking slow’ by engaging in mindful, deliberate processing can prevent our implicit biases from kicking in and determining our behaviors,” (Hammond, 2015; Kempf, 2020, p. 119).

In addition, because it is a hot topic, it may not always be accurately portrayed. Kempf (2020) described one myth as being, if we “take out” bias, that racism will go away (p. 122). There are many layers - and meanings are misunderstood. Quoting previous research about White teachers by Sara Ahmed, Kempf stated, “phenomenology of race, which is useful for understanding White teacher reflections on race and race bias mitigation,” before using Ahmed’s words to conclude, ‘whiteness is lived as a background to experience’ and considers whiteness not ‘as an ontological given, but as that which has been received, or become given, over time...an ongoing and unfinished

history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space” (Kempf, 2020, p. 125).

Further, if there’s a White space, then Kempf imagined that this White space has a similar context to that of BIPOC populations in their experiences. Lastly, Kempf stated that any anti-bias efforts cannot be attained “overnight” or a short -one time- professional development (p. 125). Thus, Kempf’s research also included a year-long study involving practicing teachers, “a small multimodal qualitative study” (p. 126). Within the methodology, participants would have certain tasks throughout the year. These tasks included book readings (e.g., reading “*So you want to talk about race*” by Ijeoma Oluo was among the book choices); interviews; activities with other teachers (e.g., sharing race biographies); and reflection. Although at press time, they were just starting the data analysis, researchers found participants’ “views on race, racism, and their own racial identities...appeared to change over time. Typically, participants’ reflections evolved to include more complex understandings of race in education generally, as well as a greater sense of what needs to be done within their own classrooms....This suggests that the duration of the project, specifically, may have had an important impact on teachers’ understandings of race and pedagogy” (Kempf, 2020, p. 127).

### ***Mirror, Mirror***

A classic, “mirror, mirror, on the wall” generally will instill thoughts of the fairy tale “Snow White.” However, to most educator researchers, it will elicit thoughts of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop - the one who wrote about and coined, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors” (Bishop, 1990). More recently, articles by Crisp et al. (2016), de Bruijn (2021), and Ahiyya (2022), all recounted how this trailblazing research started a

movement toward multiculturalism. First, Crisp et al. (2016) mentioned Bishop in the article, ‘*What’s on our bookshelves*,’ while talking about the lack of diversity on classroom library shelves. They further continued by using a term from Bishop’s work, parallel populations and parallel cultures to describe historically marginalized populations (Bishop, 2003; Crisp et al., 2016). Although this paper largely addressed race, Crisp and colleagues (2016) conducted research across several categories (e.g., gender, religion, among others).

Within the parameters of the de Bruijn et al. (2021) research, they were looking to gauge the importance and acknowledgement of reading about other cultures. What they found was in younger children’s books, there was a lack of specific culture(s) and color blindness was prevalent. In addition, they stated a need for children’s books to have cultural diversity, authenticity, and like Bishop’s research, offer an opportunity to see themselves in books as well as others who are different (Bishop, 1990; de Bruijn et al., 2021).

In Ahiyya’s first book, *Rebellious Read Alouds*, released in 2022, she argued for the importance of cultural and racial representation in children’s books. Furthermore, just as Hobson (2014) took to *TED Talk* to encourage uncomfortable conversations about race, Ahiyya (2022) wrote a whole book about it. In *Rebellious Read Alouds*, the author carved out recommendations on read alouds that will bring about courageous conversations around race and culture. Among others - Lathey (2016) and Hobson (2014) reported that young children see race and often inequality, so why not be open and talk about it. Hammond (2015) and Lathey (2016) would agree that parents “believe that a racially integrated and rigorous education prepares their children with the knowledge,

skills, and outlook needed to succeed in life and to participate in the culture” (Lathey, 2016, p. 32).

Lastly, McNair and Edwards honor Bishop’s accomplishments and 2020 lifetime achievement award. In that recognition, McNair and Edwards (2021) recounted three of Bishop’s works. This literature review focuses on one: “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors.” McNair and Edwards succinctly summarized what this title means. In using the metaphor or analogy of the mirror - Bishop meant the importance of a child being able to see themselves reflected in the book(s). Compared to using the window, where it was just as important for a child to see others - to learn about others’ race and culture. Lastly, the sliding glass door, was a metaphor for moving back and forth - and moving into the story to fully imagine and immerse oneself (including putting oneself in the characters’ place) (McNair & Edwards, 2021).

