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CRT AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE
HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

By

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

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| CHAPTER ONE: Introduction..... | 7 |
| Research Question..... | 10 |
| Personal Background and Motives..... | 10 |
| Project Rationale..... | 12 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 14 |
| CHAPTER TWO: Introduction..... | 15 |
| Culturally Relevant Pedagogy..... | 16 |
| What is CRT?..... | 17 |
| Is it Necessary?..... | 19 |
| How is CRT Implemented?..... | 21 |
| Challenges of Implementation..... | 24 |
| Tales of Triumph..... | 27 |
| Assessment of Implementation..... | 28 |
| Summary..... | 29 |
| Best Practices for Teaching Adults..... | 29 |
| Andragogy..... | 30 |
| Challenges of Implementation..... | 32 |
| Summary..... | 33 |
| Effective Professional Development..... | 34 |
| What does it look like? | 35 |
| Considerations..... | 36 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Challenges of Implementation..... | 37 |
| Making it Worthwhile..... | 39 |
| School Supports..... | 41 |
| Summary..... | 42 |
| Self-Reflection and Awareness..... | 42 |
| Reflection Linked to CRT..... | 44 |
| Challenges of Implementation..... | 46 |
| Summary..... | 46 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 47 |
| CHAPTER THREE: Project Outline..... | 48 |
| Research Paradigm..... | 49 |
| Methods..... | 51 |
| Demographics..... | 52 |
| Audience..... | 53 |
| Project Design..... | 53 |
| Timeline..... | 54 |
| Questionnaires..... | 55 |
| Summary..... | 56 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusions..... | 57 |
| Introduction..... | 57 |
| Major Learnings..... | 58 |
| Back to the Literature..... | 59 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Project Limitations..... | 61 |
| Implications..... | 62 |
| Future Impact..... | 63 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 64 |
| REFERENCES..... | 66 |

“I think we are all still trying to educate the students who used to go to school here and haven’t begun to address how to address the needs of our current students!”

-Anonymous High School Teacher

(Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 22)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the first-ring suburb where I teach, my relationship with the minority community is one that is continuously growing. I grew up in the community where I now work, and I often visit my dad who still lives there, which gives me some credibility with my students as I can relate to their experiences in the area. However, the city has changed a great deal in the 10 years since I was in high school. What was once a predominantly white area has now developed into a more diverse community due to gentrification in the big cities forcing low-income families out and into the suburbs. Our area has recently seen the construction of several low-income housing units used to accommodate the influx of population, as well as a multitude of single-family homes.

My relationship with my minority students is one that I am very protective of, because I have worked very hard to be a teacher who has a reputation as being fair and knows her students well. Out of my four level 1 Spanish classes, 59% of my students identify as members of a minority. The majority of these students identifying as African American, Asian, Latinx and Somalian. I have many families who stay in contact with me throughout their student's education at the high school even though I only teach freshmen. One mother in particular brings her twin boys to visit me during every set of conferences, even though they are now juniors, just to tell me what they've been up to, and it's usually nothing good! The boys saunter over to my table in the unpopulated gymnasium to tell me about their lives while their mother brings up the rear saying, "Ooh, Ms. Carlson! You won't believe what these boys of mine did!" There are lots of

jokes involved and “roasting” as we look for ways to get these boys to get to class on time, to do their homework, and to stop fighting in the halls. I thrive on the relationships I have created with the parents and students at my school and try to make a difference when I can. One of my biggest strengths as a teacher is that I know my students. I know who they are, what I can expect from them, and where they come from. To me, it is extremely important to have that kind of relationship with all of my students, but especially my minority students. The sad part is that I cannot say the same for every teacher.

Most of my Freshmen African American boys are very vocal and I have come to accept that as being an innate quality that I cannot, and should not, try to tame. It’s hard for them to wait to be called on, and even harder to not speak when I am speaking. But who says that’s the way the classroom is supposed to work? After a frustrating first 4 years of teaching, I have now done away with the raising of hands and instead allow my students to yell out answers or questions that they may have. To capitalize on their interpersonal skills, I incorporate more speaking practice than ever into my Spanish 1 lessons. Instead of writing essays and blogs, we focus on having conversations with each other with an end goal of being able to speak to a native Spanish-speaker for at least 5 minutes by the end of the course.

As much as I hate to say it, disparities in learning still exist in my classroom. In terms of grades alone, 96% of the Ds and Fs in my four level 1 classes belong to my minority, ELL, and low-income students. I know my classroom is not the only one where these challenges exist. Due to the struggles my African American boys face with grades

and behavior, I have slowly been changing how I teach to fit their needs. No more written homework. Ever. Some of students are too busy being the most responsible one in their household, and it's not fair for me to add to their workload. We start the year out by promising each other that there will be no written homework as long as I get through my lesson every day. This means that my students are still expected to practice their Spanish at home and practice vocabulary, but have nothing to turn in for it. It is a classroom highly based on the honors system. I have also done away with the textbook. Our district recently purchased brand new textbooks, workbooks, and online textbooks, but yet they sit on my shelf gathering dust. My students do not learn best that way, and I'm not going to sacrifice their learning because someone decided that these textbooks are a one-size-fits-all. My students learn best from interpersonal activities, like games, songs, and speaking exercises.

My experience in my first four years teaching lower-level classes is what draws me back to the necessity for professional development that centers around CRT (culturally relevant teaching) and how to implement it into daily lessons. Students in the high school, as well as all levels, deserve to know that they are valued and appreciated no matter their race, color, religion, or socio-economic status. Currently, the education system in place is not quite geared towards the students sitting in our classrooms. Professional development is needed to teach teachers how to address inequities seen in the classroom as well as to teach how to implement culturally relevant strategies within content area.

Research Question

In this section I will explain the rationale that brings me to my area of focus and “burning question” of *How can I create professional development designed to help teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom?*

This is a question that I have chosen to research and answer in the following pages due to the gap in achievement that can be seen in my classroom and those of my colleagues, not to mention the attrition rates of our minority students throughout levels I-V of Spanish. The protocols and procedures we currently have are for the students who attended our school fifteen years ago. To meet the demands of a rapidly growing and changing community our content area needs to reflect the masses, which, in my case is the population of students of color. The students who would once sit in their seats, raise their hands to be called on, and furiously take notes while listening to a lecture are not the same kids who sit in my classroom in 2018. Times are changing and the way we teach has to progress.

Personal Background and Motives

My interest in initiating professional development surrounding this topic comes from my experiences with professional development where I teach. In my time in education, I have taught in four different buildings. While much of what we focused on in each building was different in terms of practices and policies, one thing remained constant: staff development was a bore. The topics chosen for professional development had the potential to be enlightening, such as covering the use of the “N word”, mindfulness, literacy, as well as a plethora of others. During one particularly stale

session, the woman sitting next to me fell asleep and continued to snore throughout the entire presentation. On any given PD day you can see several teachers playing games on their phones or texting, and some even retreating back to the good old days of paper and pencil entertainment to complete the crossword in the newspaper. In each of these staff development sessions, we were asked to sit and watch, possibly even take some notes. Until one day when we were given the opportunity to participate in an optional summer staff development session presented by ENVoY (Educational Non-Verbal Yardsticks). It was fabulous. We were asked to collaborate with our colleagues, create posters, and try out our newly learned classroom management techniques right then and there with our peers. I learned so much and I was so eager to put it into practice. That was one successful session out of the twenty-five professional development days I have participated in.

Keeping my lack of enthusiasm for professional development in mind, I was also struggling with the grades my students were earning in my level 1 Spanish class and my level 2. I was shocked at the differences between the two classes. The average grade in my level 1 class was 74%, while the average grade in my level 2 class was 91%. I decided to take a peek at student data. Out of the 110 students I had enrolled in my Spanish I classes, 75% identify as members of a minority, low-income, or ELL. With regards to my level 2 class, only 14% identified as minority, low-income or ELL. The problem was that I was teaching the same way to two very different and unique populations of students.

This topic is important to me as I truly believe that if given the opportunity, students of color, low-income students, and English Language Learners can find engagement and success in learning a foreign language if teachers even the playing field and work to incorporate home culture and appreciation into lesson plans. Differentiation is a real thing, but bigger than differentiating for our students, we need to differentiate how we teach to our classes and how we communicate with our students through culturally relevant teaching strategies. Connecting classroom instruction to student home-life or simply making an effort to get to know our students as individuals are just two ways in which culturally relevant strategies can be incorporated.

