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Core Knowledge Language Arts: Does it Represent the Lawrence Public Schools Community?

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**Core Knowledge Language Arts: Does it Represent the Lawrence Public Schools
Community?**

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REPRESENTATION IN CURRICULUM

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CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

CAPSTONE SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Public Schools Community?

AUTHOR: Colby Daniel Callery

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Abstract

The climate of the 21st-century education system, though ever-changing, calls for students to be taught to specific academic standards while allowing for culturally diverse inclusive learning to take place. The Lawrence Public School System is comprised of over twenty different schools, with 36.6% other Hispanic, 33.1% white Hispanic, 14.1% white non-Hispanic, 7.57% two or more ethnicities, and 3.41% black or African American Hispanic with various education and life experiences. The Core Knowledge Language Arts curriculum is used for Grades Kindergarten through second grade. This curriculum was created by a white, cisgender male promoting Eurocentric ideologies. Is the Lawrence community fairly represented in this instructional material, particular at the early childhood level when students are finding their academic and social identities? This capstone looks into the creation...curriculum, exploring the representational...and comparing them to the current demographic make-up of the Lawrence Public Schools classroom.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Abstract.....	4
Problem Statement	6
Literature Review.....	9
Core Knowledge Foundation.....	12
Representation: Cultural Literacy	14
Cultural Supremacy and Cultural Ignorance in Education.....	17
CKLA Today.....	18
Theories	
Sadker’s Seven Forms of Curricular Bias	20
Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory.....	22
The Impacts of Race/Ethnicity Invisibility	23
The Impacts of Gender Invisibility	25
The Impacts of Stereotyping	27
Data Memo	28
Recommendations	36
References	41

Problem Statement

Stepping inside a public school classroom, with the current push for inclusivity and educational accountability, one may expect to find texts that reflect the students within the classroom, with various races, skin tones, cultures, genders, sexualities, etc. Yet, some currently, most-used and recommended curricula show a much higher percentage of white characters and stories compared to other races. America has been called the melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, and races and as an educational society, we are seeing a rise in the population of students of color. With this rise, the push and expectation for a more diverse learning experience fostered in the classroom by educators have come to the forefront of educational discussions, from what materials should and shouldn't be used, to how explicitly certain lessons should be taught based on accuracy and what is deemed appropriate in a diverse setting. Due to these discussions, diversity and unequal representation in the curriculum have become more apparent.

Several major reports have been at the forefront of school improvement and reform, most notably the 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education that labeled the United States of America as a nation at risk. (Denning, 1983) This "Nation at Risk" description launched debates based on public speculation and individualist ideas of what is right for individual classrooms in America. (Kamenetz, 2018) Seven years after the publication of "A Nation at Risk", the Department of Energy released "The Sandia Report" or "what a nation at risk got wrong" (Kamenetz, 2018). This second report looked at the test scores, and further classifications of, various tested demographics and then looked at the results of those who had not been previously tested. The findings of this second study showed that the decline in testing achievement was not as profound an issue as had been previously

proposed and had been discussed at political levels. The process to slow this achievement decrease and create common educational goals and criteria had already been started. This constant debate led the government to complete several additional studies to create a series of policies that could, in turn, act as a checks and balances system. The policies sought to determine how to achieve success in the public education system, and what curriculum items were essential to reach one's full potential. Changes such as representational texts, appropriately edited historical facts and hands-on classroom experiences fostered culturally diverse acceptance and learning. Further studies have demonstrated continued struggles for successful educational outcomes in our public schools which has led administrators and state leadership to search for research-based curriculums that meet set academic criteria that are believed to be aligned with the state standardized testing requirements.

With the “Nation at Risk” calling for “rigorous and measurable standards” for all grades kindergarten through high school graduation, the “No Child Left Behind ACT” (NCLBA) was conceived in 2002, using standardized testing scores as an accountable way to measure the success of an educational community. (Park, 2004) These success rankings went on to decide the amount of funding and possible penalties/support systems each district would receive based solely on the test scores of the previous year causing, what was later termed “The Race to the Top”.(Kamenetz 2018;Lynch 2016)

With the continued use of standardized testing to rate the success of education in each district, government officials, including Betsy DeVos, previous Secretary of Education, have continued to label the United States as “still at risk”, causing states to adopt methods to identify curricula designed around the testing content. (Kamenetz, 2018) To ensure that all students are given equal access to education and are career/college ready, the common core

standards of education were created to be used as checks and balances to keep schools and curriculum used accountable (Current Curriculum Frameworks - Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

To help with the curriculum selection process, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for Massachusetts (DESE) has created resources that have sorted various standardized curricula by vendor description, offered materials, educational and social-emotional needs, as well as a general overview of teacher comments and ratings.

(Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019) As part of this rating system, there is a checklist that is recommended to be used by districts when researching which curricula best meet the needs of their scholars and staff. The sections of this vetted list include: text quality and organization, classroom tasks and instruction, accessibility for students, useability for teachers, and impact on student learning. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019)

The city of Lawrence, Massachusetts, located in Essex County, had a growing population of 80,000 individuals according to the 2020 census. The five major ethnic demographics of this city are 36.6% other Hispanic, 33.1% white Hispanic, 14.1% white non-Hispanic, 7.57% two or more ethnicities, and 3.41% black or African American Hispanic. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021) As of the 2022-23 school year, there are 26 public schools and 1,126 educators servicing over 12,842 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. (Spash, n.d.) Due to several years of being labeled as underperforming by the NCLBA measures, the Lawrence Public School district was placed under state receivership by the Commissioner of Education in 2011. The Boston Globe describes state receivership as “ the district is now overseen by the nonprofit Lawrence Alliance for Education, though Lawrence school leaders

handle the day-to-day decisions in the district under the guidance of the receivership board, according to the state” (Staff et al., n.d.).

Literature Review

During the summer of 2016, Lawrence Public Schools began the process to adopt a new language arts curriculum that could be used throughout the district and continue to strengthen connections between schools and grade levels, ensuring each student is offered the same curriculum and expectations per grade level. The curricular selection task was assigned to the Office of Curriculum and Instruction.(Spash, n.d) As stated on the Lawrence Public Schools website, “The office of Curriculum and Instruction is responsible for the overall planning, implementation, and evaluation of the district’s curriculum and instructional programs. The department ensures that curriculum programs comply with the policies adopted by the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Lawrence Public Schools.”(Spash, n.d) It is important to note that though there is one Office of Curriculum and Instruction, all Lawrence Public Schools are considered to have full autonomy, allowing schools the freedom to make the appropriate decisions for their buildings without consideration of the impact on other district schools, or academic past, or future initiatives.

By the start of the 2016-17 school year, teachers were introduced to the new chosen curriculum, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA). CKLA is described by its creators as “a comprehensive program (Preschool– Grade 5) for teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking while also building students’ vocabulary and knowledge across essential domains in literature, world and American history, and the sciences.” (Hirsch Jr, 2022) Though state standardized testing results are a considerable influence on the curriculum resource selection and discussion, other factors must be considered when choosing and discussing curriculum. It

has become apparent that content involving social and cultural representation may require further study as to its importance and effects on the stakeholders of that school system. With Lawrence specifically, the stakeholders would be identified as students/families, teachers, administrators, and at times, members of the surrounding communities.

CKLA, founded and created by E.D. Hirsch Jr, is commonly discussed as being the “voice of reason making the case for equality of educational opportunity.” (*Hirsch Jr, 2021*), was created to support the efforts to develop a curriculum that met the common core standards while focusing on improving the national decline in standardized test scores in students. CKLA attempts to engage readers and writers through two distinct sub-areas known as strands. The first strand is referred to as Skills Strand, which focus on the areas of reading and writing, starting in kindergarten with hearing sounds and identifying symbols that match them, rather than using letter names which were previously seen as crucial in earlier educational practices used throughout the country. The second strand, known as knowledge, focuses on the use of themed and scripted read-alouds that students are expected to absorb and comprehend using only illustrations and symbolic representations of the printed words being read. CKLA states that these techniques are used because listening comprehension skills have been shown to form much sooner than reading comprehension skills. Through the knowledge strand, topics and themes are assigned based on the educational areas of science, history, poetry, the arts, and philosophy. Each topic is referred to as a domain, and is taught for approximately eight to ten consecutive lessons before moving on to the next. These domains do not build upon one another within the grade level but do make connections to the following grade-level material allowing students to activate previously learned knowledge or “schema”. (*Hirsch Jr., 2022*) It is important to note that many of these domains offer topics that are not typically taught in that

specific grade level; for example, in kindergarten, students are taught about colonial times, the Indian spice trade, and presidential history.