### ***Next Steps - Bringing it All Together***

Nemec-Loise (2015) quoted Jacqueline Woodson, famous children’s author, as saying, “Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together” (p. 36). Really that says it all. Besides Nemec-Loise, Crisp et al. (2016), Ahiyya (2022), Lathey (2022), as well as, Ebarvia (2024), all say that action must be taken to bring (for purposes of this literature review, racial) diversity into the classroom. In asking the research question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* - The literature review findings showed having a well developed library representing a diverse student population involves more than just books.

Ebarvia (2024) emphasized that the work begins with teachers understanding themselves. Also, Nemec-Loise (2015) highlighted the five tenets from “Everyday Advocacy,” with the first being to be informed (p. 36). Being informed can involve various activities, such as reading materials on diversity in classrooms and libraries and discussing the role of diversity with supervisors or administration. Ebarvia (2024) stressed that being informed means being self-aware and addressing one's biases. Additionally, Ebarvia (2024) and Hammond (2015) pointed out that bias does have a place in learning, as the brain relies on previous information to process and learn new information.

In addition, Ebarvia (2024) mentions additional areas of bias, e.g., curse of knowledge, as she explains, knowing a subject so well, makes it hard to teach it (p. 32). Similar to Kempf’s research (2020), Ebarvia stated that one does not just switch off their biases, “To be *antibias*, then is not about completely eliminating our biases - a lofty and impossible goal....There’s no magical moment where bias just ends and we never have to deal with it again” (2024, p. 8). The definition of anti-bias according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary: “Opposing or prohibiting unfair discrimination against people based on race, religion; ... counteracting bias” (2024). To review Kempf’s (2020) research findings quickly, they found that to manage teacher biases, it appears necessary to take the time to work through them - to make any change.

In more explicit terms or even instructions, Nemec-Loise stated librarians or teachers should “engage with your community” (2015, p. 37). She suggested the teacher or librarian go outside their space to talk to people in the community (parents, kids, colleagues, supervisors, etc.) to develop and collaborate with “diversity partner(s)” (p.

37). Again Kempf's (2020) research largely suggested reading, yes; however, reflection, as well as discussion with others, was also important. Additionally, Ebarvia's (2024) research largely represented self-work for the teacher. However, it also involved engaging activities with students - getting to know them; getting to know others from different backgrounds.

Nemec-Loise's *Everyday Advocacy* tenets continued with speaking out (2015, p. 37). Ebarvia (2024) had strong words that hopefully invoke a call to share the message with diversity partner(s). She stated, "I cannot help wondering how the stories we read in school – and the ways we interact with those stories – have led us to this moment in time. Are we – through our reading and nonreading, through our action and inactions – socialized into people who care about others or who care only about ourselves?" (p. 9). Again Nemec-Loise (2015) strongly encourages to take the next step and get out there - share the *antibias* message - diversity message to anyone and everyone.

Nemec-Loise (2015) continues to the next tenet in *Everyday Advocacy*: Get inspired, by offering several resources to get teachers started. These resources include websites to provide additional information (e.g., ALSC's *dia* initiative listed on page 37). Ahiyya (2022) and Ebarvia (2024) offer resources or ideas on where to find resources. They both referenced picture books and activities to use in the classroom. Additionally, Ahiyya's book, *Rebellious Read Alouds*, offers many suggested picture books, discussions, and even some lesson plans to aid in navigating talking about race (2022).

The last tenet is "share your advocacy story" (Nemec-Loise, 2015). She encourages getting the message out and "verbing diversity" (p. 37) by telling others how you have made a change or a difference in your classroom, community (or library).



**Utilizing Culturally Relevant Texts.** Sharma and Christ (2017) continued the advocacy of “verbing diversity” by suggesting there are five steps to choosing culturally relevant books in the classroom. As with any important change, the first step is awareness - the acknowledgement that culturally relevant pedagogy is beneficial in the classroom; the second step is getting to know the students, their cultures, interests - which has also been suggested by Hammond (2015) and Ebarvia (2024). Third, teachers need to find culturally relevant texts either through lists, author or library resources or supplemental reference guides, if available. The fourth step involves having a set of parameters for the books that are chosen; lastly, Sharma and Christ (2017) suggest having discussion materials to match the culturally relevant texts - also suggested by Ahiyya (2022) - where she incorporates read alouds, with discussion points, with specific culturally relevant picture books. These would also lend themselves to think alouds - where the teacher stops at a predetermined point to discuss ideas on a page.

**Incorporating the Students.** Time to bring in the students. So far in this literature review, many of the educator researchers have made systematic observations, collected data, and made suggestions regarding what teachers should do in the classroom. Deman-Sparks et al. (2020) suggested the conversations include the students. That is, combining culturally responsive teaching (CRT) with teachers committed to “verbing diversity” by having uncomfortable conversations about race with students (Ahiyya, 2022; Hobson, 2014; Lathey, 2022).