By integrating culturally relevant strategies I want all of my students to feel a boost in self-esteem and an enhanced desire to learn. There is a very diverse student body at my school, however the number of minority students enrolled in Spanish 2 compared to those enrolled in level 1 decreases by more than half and is unfortunately not a solid representation of our community. My hope is that by initiating professional development sessions, which include understanding how adults learn best, providing strategies for embedding culturally relevant teaching strategies in curriculum, identifying traits proven to be beneficial in professional development, as well as incorporating best practices for self-reflection, teachers will be able to attend effective PD sessions and successfully implement culturally relevant practices.

Project Rationale

This topic is professionally significant to me and to my colleagues due to the impact the education we provide has on our society. In her book, Ladson-Billings (2009)

described the legacy of racism and the effects of low expectations for our African American students and the ways in which our education system has not responded in a manner that can accurately remedy this situation. Where I teach, during the 2016-2017 school year, the achievement gap between white and African American students on both the math and reading portion of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment was 33%. Assuming that this number translates to our classrooms as well, there is a great deal that teachers can do to create a more equitable system for our kids. This starts with connecting to our kids to better understand what they need from us.

This topic is also of importance due to the benefits of second language acquisition that many of our minority students are missing out on by not progressing in Spanish. Assets such as improved analytical skills, increased creativity and problem-solving skills, as well as enhanced aptitude in memory and listening are just a few of the perks that these students are not able to take advantage of (Gabszewicz & Ginsburgh, 2011). Learning a foreign language also increases one's opportunities in fields like government, military, business, law, medicine, technology, imaging, and marketing as well (Gabszewicz & Ginsburgh, 2011). We set these kids up for failure in the "real world" when we can't equip them with what it takes to be successful.

I see these kids in my classroom daily. I get to know them, I earn their trust and I do my best to help them succeed each and every day, but it is so disheartening when they fail despite all of their efforts and those of my own. When students don't feel connected to their school and their teachers they are less likely to engage academically or socially,

which leads to worsened grades and halted progress (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Something tells me that the “system” isn’t working in their favor and it’s time for a change.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, by initiating an effective staff development surrounding CRT, I hope to decrease the achievement gap in my classroom and heighten the sense of community felt within our school. I also hope to spread the theory and strategies of culturally relevant pedagogy to the other teachers in my building through professional development sessions with the goal of making our school one that is welcoming, accepting, and fully prepared to teach a diverse group of students. In Chapter 2 I will discuss the necessity of culturally relevant teaching, best practices for teaching adults, core components of effective staff development, and the importance of teacher self-reflection.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Making the first strides towards cultural equity and awareness will require teachers to have open and honest conversations regarding privilege, cultural competence, and biases. Together, teachers will need to have discussions about these issues and their influence on curriculum and teaching practices as well as their impact on student and teacher relationships. Teachers must work towards implementing changes that will benefit student learning and relationships with staff, students, and the surrounding community. In order to achieve all of this, the decision must first be made about *“How can I create professional development designed to help teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom?”*

In this chapter, four components significant in the structuring and implementation of this professional development will be showcased: characteristics and benefits of culturally responsive teaching, best practices for adult learning, traits of effective staff development, and the benefits of teacher self-reflection. First, culturally relevant pedagogy is defined and analyzed for ease and effectiveness of implementation. Second, best practices for teaching adult learners in the 21st century are explained and critiqued. Third, presentational formats for professional development are weighed in terms of efficacy and feasibility, and lastly, the concept and importance of teacher self-reflection is outlined. Each of the facets of this literature review described above provide knowledge and guidance for the creation of an effective professional development

regarding culturally responsive pedagogy with the intent of creating a more inclusive community for teachers and students at the high school level.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

“The beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people.”

-Unknown

By the year 2039 the US Census Bureau has predicted that more than half of all students in public schools will be minority students with the population of white students declining to under 50% (Cochrane, 2017). In her book, *The Light in Their Eyes*, Nieto discussed the growing number of languages spoken in the U.S., “Approximately 55,000,000 people in the country speak a language other than English at home with Spanish speakers (34 million) far outnumbering speakers of the more than 460 other languages spoken in the country” (Pollock, 2008, 5). These statistics have quite large implications for educational practices, teachers, and students, as many educators struggle to connect to students from cultures other than their own. Success in school is often determined by achievement within the social structures that exist within a school which tend to center around white, middle-class goals as well as accommodation of a student’s home culture to that of the mainstream culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As seen in our school systems, despite the many attempts through tracking, remediation, additional programs, and increased budgets, the achievement gap between poor urban minority students and majority culture students is still in full swing. More of the same is clearly not the answer that teachers are looking for and students require.

In a school community, both students and teachers see the world through their own cultural lens. A cultural lens is defined as the way one sees and interprets the diverse cultures in society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). According to Moule in her book *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators* (2012), when students and teachers come from different cultures there is a “strong likelihood that sooner or later, they will miscommunicate by misinterpreting or misjudging the behavior of others” (p. 23). By being aware of these dynamics of differences and honoring them in the classroom, teachers can begin to teach the whole student and become cognizant of differing beliefs, assumptions, and opinions shared by those in the classroom. Finding strategies to meet the needs of a diverse group of students with differing economic and cultural backgrounds as well as distinctive learning styles has become a major focus for teachers in recent years, but there is still much ground to cover.

In the following section, culturally relevant teaching will be explained with research outlining the necessity of CRT, as well as models for interpretation, perceived challenges of integrating CRT, and instructions for assessing the impact of culturally responsive teaching.

What is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?

Research over the years has been fairly consistent concerning the qualities of a culturally relevant teacher. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching can be defined as a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning. The goal here is not to accommodate student culture to mainstream culture, but to do exactly the opposite and

accommodate the school culture to that of the student to form “a more dynamic and synergistic relationship between home/community structure and school culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 467). Teachers can implement culturally relevant strategies in the classroom by creating community, making class time social and communicative, developing authentic learning tasks, and by gamifying lessons. Caring for students within unequal social structures requires challenging the institutional inequity as we see it. We can do this through teaching with cultural responsiveness.

Culturally responsive teaching not only seeks to preserve the cultural differences seen in our students by welcoming them into the classroom, but also by connecting them to the curriculum through the incorporation of activities similar to their daily lives. The concept of establishing a strong classroom community where all are respected and cared for is one that is discussed by several prominent members in this field of research including Ladson-Billings (2009), Gay (2015), Landsman (2009), and Banks (2006). According to Gay (2015), culturally relevant pedagogy does not just consist of cultural diversity, but also societal dynamics, race, ethnicity, immigration, economy, and linguistics. Gay also highlighted that the complexities involved in successfully implementing CRT demand serious consideration in the planning and practices enacted. There are three areas of thought surrounding CRT that consist of the importance of teacher beliefs in cultural diversity, societal and school-based demographics, and the influence that culture has over teaching and learning (Gay, 2015).

Sharroky Hollie, one of the leading researchers in the area of culturally responsive teaching, has gone one step further in classifying the term CRT and instead refers to

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLR). He believes that CLR speaks to emphasize the importance of language within a culture. The use of home language is a crucial aspect of who a person is and also represents heritage, including family, community, and history.

Is it Necessary?

Culturally responsive teaching matters now more than ever. Much of teacher and student success comes from reading and reacting to scenarios that stem from cultural diversity and differences (Deady, K., 2017). Teachers need to become culturally competent, which is defined by Jean Moule as,

the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than your own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, learning specific bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that underlie cross-cultural teaching (Moule, 2012, p. 5).

According to the U.S. Census, one out of every five students speaks a language other than English at home. According to Teach Away, a leading careers and professional development platform for educational professionals, “As a result of this significant student demographic shift, a growing number of US teachers are struggling with how they can better serve students from cultures other than their own” (Swirla, 2017, para. 1). In 2016, Teach Away conducted a survey asking teachers to reflect on their areas of expertise and areas of which they wanted to improve. Results showed that the majority of teachers identified a gap in their teaching practices, more specifically, the area of CRT (Swirla, 2017). Yet, despite the increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse

students, teacher preparation programs continue to lag in embracing CRT. As reported by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, “Estimates show that only one third of US states require teachers to study cultural diversity or to participate in a teaching practicum in a culturally diverse setting” (Swirla, 2008, para. 5). According to an article written for National Education Association by Brenda Álvarez,

Instances of inequities and injustices highlighted how quality programs are inaccessible to many students of color, students as young as five are telling Spanish-speaking classmates to go back to Mexico, schools with large populations of students of color lack access to technology, and some teacher attitudes perpetuate ideas about which certain groups of students, such as kids who have a disability, can and cannot do. (Álvarez, 2017, para. 4)

The cultural gap that exists between students and their teachers is one that can play a major role in students’ academic performance and can contribute to achievement gaps among groups of students. The US Department of Education has estimated that black children are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended from preschool than white children. Looking at the same statistic from a different vantage point, black children make up 19% of the United States preschool children, but account for over half of the suspensions (“Early Learning,” 2018). In *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*, Jean Moule posited that “Schools may inadvertently make students feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. Students and parents may not trust the motives and abilities of educators because of past experiences with the system. They may believe they will not be

understood culturally or have their needs met” (2012, p. 6). Historically, in interactions involving the education system and families of color a sense of trust and understanding has been lacking.