**Collaborating with Educators.** Mabbott (2017) stated there is a need for racially diverse books in the classroom and connects that to critical race theory. In my professional experience, there has been a misnomer and misunderstanding with critical

race theory, in that it gets confused with the other CRT - culturally responsive teaching. For that reason, it was largely left out of the literature review. That being said, Mabbott did refer to critical race theory in explaining the importance of the “we need diverse books”(WNDB) campaign, which started in 2014. The article explained the role of libraries and library and information science (LIS), and how they could help keep the WNDB’s movement going - which was/is to increase diversity in books, as well as increase the number of multicultural authors (Mabbott, 2017). Though this campaign was going on in 2017, now through social justice, the movement can help make the change. It can also answer the research question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* - by helping get the word out, as well as encouraging “diverse books” (characters and authors) by creating demand - we are fulfilling our social justice advocacy. In addition, the social-justice call circles back to the beginning of my journey ~ Educators as Allies. With combined efforts of researchers, new books from Ahiyya and Ebarvia, as well as a renewed calling for allyship - the literature review says the work is here; the data is clear; and we know what we need. Now this information needs to get out - not just to a teacher here and there - but everywhere. Combined with Educators as Allies and their colleague, Seema Pothini, and her work with Learning with Justice, as well as the Minnesota chapter of National Association of Multicultural Education (MN-NAME), I will help carry out the call to be an ally.

### ***Summary***

Social justice is needed to make racial representation in classroom bookshelves a reality. Many researchers and entities have been working diligently to bring diverse

books to the classroom - Crisp et al. (2016), Ebarvia (2024), and Lathey (2022) suggest that racially diverse books in the classroom not only help students of color - seeing themselves in books, they help all students - through culturally sustaining pedagogy. Seeing multiple races and cultures represented in books helps students with higher order thinking, expands brain power, and is caring and collaborative (Hammond, 2015). Notwithstanding, books on the shelves is just the beginning. Based on the research stated here, the library becomes an extension of the racial representation in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

When I first began the literature review, I problematized the notion of what it means for a teacher to have classroom materials that are reflective of students from a myriad of cultural backgrounds. I ultimately settled on *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* While conducting the review, common themes quickly emerged that I used as a guide for answering my research question. As a result, the focus of this literature review developed into a way for teachers to establish a classroom library that is culturally relevant and thus, a way of being. The important conclusion is that representation does matter, but cannot be limited to the library only. Findings indicated that teachers must incorporate culturally thinking ways and doing that is deeply embedded into their daily practices, ways of being, curriculum, and classroom climate. A secondary aspect is for teachers to adopt a social justice lens that includes racial representation context throughout the classroom. Moreover, these salient themes articulated a necessity for teachers to have a well established culturally responsive classroom as a foundation for a classroom library that is representative of a racially diverse student population.

In summation, the research shows it is evident that racial representation in books is not only important, it is imperative. Starting with *Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Glass Door* author, Dr. Rudine Bishop, who found that students need to see themselves reflected in children's literature. That was my theory before starting the literature review. However, after reading works by Bishop and others, I found that it is also important for (all) students to see many cultures and races represented - and to make sure students see each other - to facilitate this, teachers need to establish a culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) within the classroom. Specific to racial representation, the authors consulted (Lathey, e.g.) stated the importance of students of color to see themselves, as well as White students to see other student's race and culture in books.

Additional findings indicated that when students of color are in a safe learning environment, meaning they do not have to worry about stereotypes or other risks, they can focus on learning. Furthermore, when focusing on building a library that is racially representative, that really is using the tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogy. When teachers follow CSP, it becomes inherent that the books on the classroom shelves will be racially representative of the diverse student population.

Thus, findings of this literature review indicated that students of color need to be reflected and represented in the classroom. As mentioned, the best way teachers can establish a racially representative classroom library is by following culturally sustaining pedagogy. However, a central location was lacking to find resources to help teachers establish a classroom environment that lends itself to being safe, inclusive and racially representative. As a way to address this gap, I recommend putting together a reference guide for teachers to use to help establish, not only a classroom library, but their entire

classroom climate. I feel this is important because when teachers attend professional development, they are largely left to find the classroom materials necessary on their own. There is a vast amount of resources out there - and to help teachers obtain them in one central location would help me fulfill my goal of being an educator ally; while also helping establish a racially representative library and classroom of my own.

In the next chapter, I address *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* - as well as further connect the literature review to the project rationale. Additionally in Chapter Three, I describe the project in detail, including: an overview, audience, setting and timing. Lastly, in Chapter Four, I discuss the collection and contents of the reference guide, as well as reflect on the project as a whole, including the learning and growing of an educator.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

The gap that emerged from the literature review seemed to be a lack of a central location to find multicultural resources. In my own experiences of cultural proficiency, through either professional development or Hamline University, there was a lack of resource materials to reference or gauge whether there was racial representation of the students in my classroom. Through the capstone project and research, I set out to answer this question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

After compiling data in the literature review, it was apparent there continues to be a need for a focus on multicultural education. Through a social justice lens, academia authors, Ahiyya and Ebarvia, encourage inclusivity - using culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). They believe educators need to focus on a number of elements in order to (racially) represent students in the classroom. Through mindfulness and strategic steps, they can walk a teacher(s) through establishing a classroom that will be racially representative of the students. Additionally, Will and Najarro (2022) wrote “culturally sustaining pedagogy says that students of color should not be expected to adhere to white middle-class norms, but their own cultural ways of being should be explored, honored, and nurtured by educators” (*What is culturally sustaining pedagogy? section*).

Even though I have attended cultural proficiency professional development each year, including Educators as Allies, there were many new learnings from the literature review. The whole point of social justice: provide a new lens of perspective, as well as,

living out “when you know better, do better,” ~ Maya Angelou’s famous quote. After attending Educators as Allies training, I knew I wanted to do better. Hammond (2015) stated, “It is our responsibility to create the right conditions for optimum learning” (p. 50). When combined with the literature review, it became clear that what would help me in my classroom, would most likely help others. It would also fulfill my objective of allyship - that I do my part to be racially representative as well as aid in being a social justice advocate. Therefore, I set out to answer the question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* The goal I set for myself was to become an educator ally; to help students do better, I want to help educators be better. Thus, the product I created was a resource guide to help teachers establish a multicultural classroom that goes beyond books on the shelves. In the subsequent sections, I talk about the project details. Since education is ever-evolving, the guide will be fluid - as we continue to learn and evolve, so will the guide.

### **The Project Overview**

The literature review, combined with my past experiences, made me realize what has been missing - a central location of resources to help me establish a classroom that represents an increasingly diverse population. This resource guide would help me, as well as other colleagues, establish a racially representative classroom that goes beyond books on the shelves. Many resources came together from the literature review; they were further collected, vetted, and assembled. Since a major part of establishing an inclusive and racially representative classroom happens at the beginning of the school year, the resource guide is shared with teaching colleagues during the preparation week prior to the first week of school. Since the document is in a reference resource form - guide - teachers

can refer to it throughout the year. In addition, they can pick and choose which parts of the resource guide they would like to use.

### **Audience**

The research question infers helping colleagues; the initial audience benefitting from this project were my direct coworkers. There are about 30 teachers in my current school. It is a private, parochial school in the southeast metro area, serving kindergarten - eighth grade. Since the research question started as an elementary focus, the first teachers to see and use the guide were elementary colleagues. That being said, within the literature review, most of the research reviewed was, in fact, ***not*** age specific. Even so, the initial focus was on elementary age students; thus, my main audience, initially was kindergarten - fifth grade teachers (20), support staff (5-10), and administrators (3). I envisioned teachers utilizing this guide to not only establish a racially representative classroom library, but also their entire classroom environment - in order to be representative of the increasing diversity within the school. The reference guide can be utilized by practicing teachers (or student teachers), brand new and veteran teachers. The practice of using the guide includes a reflection piece in order to continue to reflect on one's own teaching practices and where they can improve their CSP (culturally sustaining pedagogy) to be not only inclusive in the area of literature, but also the entire classroom. In addition, there was also a goal of being inclusive so that all students benefit from all students' cultural and racial backgrounds.

### **Setting and Timing**

Since the guide is largely useful in setting up the classroom environment, it lends itself to be available to teachers during the week prior to the start of school (in my area,



called “workshop week”). Each year, the guide would be presented or available at a meeting within workshop week, where, at minimum, the elementary staff would all be in one place. That is, to best serve everyone’s time to explain what the resource is, the rationale behind it, as well as how to use the resource - scheduled for no more than one hour. Since there are many different areas of the resource to reference, each individual teacher/grade level would receive their own guide and determine how best to use it for their classrooms. ‘Part 2’ of the resource distribution would be on their own time, although, still during the week prior to school starting. Within this time, there is room for personal reflection; assessing implicit bias; and/or assessing what is missing (or too much of) in the classroom(s). The greatest benefit would be to reflect before and after Part 2 - this can be done prior to setting up the classroom or once complete. ‘Part 3’ includes a scheduled hour at the end of the week for teachers to gather again and share the journey, any reflections, or aha moments. At this time, they would also fill out a short efficacy survey about the guide. The assessment consists of no more than three questions: Scale of 1-5 - Did you find the guide helpful? What was the most helpful? (why/why not optional); and Is there a resource you use that is missing? (also optional).