The changing demographics in the US are clearly visible within its secondary populations as well as the elementary population. As schools around the country are becoming more and more diverse, it is of tantamount importance that the educators who serve those populations evolve and grow with the community. Traditional methods of teaching are not the only ways teachers can connect with students in the year 2018.

How is CRT Implemented?

Culturally responsive teaching is rooted in principles of differentiated instruction that link content with both students’ ancestral and contemporary culture (Landsman, 2009). Generally, culturally relevant teachers create classroom climates that are respectful of individual differences, while also being inclusive enough to help students understand the cultures of their peers. Experiential learning and cooperative learning are two of the most common teaching styles present in culturally relevant classrooms (Byrd, 2016).

Like many others in this area of study, Hollie (2012) discusses the importance of moving away from a deficit mentality when considering the language and culture of populations such as Mexican Americans, Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans. For many teachers, the first thought is to lament on what these students don’t have. They are lacking study skills, they lack initiative, or they lack the traits necessary for academic success. What these students do bring to the classroom is not

usually seen as an asset, but as a liability (2012, p. 31). According to the 2014 Center for American Progress Report, high school teachers believe that high-poverty, black, and Hispanic students are 53, 47, and 42 percent less likely to graduate from college compared to their white peers (Boser, Wilhelm & Hanna, 2014). Instead of confronting underserved students with a deficit mindset, teachers need to work towards a surplus mentality that focuses on the assets these students bring into the classroom. One asset that is generally overlooked is a student's ability to speak a second language. In her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Gay discusses the importance of adapting a "language plus" mindset in appreciation of the knowledge these second language students have acquired. This can be done through recognizing disconnects between home and school life, motivating students by identifying their strengths, or finding alternative ways to engage students (2010).

There are many strategies that can be used to implement CRT in the classroom to foster the creation of relationships and cultural appreciation. Highlighting how topics in the content area may apply to students, grouping students with different classmates to share perspectives, and encouraging discussion to problem solve are all a manner in which CRT can be fostered. Another way to implement CRT is by simply getting to know one's students. This can be done through the distribution of surveys and questionnaires, holding open conversations, or gathering information about learning styles and experiences. Another manner to get cross-cultural knowledge of one's students is through other types of cultural learning such as how to listen, how to value differences, and how to call into question the norms in which one is raised (Moule, 2012, p. 23).

These understandings are sometimes a natural byproduct of time spent in a racially diverse classroom and cannot always be taught (Moule, 2012).

Another strategy used is presenting new concepts using student vocabulary during instruction to deliver relatable content. In Ladson-Billings exemplary book, *The Dream-Keepers*, she described eight teachers who are considered to be successful in teaching African American students. She tells of one teacher in particular who uses rap music as a vehicle for teaching poetry, which enables her students to outperform others who were not supplied with the same approach to instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2009). By presenting concepts in student-friendly language, teachers can open the door to present challenging skills while simultaneously engaging learners.

Lastly, by gamifying lessons, content and delivery can be diversified and appeal to different learning styles. Games increase motivation in education while setting clear goals and showing progress throughout the course which is also a great motivator (Guido, 2018). Table 1.1 offers a multitude of ideas for the incorporation of culturally relevant strategies.

Table 1.1

Strategies for Incorporating CRT

(Adapted from Guido, 2018)

| <i>Implementation of CRT</i> | <i>Explanation</i> |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Calling on all students | Encourage students to share their own experiences and opinions. Calling on students without their hands raised acclimatizes them to speaking in front of their peers. |
| Using media to positively portray | Using media is proven to boost engagement levels in the classroom, but using movies, books, and even posters that show a variety of cultures being depicted |

| | |
|--|--|
| diverse cultures | in a positive light helps students to see themselves as capable of more. |
| Peer teaching | Students who read and discuss with partners typically score higher on tests and assessments. This is due to the critical thinking skills, discussions, and rationalizing that occurs in their own words. |
| Establishing cooperative base groups | Assigning cooperative groups allows students to learn from each other and about each other in an academic setting. These groups encourage students to make sense of previously taught lessons in their own words and process information with their peers. |
| Incorporating problem-based learning | When presenting a real-world problem for students, typically there will be a cultural link, and because students can apply different approaches to solve the question, they will undoubtedly rely on their own unique cultural perspectives. |
| Involving parents with take home letters | This is a core piece of any culturally relevant teacher. Parents and guardians act as the main educator of their children and initiating communication with them cultural context and open the possibility of parent involvement. |
| Utilizing learning stations | Students respond differently to different types of content due to culture, learning needs, socialization or preference. A range of information can be provided to each student by setting up stations that use a unique skill related to the lesson. |

The activities and strategies for implementing culturally responsive teaching discussed above will become an integral part of the professional development sessions created. Not only is it important for teachers to read and learn about these concepts, but it is also necessary that teachers are able to take time to attempt these new learnings as well as reflect and assess their implementation.

Challenges of Implementation

While implementing culturally relevant pedagogy is clearly a topic of much discussion and excitement, there are also several difficulties that can play a role in its actualization. One of the most significant challenges is that of a white teacher's struggle to create a classroom that is culturally responsive. In her book, *A White Teacher Talks About Race*, Landsman touched on several of the issues related to teaching in a diverse

school as a white teacher. Landsman's book acknowledges whites' nervousness about discussing race, as well as racial ignorance, and the concerning issue of color blindness. She also realizes that she "cannot reach certain students the way someone of their own skin color or culture can reach them" (2010, p. 78). The account presented in this book is one which affords insights into classroom race relations through the eyes of a white, female teacher. In congruence with Landsman, Cochrane (2017) quotes the European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness (2012, p.2) surrounding the paradox that exists in order for white people to engage in social justice, "Our knowledge is partial and evolving while at the same time being committed to speaking up and taking action in the world based on our current knowledge, however imperfect..." (p. 2).

There are many reasons why initiating culturally responsive teaching can go unimplemented in a classroom. White teachers generally have a reluctance to exercise authority in a conversation about race due to racial fear, moral distance, or the presumption that black children are bad (Pollock, 2008, p. 274). Teachers need to practice holding discussions outside of our comfort zones about the relevance of race to teaching. Along with a reluctance to have conversations about race, many teachers are worried about being called racist, or being accused of having racial bias. According to Pollock in *Everyday Anti Racism*, as white teachers, we need to learn to not take these accusations personally and use it as an invitation to enter into dialogue with the accuser rather than defend our own honor (Pollock, 2008, p.310). We need to acknowledge that our judgement may be flawed and ask for more information from the accuser's point of

view. We also need to perfect the art of listening carefully. There is a difference in listening to respond, and listening to understand that many of us have not yet mastered.

Another hardship is the lack of support for culturally diverse training seen in most schools around the country. Whether it is to be believed or not, even the most well-meaning teacher can harbor deep-seated biases. According to Moule, “Most teachers regularly, although unknowingly, discriminate against culturally different students by lacking the sensitivity, knowledge, and skills necessary to teach them properly” (2012, p. 5). The creation of implicit biases are the natural processes by which humans intake information, but that bias must be countered by untraining the mind in its’ judgment of people based on broad generalizations (Staats, 2015, p. 29). As mentioned above, many teachers in the United States feel unfulfilled with the amount and quality of training they have received in CRT. The majority of teachers also felt that their capability to carry out what they had learned was minimal (“Teach Away,” 2017).

Lastly, the conversations that surround race and diversity in general are hard ones to initiate and sustain. It can be challenging to handle an oppressive situation, to engage others, and to develop an action plan for equity. “Part of this learning is to lean into uncomfortableness and to do something with it because you don’t build social justice warriors from just saying ‘we have a problem’” (Álvarez, 2017, para 18).

While CRT is a concept that has been around for many years already there are some drawbacks and hardships surrounding its implementation. However, there are bound to be struggles and challenges when working in an area so delicate and sensitive in today’s society. Developing an awareness of these challenges helps to identify what we

can fix and improve throughout the process of becoming culturally relevant educators, because it is just that, a process. The idea of being a 100% culturally responsive teacher is inconceivable as there will always be more relationships to build, more strategies to implement, and more students to connect with.