In utilizing the resource guide, the teachers can take on as little or as much as they can during the prep week - before school starts. They could continue to refer to the guide throughout the year. In addition, the way I envisioned the resource guide to be best utilized, is it continues to be changed and/or added to over the years. Based on the literature review, it seemed to fit that the best culturally sustaining pedagogical practice is to reflect on the previous year: what to do differently or what resources/materials are

needed in the classroom - the resource guide would be an asset here as well. The implication is that education is ever evolving and thus so should the guide.

### **Professional Development Considerations**

Even though my vision for the guide is to be a teacher resource and not explicitly professional development, some learning tenets for professional development and adult learning were taken into consideration. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) to be successful at delivering new teacher learning to teachers, means that the information was used to “change teacher practices” and “improve student learning outcomes” (p. v). Based on the ideas of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), in order to make change probable, the professional development, or in this case, the resource guide, needs to have these elements:

- Content focused: the information in the guide contains multiple content areas - but its focus will answer the research question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*
- Supports collaboration: even though the resource guide gives teachers information to answer the above research question, it also contains additional links to culturally sustaining pedagogical practices. Further, it can be a launch pad for additional conversations and collaboration among teachers attending the workshop, to fully make the guide a fluid resource.
- Uses models of effective practice: the resource guide has the basics listed in order to fulfill the research question; however, it will also contain links to authors, culturally sustaining pedagogical practices, as well as, industry websites, blogs and webinars.

These are three of seven elements out of Darling-Hammond's list of tenets to be mindful of when conducting professional development. Since my project is a resource guide, these three were the focus when creating the guide.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) suggest that having administrative support as well as the ability to make any curriculum and other materials available to teachers is necessary for success. This is why the guide is both necessary and prudent. The findings from the research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) indicate that many professional development programs lack the necessary materials to adequately support teachers. This aligns with my own experiences and was the reason behind the design of this product. There was a noticeable absence of centrally located resources to help teachers in creating a racially representative classroom and classroom library.

### **The Product**

Technically, the tangible product is a reference guide for teachers. It was made available online and in pdf printable format. The guide includes helpful information (in a quick, easy to read format) to aid teachers in setting up or establishing or reinventing their classrooms. The reference guide contains the following, at minimum:

- Recommended culturally sustaining pedagogical books
- Online website resources (e.g., APA)
- Recommended websites (e.g., Educators as Allies; National Association of Multicultural Education; Learning for Justice)
- Recommended TED Talks (re: education and links)
- Links to check implicit bias (or other biases); as well as additional resources

- Lastly, a section to record goals and reminders; as well as, a section to journal the journey

## **Summary**

Within the literature review, arose an opportunity to assist colleagues and myself with a reference resource guide. This guide provides ways to create and establish a classroom that is racially representative across an increasingly diverse classroom and school. The guide contains resources and links to assist teachers in establishing a culturally sustaining pedagogical classroom, as well as answer the question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

Next, in Chapter Four, I reflect on the project as a whole - connecting the research question to the literature review - and eventually how that connected to the product. Within the final chapter, I provide a reflection - a look back at the completed project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Project Reflection

#### Introduction / Overview

Brainstorming capstone topics, one of the areas I was most interested in was equity in literature. Realizing this can be myopic, and at the same time, broad, I struggled with narrowing down the research question. After doing some preliminary research, the question found me. The research question I sought to answer was: *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?*

The question was important for two reasons: my background and the increasingly diverse classrooms where I teach. Even though I grew up in an area of White space - my hometown, school classmates, spouse, etc., I have always been interested in equity. I went back to school in my 40s, with what I thought was an open -and antiracist- mind. Through a myriad of experiences, I learned that I needed to open my eyes; check my implicit biases; and dig in and learn - then learn some more. Within my classroom, I have experienced a growing diversity among the school children/community. I felt it was important to learn how to establish a classroom library that represented or “mirrored” the students that occupy that space.

The structure of this chapter is a look back at where we started and how far we have come; with most likely some distance yet to go. The first area I reflected upon was the major findings from the project, mainly the literature review. It can be a vast area - talking about equity and diversity in literature; however, one area that kept coming up was multicultural education. Next, I addressed the major findings from the literature review with a brief recap of the findings. Toward the end of this chapter, I looked at the

implications and limitations of this project. Looking beyond the major findings, I listed what this product could continue to mean, for education, for colleagues, as well as myself. Lastly, I looked back on the project as a whole: what I learned; how I grew; the limitations I encountered; as well as, the future for the product.

### **Major Findings**

There were two major findings for me personally. One of the findings was there was a lot more to my research question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* That is, in order to establish a racially represented classroom library, a teacher should practice culturally sustaining pedagogy or CSP (Hammond, 2015). In addition, I experienced an ‘aha moment.’ I knew of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), in that a teacher should build relationships and ask about prior knowledge, for example. In other professional development - I knew to be mindful of classroom layout. However, the aha moment was in culturally sustaining pedagogy - the tenet of complete classroom inclusivity - meaning the classroom should mirror or be representative of classroom diversity. Albeit, I had only been teaching a short time, I realized the classroom decor, e.g., reflected me. In addition, I felt I was following CRT - by being mindful and respectful of different cultures. However, my teaching pedagogy was to invite students of color into *My* space - which really meant, my White space. In reading Hammond (2015), Ahiyya (2022), and Ebarvia (2024), culturally sustaining pedagogy tenets mean that every aspect of the classroom (decor, books, lessons) needs to be inclusive - that is, instead of “including” students of color into my space, I need to work on recreating the space to be equitable, diverse and inclusive. In short, I need to change.

### Literature Review Takeaways and Implications

When I first began the literature review, I problematized the notion of what it means for a teacher to have classroom materials that are reflective of students from a myriad of cultural backgrounds. I ultimately settled on *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* While conducting the review, common themes quickly emerged that I used as a guide for answering my research question. As a result, the focus of this literature review developed into a way for teachers to develop a classroom library that is culturally relevant and thus, a way of being.

The important conclusion was that representation does matter, but cannot be limited to the library only. Findings indicated that teachers must incorporate culturally thinking ways and doing that is deeply embedded into their daily practices, ways of being, curriculum, and classroom climate. A secondary aspect included teachers adopting a social justice lens that includes racial representation context throughout the classroom. Moreover, these salient themes articulated a necessity for teachers to have a well established culturally responsive classroom as a foundation for a classroom library that is representative of a racially diverse student population.

In summation, the research showed it is evident that racial representation in books is not only important, it is imperative. Starting with *Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Glass Door* author, Dr. Rudine Bishop, who found that students need to see themselves reflected in children's literature. That was my theory before starting the literature review. However, after reading works by Bishop and others, I found that it is also important for (all) students to see many cultures and races represented - and to make sure students see

each other - to facilitate this, teachers need to establish a culturally sustaining pedagogy within the classroom. Specific to racial representation, the authors consulted (Lathey, e.g.) stated the importance of students of color to see themselves, as well as, White students to see other student's race and culture in books.

Additional findings indicated that when students of color are in a safe learning environment, meaning they do not have to worry about stereotypes or other risks, they can focus on learning. Furthermore, when focusing on building a library that is racially representative, that really is using the tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogy. When teachers follow CSP, it becomes inherent that the books on the classroom shelves will be racially representative of the diverse student population.

Thus, findings of this literature review indicated that students of color need to be reflected and represented in the classroom. As mentioned, the best way teachers can establish a racially representative classroom library is by following culturally sustaining pedagogy. However, a central location was lacking to find resources to help teachers establish a classroom environment that lends itself to being safe, inclusive and racially representative.

The implication, then, of the literature review was first and foremost to address this gap. Further, I recommended putting together a reference guide for teachers to use to help establish, not only a classroom library, but their entire classroom climate. I felt this was important because generally when teachers attended professional development, they were largely left to find the classroom materials necessary on their own. There is a vast amount of resources out there - and helping teachers obtain them in one central location



would help me fulfill my goal of being an educator ally; while also helping establish a racially representative library and classroom of my own.

### **Reflecting Back**

Reflecting back over the capstone journey, I first am thankful. With what I thought were progressive thoughts in my teens, early adult years, and even now - were grossly inadequate. I am thankful for the opportunity to learn from my professors and friends, as well as new friends - peer and content reviewers. Further, I am thankful for the educators and educator researchers, like Hammond, Ahiyya, and Ebarvia, who work tirelessly to get their messages across to other lifelong learners, me included. Although the learning is not yet complete - just like the resource guide created in this journey, learning is ever-evolving.