Tales of Triumph

While CRT is not a tangible subject and is therefore difficult to be measured and weighed, there have been many success stories attributed to its implementation. Most successes are measured in a qualitative form, while very few are recorded using a quantitative method. Success in CRT can be accomplished in the simplest of ways through building relationships with students, or in larger ways through implementation of CRT strategies that lead to student success. Any progressive movement on the continuum of cultural responsiveness can be considered a success.

In a quantitative study completed by Byrd in 2016, student perception of CRT and school racial socialization with academic outcomes and racial attitudes was investigated. According to this study, the use of culturally responsive teaching methods resulted in greater interest in school as well as a greater feeling of belonging. The findings in this study support the idea that culturally responsive teaching is good teaching. What was surprising about this study, however, is that critical consciousness socialization was associated with lower feelings of belonging, but that promotion of cultural competence was associated with greater feelings of belonging (2016, p. 7). These results highlight the need for a balance between learning about other cultures and learning about cultural conflict.

According to Gay (2010), the reason that CRT works to improve student achievement is due to the validation it provides in multiple areas. CRT acknowledges the legitimacy of heritages of different ethnic groups, which, in turn, affects student attitude, disposition, and approaches to learning as worthy of their time and effort. Implementation of CRT also builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school which helps students to merge their two socio-cultural realities instead of transitioning between two very different cultures on a daily basis. CRT facilitates the use of a multitude of instructional strategies, which allows for optimal connection to different learning styles, thus meeting more students where they are and helping them to achieve more than any cookie cutter strategy could. Lastly, it teaches students to appreciate and praise their own culture instead of being ashamed of it, as well as the cultures of others (Gay, 2010, pp. 31-32).

Assessment of Implementation

How does one know if they are a culturally competent teacher? According to the National Education Association and Jean Moule, there are five basic cultural competence skill areas: valuing diversity, being culturally self aware, understanding dynamics of difference, pursuing knowledge of student culture, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity (Moule, 2012). Valuing diversity includes being accepting and respectful of cultural differences, and being culturally self-aware refers to understanding one's own individual experiences and how they shape a person. The dynamics of difference center around understanding what could potentially go wrong in cross-cultural communication and how to navigate it, while pursuing a knowledge of

student culture refers to having the ability to understand student behavior in various contexts. Lastly, institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity refers to making these competencies school-wide policies in hopes of better serving the student population. As described by Moule, achieving growth in one of the five skill areas will promote and support growth in another (2012).

Summary

Teachers and schools looking to implement culturally responsive and culturally sensitive initiatives will find that there is a plethora of information and research at their disposal. CRT in today's classrooms is a necessity as the world in which we live is constantly growing and evolving and our schools are struggling to reflect that growth. Many of the theories discussed above present a clear image of CRT as a teaching style that is student-centered, relationship-driven, and inclusion-based. Although there are a few challenges in carrying out this ideology, such as teacher race, time, and ability to connect with students, there is no doubt that CRT has a place in today's education and society.

Best Practices For Teaching Adults

“Learning is not attained by chance. It must be sought for with ardour and attended to with diligence.”

-Abigail Adams

Before creating materials for educators to use, it is important to understand the individuals who will be on the receiving end of the professional development process. Where are these teachers from? What is their background? What is their reputation as an

educator? Without an understanding of the group's make-up, learning styles, skills, and desired outcomes, a professional development session will not have the desired impact. Ideas shared and presented throughout the sessions may also be misunderstood, unhelpful, or completely missed. Without any consideration for the audience of the professional development educators will not reap benefits from the session, nor develop any new or improved skills. Therefore, it is crucial that the specific learning needs of the adults attending the session are addressed before any staff development is planned, structured, or enacted. In this section the concept of andragogy will be presented along with several challenges associated with teaching adults.

Andragogy

There is, indeed, a difference between teaching children and teaching adults. Andragogy is a term first coined by German educator and editor Alexander Kapp, which later became a theory adopted by Malcolm Knowles in 1985. Andragogy is defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn". In his research, Knowles worked to develop a distinctive conceptual framework for adult education that is still considered to be the most prominent description of adult learning to date. Knowles classified andragogy through four assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from assumptions about child learners, with a fifth assumption added by Knowles in 1984 (Smith, 2002). These assumptions are classified as self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and lastly, motivation to learn (Smith, 2002).

According to Smith, self-concept refers to how one matures from a personality of dependence to one of self-direction. Knowles argued there is very convincing evidence

that those who take the initiative in learning will learn more than those who are passively waiting to be taught (Smith, 2002). In psychological terms, taking increased responsibility for our lives is “an essential impact of maturity” (as cited in Smith, 2002). The second assumption of adult learners is experience. Adults bring into the classroom various levels of world experience, as well as past mistakes, which gives them a richer background for new ideas and concepts. According to Clegg & Bailey (2008), however, experience can also be a negative when teaching adults as they have already developed many preconceived notions and biases. Unlike children, adults tend to define themselves by their experiences. Thirdly, an adult’s readiness to learn makes a large impact on their learning processes. As a person matures, his or her readiness to learn is often times modeled around their developmental tasks and social roles, therefore acclimatizing their want of learning towards their everyday life. Fourth, Knowles classified one’s orientation to learning. As maturity occurs, the need for immediate application of knowledge emerges from what was previously delayed utilization of knowledge. Therefore, the concept of learning shifts from one that is subject-centered to one that is problem-centered. The fifth assumption of adult learners, motivation to learn, was added by Knowles in 1984, four years after his outline of the initial assumptions. One’s motivation to learn is what Knowles considered to be a drive that shifts from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic as one ages.

Along with the five assumptions of learning, Knowles also classified four principles that can be applied to adult learning. The first principle is the notion that adults need to be involved in the planning of their own learning. Instruction also needs to be

task-oriented instead of promoting rote memorization of information. Teacher directions should be clearly defined by objectives and within the school should exist a multitude of opportunities for interactive instruction involving adults in the process of their own learning. As one matures, learning ability increases from the use of symbols and words to the use of hypothetical reasoning, logic, and abstract thinking (Clegg & Bailey, 2008, p. 36). When educating adults, instruction should also take into consideration the background of the adults. Learning materials and activities should be differentiated to accommodate diverse learners coming from different levels and experiences. Lastly, due to adult learners being self-directed, instruction should allow learners to discover knowledge for themselves through the use of discovery-based activities, problem-oriented activities, as well as inquiry-based activities (Knowles, 2012).

In order to create the best and most effective professional development sessions, one must keep in mind the way adults learn best. The information presented and the topic at hand will be important in the creation of professional development sessions which will cater to the way adults learn as well as the differences in teaching adults versus teaching children.

Challenges of Implementation

While Knowles clearly outlined the assumptions and principles necessary to understanding adult learning, there have also been some challenges in educating adult learners. One drawback in teaching adults is that adults are far less open minded than children and are therefore much more resistant to change (Clark, Freedberg, Hazeltine, & Voss, 2015). Maturity and life experiences lead to a much more rigid frame of mind,

which is largely considered to be the adversary of learning. To combat this challenge in teaching, educators need to provide a “why” in their instruction of new concepts, as well as link new concepts to old concepts and encourage exploration. Another difficulty in educating adults is that aging is often associated with a decline in cognitive learning (Clark et al, 2015). Adults tend to learn new concepts at a slower pace as they age; however, the depth of learning increases with age, which can lead to more integrative knowledge. Adult learners also have multi-leveled responsibilities, which include, but are not limited to, family, friends, work, and the need for personal time. The juggling of these responsibilities makes adults see their time as being very precious, which can lead the learning desire to be out-prioritized by other circumstances (Chinnasamay, 2013).

While Knowles is considered to be the world’s salient researcher on the topic of adult education, it is clear there is no “one size fits all” strategy to meet the needs of every adult’s learning styles. Adults certainly possess different strengths in education than children, but, as with children, each adult is different and therefore in need of differentiated instruction in terms of content, product, and process of the lesson. Within a staff development session, each group of teachers brings in their past educational achievements, background knowledge, and self-efficacy making each group of adult learners unique.

Summary

The teaching of adults is characterized by self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. In the successful education of adult learners strategies present include involving adults in planning their own learning, using

task-oriented lesson plans, acknowledging adult experiences, and integrating discovery-based activities. While adults are far more mature than children, there are still several challenges in their education. Adults have a much more rigid frame of mind towards learning than children, cognitive thinking abilities tend to decline with age, and adults have many responsibilities that may take priority over new learning. In fostering the implementation of CRT through PD sessions, it is essential that best practices for teaching adults are facilitated throughout the implementation of professional development learning activities.