There were two areas that were quite frustrating: landing on the formal research question, and the never-ending, literally tons of research in the area of equity in literature. If it were not for an official capstone timeline, I could still be looking at peer-reviewed literature sources. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, the question ended up finding me. Certainly I was interested in equity in literature as a topic. Further, with new classroom books, I was curious about the topic; however, the question really was not completely formed until well into the literature review. Secondly and quite honestly, as I reflected back on the project, I still came across new information sources.

That being said, I am immensely proud of the end product. In the years since earning my teaching license and completing professional development, like a really good movie, I left wanting more. In essence, I am and will continue to be a lifelong learner. However, as I continued through the literature review process, it became abundantly clear

what had been missing - a centrally located resource. Even while reading the literature, I came across websites, blogs, etc., that would fit nicely in one-central location. While compiling resources to vet and eventually include in the resource guide, I continued to learn. Overall, I learned an enormous amount of content; but most importantly I grew as an educator and as a person. My hope will continue to be that others do as well.

### ***Limitations***

As with any project, large or small, limitations are bound to play a part. Certainly this project was no exception. The first limitation actually was the never-ending amount of content. It was extremely difficult narrowing down the options, which had to be done for the sake of timing and length. Reflecting back, I feel I went the right direction - the direction the literature review took me; mainly because of the concluding findings.

That being said, that would also be a limitation - does everyone already know what I uncovered? There were articles that I found dating back to 2009; at that time, I did not have any clue of culturally relevant anything. However, as I conducted the literature review, there were still major findings coming out of websites and recently published books, I realized I must be on the right path.

Lastly, I ran into some limitations on the product itself. The first was how to best disseminate the information. My goal for the guide was to be ever-changing or ever-evolving. If that was to happen, then what was the best way to get the resource in the hands of educators. In the end, I decided it would continue to be in the intended format, a resource guide in the form of a downloadable document. The next hurdle was 'teaching' my colleagues - some of them have been teaching for decades. However, I did not let that stop me from my goal of being an educator ally. In addition, I knew this would be a

limitation - the amount of time set aside in 'teacher workshop' to teach my colleagues about the guide: what it is, how to use it, and then share their own findings - was not enough. I knew going in that they would be anxious about getting through it quickly in order to get to their next to-do items. However, the intended design of the guide was to be able to keep going back to the resource. To that end, the project was a success.

### ***The Product ~ Now***

The culmination of the project was a product that I did not realize I was missing until I started researching articles for the literature review. In this current form, the guide was set up as an information resource, for sure; however, in its guide format, it lends itself more to showing an educator where to look for more information. That is, with the guide providing lists of websites, books, etc., the educator would be able to choose which direction to go. In setting up the guide in this manner, it alleviated me from worrying about teaching educators what they already knew; and it fit the education philosophy of teach how to learn not what to learn.

In the product's current form, a teacher could look for additional resources for setting up or revitalizing their classroom, then return to the guide at a later date. It is not a use once and done; it was designed to be a resource the teacher could continue to use. They could use it at the beginning of the year - use it for adjusting biases, set up the classroom; and then, journal and reflect at the end of the year to see what worked and what did not. Then, the best part of the resource guide - they could use a different part of the guide the following year.

### ***What the Future Holds***

The complexity of the product, the resource guide, was designed to be ever-evolving, which means, in the future, there will be information added to the guide. The unknown would be how long culturally sustaining pedagogy will be taught before it changes to something else. At what point does something get taken out of the guide? These remain unknowns for now. The goal was equity in literature; my personal goal is/was to be an educator ally. The goal for the product, the resource guide, was to help educators learn more and do better. When we need to learn more, the guide will evolve so we can do better.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

I am just so proud of this project, the outcome of learning, as well as the product - the resource guide. There were some important learnings found, as well as, growth as educators and people. I would like to end with this reflection, it is a quote taken from an article (within the literature review). Will and Najarro (2022) set out to write an article in/for *Education Week*, and it left a profound impact on me as an educator, but also as a White person - still largely in a White space, but currently growing in diversity.

“Schools are still places where white norms are considered the default standard in the curricula, behavioral expectations, linguistic practices, and more. Culturally sustaining pedagogy says that students of color should not be expected to adhere to white middle-class norms, but their own cultural ways of being should be explored, honored, and nurtured by educators.” (2022, *Education Week*)

Before and after this capstone journey, I set a goal of being an educator ally. That meant, I pledged to not be silent, and to be proactive in sharing what I learn. To that end, I reflect again on my biggest take away from this capstone project, and the research question, *How can teachers establish a classroom library representative of a racially diverse student population?* In order to establish a racially diverse classroom, and thus library, then I need to practice culturally sustaining pedagogy. In doing so, the classroom will be representative of the student diversity **and** inclusive. Thus, the space will mirror and represent ALL in the classroom, teacher *and* students.