Effective Professional Development

“Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.”

-John Cotton Dana

Professional development is defined by Darling-Hammond as, “a product of both externally-provided and job-embedded activities that increase teachers’ knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning” (2017, p. 12). According to the Glossary of Education Reform,

the term professional development can be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, education, or advanced personal learning with the aim of helping administration, teachers, and support staff to improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013, para. 1).

As suggested by Banks, “professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within the U.S. society and the

ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behavior” (2001).

Teaching is a profession that requires a commitment to ongoing learning which can be accomplished through continuous professional development. To a larger degree, teacher learning takes place unconsciously and involves cognitive, emotional, and motivational dimensions (Korthagen, 2015). Professional development should provide teacher support, influence teacher knowledge and practice, as well as produce positive student learning outcomes (C. Bates, & N. Morgan, 2018, p. 623). However, according to Darling-Hammond, “Research has noted that many professional development initiatives appear ineffective in supporting changes in teachers’ practices and student learning” (2017).

What does effective professional development look like?

According to Darling-Hammond (2017), and supported by Bates and Morgan (2018), effective professional development consists of seven characteristics. The first of these is that the development session is content focused, which entails a discipline specific session and not a generic presentation separate from a school context. Second, it incorporates active learning which also utilizes adult learning theory. This can be accomplished through the choice to move away from traditional teaching methods that are lecture based and towards models that engage learners directly, such as “sense-making” instruction. Effective professional development should also support collaboration. These sessions can facilitate collaboration in a variety of ways, through one-on-one interactions, small group discussions, or exchanges with other teachers

outside of the building. Darling-Hammond also identified that successful professional development includes the modeling of effective practices. Some of these models include videos, demonstrations, unit/lesson plans, observations, and sample assessments. The provision of coaching or expert support is also crucial to an effective professional development session. One-on-one coaching or facilitation of the session by an expert in the field are both options for providing support to teachers. Lastly, the sixth and seventh characteristics state that effective professional development offers multiple opportunities for reflection, and consists of a sustained duration. It is important for teachers to receive time to reflect on student gains associated with professional development and the ability to make changes to their practice. Professional development should also be ongoing, as traditional fragmented sessions do not offer the time necessary for retention of material that is both rigorous and cumulative (Darling-Hammond, 2017, pp.1-25).

Considerations

Planners of adult professional development must first examine the timing, length, and format of the sessions. In terms of length, professional development sessions can range from a one-day conference, to a one-week workshop, or even a multi-year advanced degree program. The sessions can be delivered during school hours, during summer or teacher work days, and be presented in front of a large group, small group, individually, or online. As reported by Darling-Hammond (2017), teachers typically need substantial development in a particular area that is equal to or greater than 50 hours. Unfortunately, U.S. teachers have reported receiving a maximum of 16 hours in a given area (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Next, the issues of cost and the presenter of the professional development arise. Professional development sessions may be funded by the district, school, or state budget programs, or they may be provided through grants and other private funding. When examining who is to facilitate the information at the sessions it is important to consider all possibilities, such as educators from within the school, outside consultants and experts, or organizations hired within the district (Korthagen, 2015).

The seven principles for effective professional development outlined above will guide the formation and presentation of the capstone project. Details such as who will present, where the sessions will take place, as well as when the sessions will take place will all be given the greatest consideration to make the professional development sessions as effective as possible.

Challenges of Implementation

One of the most important features of successful professional development is teacher buy-in. If the subject at hand is uninteresting, or inapplicable to daily classroom life, teachers will dismiss the topic before the presentation has even begun (Darling-Hammond, 2017). It is of the utmost importance that teachers understand the reasoning behind this particular selection for staff development and are able to see the practical applications of such new information.

While few teachers would argue the importance of effective professional development, many programs and opportunities may be criticized. Due to reasons of poor design, scheduling, facilitation, or irrelevance to teaching needs, some professional development opportunities don't seem quite as insightful and meaningful as others. Some

of the biggest challenges in providing professional development are finding adequate time during the school year and securing sufficient funding. Nearly half of teachers in the United States are dissatisfied with the current professional development opportunities provided by their school or district (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). In *Effective Teacher Development* by Darling-Hammond (2017), several barriers to the creation of successful PD are identified such as inadequate resources, lack of shared vision, lack of time for implementation, failure to align state and local policies, dysfunctional school culture, as well as the inability to track and assess the quality of professional development.

According to Richardson (2003), professor and chair of the Educational Studies Program at the University of Michigan, American character has a large influence on the way many Americans approach staff development. The sense of individuality embedded in American culture makes it a challenge to develop a collective sense surrounding something teachers are passionate about. “As teachers, the individualistic culture affects the way we think about change, how we seek help for the improvement of practice, and whom we talk with about what we do in our classrooms” (Richardson, 2003, p. 2). One of the most interesting observations made by Richardson is that most of the educational policies enacted recently at the state or national level are working to break this sense of individualism by pushing towards a system of standardization. Implementing an effective professional development session while recognizing the individualism inherently embedded in our culture is potentially problematic as there may be a sense of “closing the

classroom door” by teachers who view their classroom as unique and therefore unlike other classrooms.

The most traditional strategy in facilitating professional development lies in what Korthagen calls the theory to practice approach. This approach presents theories about teaching and learning in hopes that it will promote teaching styles that coincide with those theories. Many studies have outlined the failure of this approach in changing teacher behavior and instruction (Korthagen, 2013). As Korthagen stated, “An important reason why the theory-to-practice approach does not work well is its assumption that teacher behavior is guided by teacher thinking” (2013, p. 4). While there are several challenges to implementing effective professional development it is crucial that the challenges can be identified and assessed in order to avoid possible mistakes and wasted time.

Making it Worthwhile

When considering effective and ineffective strategies in congruence with staff development, strategies involving the actual practice of newly acquired knowledge rank far superior to the rest. Yes, one needs to understand the concepts and principles in personal ways, but instructors who practice culturally relevant behaviors are far more successful than those who talk about culturally relevant behaviors. “It is not enough to have courageous conversations about racism and social injustices, to appreciate cultural differences...they need to practice actually engaging in cultural critical consciousness and personal reflection” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p.182).

Irony in education can be described as 300 teachers being lectured on differentiated instruction for a period of three hours. Differentiated instruction has been at the forefront of the field of education for many years, yet staff development sessions rarely include the best practices that teachers are instructed to use in their day to day lessons. What is needed is a comprehensible staff development presentation that truly allows for differentiated instruction, including, but not limited to, preparing lessons based on learning styles, using formative assessments, assessing and adjusting lessons to meet learner needs, as well as grouping by shared interest or ability level. To manage this effectively, presenters must provide flexible approaches to content and opportunities for working in varied instructional formats while simultaneously developing challenging and engaging tasks for the learners (Heacox, 2012).

One of the most successful strategies in professional development is learning by doing, or what is also known as experiential learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). When one is actively engaged in the learning process, that learning becomes real, relevant, and rewarding. According to DuFour and DuFour, “the most powerful learning always occurs in the context of taking action...Learning by doing develops a deeper and more profound knowledge” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many 2006, p. 4).

In order to develop an effective professional development session all of the factors discussed above must be taken into consideration. The time allotted, presentation format, as well as feasibility of implementation are three concepts in particular that will be focused on when creating sessions for culturally responsive teaching taught through professional development.

School supports

Professional learning communities are one of the many supports of successful implementation of professional development. When seeking to implement culturally relevant pedagogy, it is imperative that one receives support from the school and the school district at large. One way to ensure successful implementation is through networking. Research shows that professional learning communities (PLCs) have the potential to provide the best environment for meaningful professional development (DuFour, 2014). Professional learning communities are an organic and a thoughtful way to promote collaboration, as well as to build school culture and structure and to impact the assumptions and practices of teachers. They also develop clear commitments and use results-oriented goals to mark progress of their vision, mission, and values (DuFour & DuFour, 2008). In their book, *Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, DuFour and DuFour discussed the culture of a PLC's commitment to continuous improvement. They described a disquiet with the status quo that helps to engage members of a PLC in an ongoing cycle of gathering evidence of student learning, building on strengths and addressing weaknesses in learning, implementing strategies, analyzing the impact of changes, as well as applying new knowledge to continue to the cycle of improvement (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many 2006). PLCs can be a great resource for fulfilling professional development needs in a continuous and scheduled manner.

Summary

In the creation of successful staff development it is important to recognize the practical aspects of doing so. Timing, finances, format, and presenter are all factors that take precedence. The staff development topic at hand must also be relevant to teachers, as well as administration. There are several challenges that come with implementing PD such as poor design, facilitation and scheduling. The American culture and ideal of individualism is also a factor that can potentially impact professional development in a negative way as teachers may believe they don't fall into the category of needing a certain type of development session. In selecting the format for presentation, the theory to practice approach has been proven to be ineffective, while modeling strategies and discovery-based strategies are more conducive to this type of learning.

Importance of Teacher Self-Reflection and Self-Awareness

"We had the experience, but missed the meaning."

-The Dry Salvages, T.S. Eliot, 1943

The bird watcher engaged in daily vigil grows tired of looking at a particular bird and learns she must study that bird in a new way in order to renew interest in it. She describes how carefully she examines the bird in which she has lost interest. She reverses its evolution and sees it as a lizard; she sees its feathers as lizard scales; she sees it stalking instead of flying. Then she reverses the process to see the bird once more. (Dillard, 1985, p. 33)

According to Denton (2009), the connection between experience and meaning is sometimes nebulous or missing. Reflection represents the human capacity for

higher-order thinking, and one's ability to make connections between thoughts and ideas. Reflective thinking embraces doubt and hesitation. It is an action that is generally not done instinctively, but must be done purposefully. It is done well when opposing opinions are explored in order to examine thoughts more closely and answer the questions why and how. In agreement with Denton, Dewey defined reflection as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds to support it, and further conclusions to which it ends" (as cited by Denton, 2009). The importance in Dewey's analysis of reflection is that he describes it as being an active process, letting students develop their own beliefs through research and proof (Denton, 2009). Reflection is a look back at the past to critique, generate, and transform one's thoughts for the next day, the next students, or the next department meeting.

Hole and McEntee (1999) have identified four protocols of guided reflection practices which are intended to help teachers who choose to reflect on their own. The first step is to identify what happened which is done through merely stating the facts of the event without judgement or personal feelings getting in the way. Step two asks the question of why did it happen? This involves searching the context within which the event occurred and the underlying structures evident in the situation. The third step is searching for what it might mean. Split-second decision making is a crucial aspect of teaching, but all of these split-second decisions carry meaning and should not be ignored. Lastly, the fourth step is to identify how the meanings can impact practice. Following the

first three steps is a perfect entryway into allowing reflection to change practice and “to gain new insights into ordinary events” (1999, p. 35).

However, reflection can only be as good as one’s awareness of their own practices. This means lowering the affective filter and fully submerging oneself in metacognition while simultaneously recognizing the ability to apply old knowledge to new problems, new situations, and new environments (Denton, 2009). The application and practice of reflection is crucial for improvement in social, academic, and professional contexts. When educators understand the value of reflection and can implement it successfully in their work, they are able to improve their abilities in connecting with students, and ultimately become better teachers. Reflection is not precise, nor is it something that can be measured. It requires intent and effort on the part of the teacher and is required to achieve goals of improvement in both oneself and one’s students. Additionally, organizations such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Council for Social Studies, and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education are all proponents of reflection being used as a valuable teaching tool (Denton, 2009).

Reflection Linked to CRT

While the ideas of reflection and culturally responsive teaching can be considered separate entities, it is important to underline the impact attained when the two are combined. According to Gay and Kirkland (2003), in order to truly reflect, teachers need to develop a sense of who they are as people, an understanding of the contexts in which they teach, and the ability to question their assumptions and basis of knowledge. “Critical

racial and cultural consciousness should be coupled with self-reflection in both preservice teacher education and inservice staff development” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 181). The practice of self-analyzing involves monitoring one’s own cultural beliefs and professional behaviors in accordance with the value of cultural diversity and the best ways to teach ethnically, economically, religiously, racially, or linguistically diverse students. As identified by Moule in *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators*, “Teaching others provides a continuing set of experiences and opportunities to reflect on the educational process, and these reflections on educational practice and perspectives improve them” (2012, p. 23).

As discussed by Cochrane (2017), the concept of cultural humility comes into play throughout one’s journey to becoming culturally competent in the classroom. Cochrane defines cultural humility as the focus on lifelong cultural learning and critical self-reflection. “Cultural humility requires that each of us respond to culture as an ongoing process, accompanied by regular self-reflection. How carefully am I listening? What more can I learn?” (Cochrane, 2017, p. 3). Another quality of cultural humility is the need to recognize and disrupt power imbalances, which exist according to social class, race, gender, ability and more.

Cochrane offers several questions used to stimulate personal reflection in terms of cultural competence: Who are we? What attitudes, gifts, and beliefs do we bring to our teaching? Who are our students? What is their experience here? What is the cultural content of our discipline? How do we increase culturally responsive teaching in our curriculum and throughout the school culture? Many of these questions can be used to

reflect on personal relationships, past experiences, and inner thoughts throughout the educational process.

Challenges of Implementation

One of the most significant obstacles to participating in critical self-reflection is the common misunderstanding of what reflection is and is not. Many have confused self-reflection with describing issues, stating philosophical beliefs, or summarizing statements made by scholars (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In these examples, what is lacking is critical introspection into oneself and the transformation of beliefs or actions.

The most challenging of all, is the teacher who either stays silent during discussions of reflection of cultural equity or the teacher who diffuses attention away from the topic at hand and instead offers evaluations or justifications (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In order for all teachers to share their skill sets and experiences, the environment must be one in which thinking analytically and reflecting are all regulated norms. Teachers who believe that teaching is an objectifiable artistry or teachers who believe they do not need to reflect on their practices are teachers who cannot reap the benefits of reflection.

Summary

Clearly the art of reflection is one that has retained its' notoriety throughout the decades as an integral part of the teaching profession. For teachers, there is always a possibility to do more, or to be more for one's students. Excellence has no ceiling, which is supported by many experts in the field of educational reflection. According to Dewey (1938), "Every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the

quality of future experiences” (p. 37). Many successful teachers can be characterized by their ability to become introspective and make modifications or alterations to their own practices through the process of self-reflection.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensible look at research surrounding the question, *How can professional development be designed to help teachers implement culturally relevant pedagogy in the classrooms to help students succeed?* In order to fully comprehend the strides made and the difficulties that still lie ahead in this quest, the facets of culturally responsive teaching, adult learning, self-reflection, and effective professional development were dutifully examined.

Chapter 3 will provide a detailed look at the construction of the staff development sessions. The audience/participants will be outlined, the context of the study will be defined, and the methods used will be identified. The length and frequency of the project as well as data that explains the need for professional development in the area of culturally responsive teaching will also be shared.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

The literature review above provided research and guidance for the necessity of professional development sessions geared towards implementation of culturally relevant teaching. Careful examination into the works of the major players in the field of culturally responsive education, such as Ladson-Billings (2009), Gay (2015), Landsman (2009), and Banks (2006) have brought to light the strategies and challenges that can lead to success or failure in the creation of an effective staff development surrounding CRT. The literature study further outlined the role of self-reflection in the creation of not only a good teacher, but good staff development and mindset of an effective culturally relevant educator. The creation of successful professional development sessions clearly relies on the relevance of the topic at hand, and the ability of teachers to self-reflect.

With this information, I return to my burning question, *“How can I create professional development designed to help teachers implement culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom?”* The evolution and progression into teachers of cultural awareness is one that will require time and patience, and must be done through multiple sessions of professional development to become a fully integrated and natural piece of daily instruction and professional work. My information for PD will have to take into consideration the many perspectives of people of color at school, both teachers and students, as well as our unique needs for staff development. The goal here is to evolve the

teaching staff at my school into a community of knowledgeable teachers with the intent of making our school a culturally relevant one.

In this chapter I plan to outline the audience/participants, the context of the study, methods used, the length and frequency of the project, as well as the data explaining the need for such staff development. Demographics of the school where I teach will be shared, potential resources in pursuing this staff development will be analyzed, as well as an inclusion and explanation of a description of the project itself. In the end, the materials provided in this project, research studied, and actions taken will be applied to a learning community continuously over the course of 1 school year.

Research Paradigm

The goal of my professional development sessions is to first inform and educate fellow teachers on the researched best-practices of culturally responsive teaching, and to then provide them with the tools necessary for continuous implementation.

Due to the rapidly changing population where I teach, the poor scores from minority, low-income, and ELL students, as well as the attrition rates of these students from Spanish 1 to Spanish 5, our school needs a building-wide training focused on improving the achievement of these students using culturally responsive teaching. After analyzing research on best practices for culturally relevant teaching strategies, how to educate adult learners, qualities of an effective professional development session, and the importance of teacher self-reflection, I know that I will have to provide support to my colleagues in a comprehensible format that is also easy to facilitate. I will also have to

find a way to model culturally relevant teaching to my colleagues in the hopes of giving them a better understanding of what culturally relevant teaching actually is.