## APPENDIX

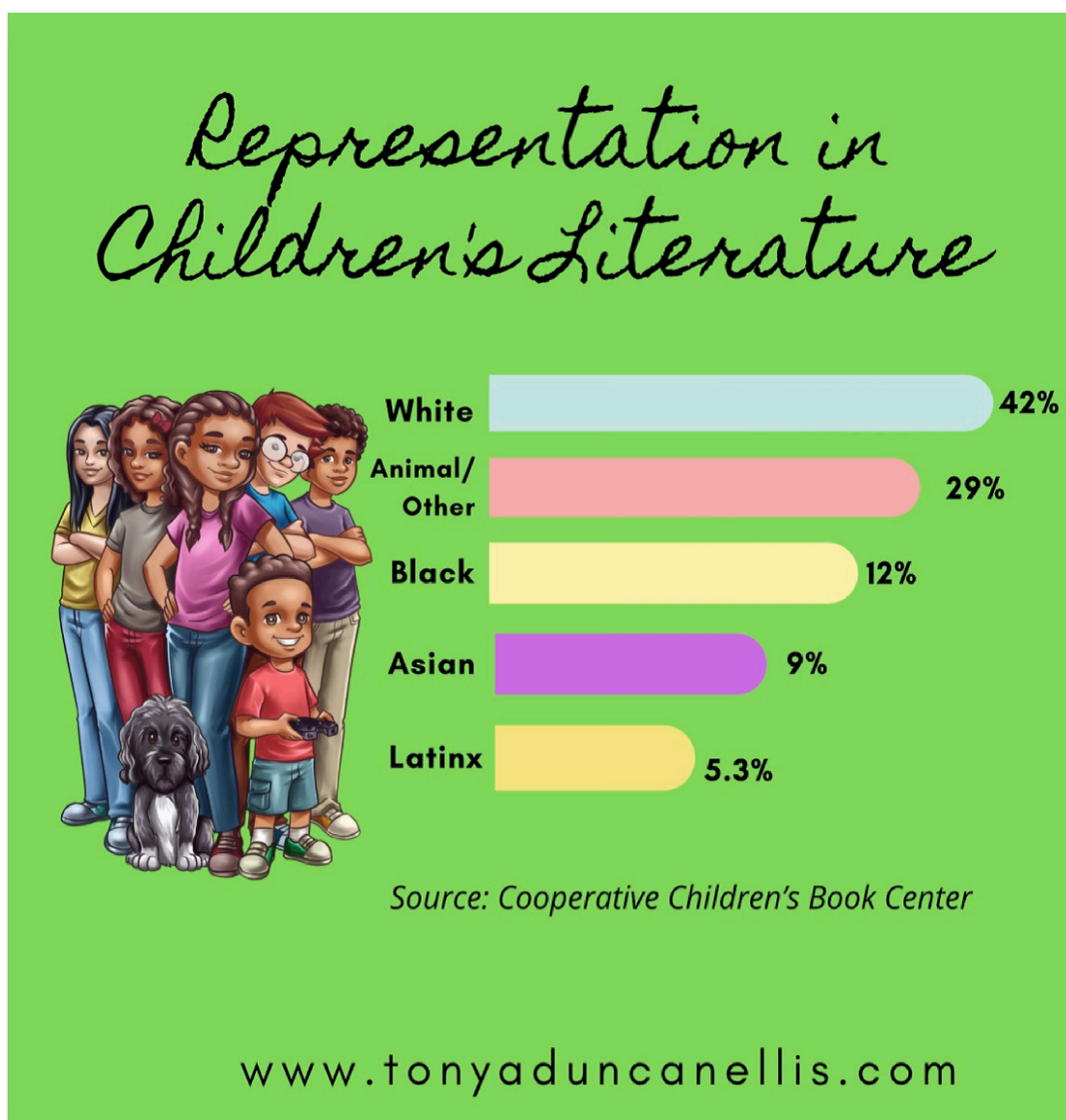
### List of Tables

Table 1: ELA classroom books counts and percentages by race (Sieben Classroom)

Race / Category	Main Character %	Author %	Illustrator %
White	27	72	53
Black	20	12	18
Animal	20	na	na
Asian	17	12	14
Latinx	7	3	4
Pacific Islander	3	<1	1
Native American	3	<1	–
Sample size	=118	=118	=107

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Tonya Duncan Ellis' Depiction of Representation (*posted on MARCH 5, 2021*)



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