The first step towards becoming a more culturally competent teacher is to get an education on CRT. Teachers enrolled in this PD will start out by reading articles from CRT gurus such as Ladson-Billings (1994), Landsman (2009), and Hammond (2015). Teachers will be expected to have conversations with their colleagues surrounding sensitive topics and maneuver these conversations in a professional manner. As a reaction to the research on culturally responsive teaching strategies, I want teacher participants to create lesson plans within their disciplines to fully showcase strategies relevant to connecting with students, evidence of a student-centered classroom, as well as incorporation of inquiry-based and communicative-based activities. With a focus on building relationships and community, we will collaborate to create lessons “that empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 16-17).

In addition to the examination of culturally relevant strategies, the concept of teacher self-reflection needs to also be embedded in the training before we dive into the topic at hand. Teachers need to be vulnerable enough to explore their own cultural biases and attitudes towards cultures other than their own. Organic reflection happens when students/teachers consider what could have been done differently, when they obtain a greater understanding of themselves or others, or when they scrutinize a topic from a different vantage point (Kaye, 2014).

In researching professional development and how adults learn best, it is clear that adults need to be involved in the planning of their own learning with a base of task-oriented instruction, while also taking into consideration the background of these adults and the discovery of knowledge (Knowles, 1985). Teachers also need a firm support system in place for the discussion and collaboration of new ideas and strategies, as well as the inclusion of self-reflection. The staff development sessions I create must give teachers ample time to collaborate and share, and it must be long-term to facilitate reflection and growth.

Methods

While brainstorming staff development sessions, I realized that the proposed sessions need to be something that can be easily incorporated into something teachers are already doing, without adding to their workload, as well as something practical for application and worth the teachers time. If teachers find the information in the sessions uninteresting, or inapplicable to daily classroom life, they will dismiss the topic before the presentation has even begun (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Teachers have a million things to do each day from creating lesson plans, to finding a pencil for Tariq, attending IEP meetings, and trying to figure out where Vivian actually went when she asked to use the bathroom. With all of the commotion of the school day, it seems easiest to facilitate such discussions about culture during PLC. Where I teach we have one hour set aside each Wednesday morning for the sole purpose of collaborating with our departments.

Clearly, implementing culturally relevant training into PLC time when teachers are already working together to create new lessons and modify old ones is ideal. What is also evident is that it is very challenging to check on the progress of twenty-five different groups of teachers in the same hour. With that being said, the idea came to me to create an online component that would help to guide PLCs each week with an agenda that integrates what they are being asked to do during PLC and ways to incorporate culturally relevant teaching into the mix. PLCs will be utilizing Google docs as an easy tool to communicate with other PLCs and check on weekly progress. Through the use of time already allotted through PLCs, the training and learning can be long term as well as completed routinely each week without too much time in between sessions.

Demographics

I teach in a suburban high school school located in Minnesota which serves ninth grade through twelfth grade students. According to the 2016 US Census, approximately 81,000 people reside in this community living in approximately 26,000 households. Forty six percent of the population identifies as white, while 26% identify as black, 6% Asian, and 18% as Hispanic, with 12% of the population identifying as Native American or as two or more races. The city maintains a 8.5% unemployment rate.

Figure 1.1

School Population

| School | | |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Hispanic/Latino | 150 | 5.5% |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 18 | 0.7% |
| Asian | 421 | 15.4% |
| Black or African American | 489 | 17.9% |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 1 | 0.0% |
| White | 1,549 | 56.7% |
| Two or More Races | 102 | 3.7% |
| Total | 2,730 | 100.0% |

| School | | |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| American Indian | 38 | 1.3% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 310 | 10.8% |
| Hispanic | 103 | 3.6% |
| Black | 417 | 14.5% |
| White | 2,008 | 69.8% |
| Total | 2,876 | 100.0% |

At the school where I teach, we have a population of just under 3,000 students, and our student enrollment is expected to increase over the next 10 years. The school is becoming more and more diverse as time goes by with a population of 70% of students who identified as white in 2010, now just a little over 55% in 2018. Roughly 5% of students receive special education services, and more than 22% of students speak a language other than English at home, with Hmong being the most highly spoken home language at 7.1% in 2018 (Central Minnesota Educational Research and Development Council, 2018). Out of the 124 content area teachers in the building, only 8 are teachers of color. That is .06% teachers of color in our building, and 45% students of color. Out of the 255 staff members in the school, only 19 identify as persons of color, which is .074%.

Audience

The intended audience for this project are the 124 content area high school teachers teaching in the mainstream classroom at my school for the 2019-2020 school year. Content area teachers can make a large impact on the student population if given the correct training, support for implementation, and collaboration to develop their own repertoire of culturally relevant teaching strategies. Content teachers will meet during PLC time, which occurs every Wednesday from 7:10 until 8:20.

Project Design

The purpose of this project is to bring an awareness and ease of application in culturally relevant education to teachers in the school where I teach. I will utilize Google docs which allows for collective group thought, reflection, and collaboration within

PLCs. I will also distribute questionnaires to gauge the level of necessity for culturally responsive training, and again later to gauge the change in confidence and ability levels. The by-products of this development will be lessons, teaching videos, activities, and community building strategies which is supported by many leaders in the field, such as Darling-Hammond (2017), Hammond (2015), as well as DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many (2006). The online component of this project will consist of a plethora of interactive learning experiences on Google docs featuring much of the above research on CRT, as well as a variety of activities, assignments, and discussion questions used to spark reflection and progress. Participants will be asked to read articles from Zaretta Hammond, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and watch Youtube videos from individuals such as Christopher Emdin. There will also be opportunities for self-assessment, lesson planning, and peer assessment of colleagues. Teachers will be expected to have open and honest conversations with their peers while simultaneously increasing awareness of their own values and belief systems.

Each PLC in the building will receive a Google doc that contains the CRT PD for the year and is to be facilitated by the department leader. As a department teachers will work their way through ten modules that consist of two lessons each, which amounts to twenty weeks of professional development at about 30 to 40 minutes a lesson. Through the use of Google docs and PLC time teachers will be able to create, share, and reflect on their journey on the continuum of becoming a more culturally competent teacher.

Timeline

Starting in August 2019, teachers will meet every Wednesday at 7:10 for one hour and ten minutes to work in their PLCs. The first half of the time will be spent working together on CRT training and the second half will be spent working on PLC necessities as designated by the curriculum coordinator or departments themselves. Teachers will follow the meeting agenda which is set up on Google docs and can also be found in the PLC agenda Google Doc delivered out by the curriculum coordinator at the beginning of each trimester. Each meeting will consist of a warm-up, instruction time and closing time. Facts and ideas for application of culturally responsive pedagogy, a lesson designed with a core of CRT, and a discussion question to encourage reflection, and self-awareness are just a few of the opportunities presented to teachers through this professional development.

Questionnaires

For future use as part of the project, teachers throughout the school will be given a Google Form to fill out regarding their opinion of the professional development training they had received in previous years regarding culturally responsive teaching and their ability to implement such instruction in their classroom. The main inquiry of the questionnaires is to get feedback on how effective and pertinent previously enacted professional development sessions have been in the eyes of the staff participating in them. The questionnaires will also touch on whether or not teachers have implemented strategies or ideologies presented in previous professional development sessions as well as allow the collection of data on the successfulness and effectiveness of the PD session as a whole to allow for continuous improvement in the selection of PD materials selected.

According to Mills, “Questionnaires allow the teacher researcher to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time” (2014, p. 93). The teachers will self-administer the questionnaires on Google Forms and the results will be submitted back to me instantaneously. The questionnaire comes from Moule and can be found within Module 1.1 of the project.

Summary

In conclusion, I will create and design a professional development which functions off of the basis of acquiring information, applying newly learned concepts, and reflecting upon said information. This will be done during PLC time once a week for one hour and ten minutes with the facilitation of Google docs to create lessons and facilitate discussion questions. The shared, online, professional development resource will be a place for teachers to work collaboratively, share goals and triumphs, as well as ask for clarification and have collective discussions with their colleagues. In chapter four I will reflect on the process I will use to create resources, websites, discussion questions, and reflect on the possible changes in student and teacher attitudes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

From the beginning of this project, the intention has been to increase the cultural responsiveness of teachers within my school in order to make a difference in the successes of all students. I began this process by asking, *How can I create professional development designed to help teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom?* Now this process comes to a close with the final installment of the project: a series of 10 modules containing 20 sessions of staff development to be completed over the span of one school year in order to move teachers one step further on the spectrum of educational equity.

In this chapter I reflect on the process of creating this project; the initial idea and framework, the research, and the creation of the project itself. I share what I have learned as both a researcher and as a writer and make connections between the research and my own work. I will address the limitations of the project, as well as discuss the impact I believe the project will have, and also predict how the project might be used in the future. I examine the potential of involving more like-minded people in the work of becoming more educationally equitable through the use of culturally responsive teaching, and

address the next steps for continuing the conversation of culturally responsive teaching after use of the materials.

Major Learnings

My capstone journey took seven months to complete. Throughout the process I have learned the most through my research as well as my conversations with other colleagues and experts in the field of CRT. One of the most important realizations is that the road to becoming a culturally responsive teacher never ends. The main goal for teachers who want to become culturally responsive is to keep working at it. Keep connecting with and learning about students. Keep delving into one's own cultural background and biases, and keep supporting colleagues to do these same practices and hold each other accountable. The world and its population is changing, and change is hard. The best way we can serve our students is through working towards becoming more and more culturally responsive to meet the needs and learning styles of a diverse population. Another takeaway is that effective CRT happens when collaboration is fully functioning and at its best. The exchange of ideas and opinions, as well as successes and failures, is how teachers as a group can better serve their students. Listening to understand rather than listening to respond is a skill that once mastered can yield great results in terms of working with colleagues and students as well.

I also understand that the actual physical implementation of this plan would require more work, and collaboration, as well as a better understanding of the setting in

which this professional development would be enacted. Change is good, but too much change at once can cause extreme backlash and unwillingness to cooperate from the participants.

I did my best in creating this professional development to not only make it meaningful, but also make it feasible and realistic for the teachers who are participating. One of the most important aspects of this project is not the materials presented, but rather the format in which they are presented with the core idea of realistic implementation. It was also imperative that I maintained staff buy-in while also adhering to best practices of CRT, professional development, teaching adults, and self-reflection.

In conclusion, my major learnings have centered around the reality of putting this project into action. There are many areas of consideration when planning professional development sessions such as content, research driven methods of presentation, feasibility, audience buy-in, as well as inclusion of all of the best practices that make professional development effective, such as content-focused instruction, support of collaboration, and sustained duration.

Back to the Literature

How can I create professional development designed to help teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom? The project has become a 20 session, 10 module entity created with the idea of implementation throughout 20 weeks of professional learning communities. The modules touch on examining cultural biases, assessing cultural competence, connecting CRT to the classroom, identifying characteristics of culturally competent teachers, identifying culturally responsive

practices, designing a lesson with CRT in mind, and assessing lessons for the use of CRT. Based on best practices for teaching teachers, the professional development sessions incorporate active learning, and include opportunities for collaboration as well as differentiated instruction through the inclusion of discussion activities, partner work, and various methods of presentation (Knowles, 2012). The staff development created also focuses on real-life application of the knowledge learned and stresses self-reflection and self-awareness within each module through the implementation of lesson plan creation as well as meaningful reflection at the beginning and/or end of each session (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Most importantly, this development models effective practices and engages teachers in the learning content as opposed to the cookie-cutter model of staff development so often selected for teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

While the end goal of this project is not exactly a mighty one, it is definitely an important one. By the end of these professional development sessions teachers should feel more capable of implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies than they were before. Teachers should be familiar with the creation of lessons that demonstrate abilities in the implementation of CRT, as well as the analyzation of lessons for cultural responsiveness. By no means is this project meant to be a “one-size-fits-all” solution to close the achievement gap. The aim here is simply to improve the ability of teachers to connect with students as well as learn new and feasible manners in which classrooms can be more culturally responsive. The goal is improvement not overhaul.

This project was heavily influenced by the works of Julie Landsman (2009), Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009), Geneva Gay (2015), and Christopher Emdin (2017);

pioneers in their field of study as well as visionaries of a more equitable society.

Culturally responsive teaching at its core “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382).

Project Limitations

One of the biggest limitations to this project is teacher buy-in. If teachers are not motivated to participate in this professional development series, they will not reap the benefits aligned with exploring new ways to teach in a culturally responsive manner.

Another such limitation is the sense of overwhelm that can be felt from teachers in all content areas. Yes, most teachers believe that incorporating culturally responsive

teaching is an important issue in today’s society, however, many of these teachers are already so stressed with covering the content as outlined by the MDE standards that they

feel unable to devote more of their time to the implementation of these practices. I

believe wholeheartedly that the teachers in my building want to improve cultural relations and further connections within their classroom and the school at large, however, they are already far too stretched in what they are being asked to cover within a given trimester.

Due to this notion, the professional development sessions take place during PLC time once a week, which is seemingly the least offensive time to ask for teacher participation

and effort as it does not require extra time, or time spent out of school. The easy

implementation of these CRT strategies is specifically designed to have minimal

interference with the busy schedules of teachers, however, teachers will continue to feel stressed and overwhelmed as more and more is asked of them.

Another limitation to this professional development is that it assumes the PLCs set in place are high functioning. While this should be the case, it is not always so, and some PLCs are better at collaborating than others. Assuming a department's PLC is functional, the implementation of this professional development will be highly successful. However, if a PLC is low functioning, does not work well together, or simply doesn't meet, this professional development will not have the intended impact and will be wasted.

However, no matter what my colleagues and I may think, a major limitation of this professional development is that it relies heavily on administrative approval, support, and implementation. This professional development can only be implemented with the help of the administration. Through these sessions, teachers are held accountable within their PLC and are asked to participate with their colleagues in discussions and the creation of lesson plans and videotaping. This plan will only have the intended impact if administration begins to walk the halls, observe during PLC time, and implement classroom walkthroughs.

Implications

In chapter one I discussed the increasing diversity where I teach, as well as the lack of diversity of the teachers in my building which has led to a major disconnect between teachers and students. I feel that through the lesson plans provided, all teachers can move themselves forward on the spectrum of teaching with cultural responsiveness. The feasibility and accessibility of the activities, articles, and videos makes this professional development far more capable of impacting teacher instruction than any

lecture ever could. The project and lessons within are laid out in a non-threatening manner and are to be completed in the privacy of a teacher's own PLC, therefore the affective filter will be much lower than it would be in a room of 150 other teachers. I do believe that if teachers are willing to have open and honest conversations, this professional development will be successful and many will reap the benefits of self-contained, collaborative sessions.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that providing teachers with resources and time to learn and collaborate, teachers will be more equipped at connecting with their students and allowing students to see them as people. In addition, the activities included within each module will prompt all participants to truly dig down deep and reflect on their own cultural journey as well as share their feelings and ideas with their colleagues. Therefore, I feel that through the creation of these professional development sessions I have addressed the needs of the teachers in my building in the best way I possibly could and I look forward to what the future has in store for this project.

Future Impact

The immediate impact of this professional development will be felt within the school where I teach as the materials and lessons are intended to educate staff and improve student and teacher relations. With the help and guidance of my peer reviewers, content experts, and faculty advisor I believe this project is of true value and can be realistically implemented in the district where I teach. While the staff will not be happy about having yet another requirement to meet in terms of working towards a school that is more adept at implementing CRT, I believe that they will see the importance and

validity of enacting a program with a focus such as this. Currently, I am working on getting the project to become a real possibility within the school. I plan on meeting with my building principal to discuss implementation for the next school year and am seeking the support and approval of my colleagues to begin the process. The professional development we are currently implementing on CRT is not entirely effective, and therefore is something that needs to be modified and/or adjusted. This professional development plan provides another option to replace what is currently being used.

In summary, it will take a lot of support to make this professional development plan a reality. It will require not only buy-in, but also participation from the teaching staff, as well as solid support and direction from the administration, especially the building principal. I am hopeful that the implementation of this plan can begin in the Fall of 2019 and will be an effective measure for educating and expanding knowledge on CRT.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, I definitely have a newfound appreciation for the creation and implementation of professional development for teachers. After sitting through many bone-dry, inapplicable lectures, I now understand that the creation of PD is a tricky one. Not only must the facilitator trigger the interest of the audience, but they must also maintain that interest throughout the entirety of the development sessions. Considering that according to Darling-Hammond (2009) effective professional development must be ongoing, this is a daunting task. Change needs to happen slowly in order to gather momentum and teachers must be given adequate time to learn and attempt new strategies

and ideas. It is my hope that this professional development will someday reach the desk of the administration and be an asset in helping teachers to become more culturally aware and better able to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies in their classrooms.

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