Continued research in achievement gaps between various demographic groups across the nation has been highlighted. Achievement gaps are often seen as a determinant of the educational future of a student, as well as their future as a member of the local community. Data has shown that minority students have had quicker and higher achievement across academic areas compared to their white peers, yet this data still shows, despite these quicker jumps in achievement, the gaps still remain.(Stanford, 2015) One suggestion to help with the overall climate and culture of academic communities is to create or use a Culturally Inclusive Curriculum (CIC) or Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). CTI and CRT based on pedagogy that not only acknowledges the differences in student cultures, languages, and experiences but instead embraces them and relates them to the learning within the classroom. This effort requires the teacher to become culturally competent while making intentional changes to their classrooms to learn more about their students' lives as well as represent them within their materials and curricula. (Holcomb-Mccoy, 2022) These pedagogical and practice changes would require the educational staff to receive additional professional development, access to culturally responsive materials, and access to demographic statistics and information of the students within their classrooms. (Stephanie Smith Budhai & Lewis, 2022)The United States is set to become a Majority-Minority population within the next thirty years (Frey, 2018), meaning a subdivision in which one or more racial, ethnic, and/or religious minorities (relative to the whole country's population) make up a majority of the local population (Merriam-Webster, 2014). The work towards becoming a CRC (Culturally Responsive Classroom) should begin now. In Lawrence Public Schools, are the curriculum decisions being made the best for

promoting cultural and gender differences with a goal to creating a more inclusive learning environment?

Core Knowledge Foundation

To assist schools in raising test scores, and now providing an effective common core aligned curriculum, E. D. Hirsch Jr's Core Knowledge Foundation provides a Language Arts curriculum (CKLA) implemented in grades k-5. In 2016, the commercial version of CKLA was distributed to more than 500,000 students in elementary classrooms (Bevilacqua, 2016), this includes over 12,000 classrooms that were reported to be using the curriculum across the United States (Bevilacqua, 2016). These implementation statistics do not consider the 6.7 million free downloads of CKLA materials in the same year. The curriculum has been noted to aid in reading comprehension and test scores, offering general knowledge chosen by E.D Hirsch, that he sees as necessary to become successful in life in the United States.

CKLA's curriculum is made up of two distinct structural components, classified by CKLA as strands. These strands are titled "Skills" and "Knowledge" which previously was titled "Listening and Learning". The "Skills" strand works on the skills necessary for foundational reading and writing; phonemic and phonological awareness, letter symbol creation and recognition, and book handling are among the main focuses. The "Knowledge" strand uses scripted read-aloud from ten distinct units, referred to as "domains", expanding from nursery rhymes to the American presidents, having students focus on topics and vocabulary previously described as being above grade level to work on comprehension skills. While the teachers read the scripted materials, students are shown a picture with no words on a flip chart that they must rely on to follow along with the story. Both strands use vocabulary and extension activities to help reinforce the lesson's objectives.

As early as 1994, CKLA and its initial foundation, housed with Hirsch at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, began working closely with school districts and their administrators to investigate the effectiveness of its programs, reporting back a “great success.” (Marcus, 2000) Overall, this data showed increases in academic achievement in students labeled as “the disadvantaged ones”(Marcus, 2000). With the use of deficit language referring to those with an educational and systemic disadvantage as the “haves and have-nots”, CKLA began describing its work and effectiveness as a step toward improvement in equity and quality of education (Marcus, 2000). It is important to note that equity is defined as equal gains across social classes or previously low-performing students; gender, race or sexuality are not mentioned directly.

In 2016, the Foundation published additional research to prove the effectiveness of its design. This came after the initial commercial version of CKLA had been aligned with the common core standard. *The Research Foundation of Core Knowledge and Language Arts* was written by CKLA’s Director of Research, Anita S. McGinty, and the foundation’s president Linda Bevilacqua. This report describes the importance of combining decoding strategies from the Skills section with the advanced comprehension skills from the Knowledge section, creating the definitive foundation for successful reading in later years. (Bevilacqua & McGinty, 2016). The article describes the Knowledge strand as a “language-based knowledge-driven approach to build comprehension”(Bevilacqua & McGinty, 2016). The authors go on to explain that there seems to be a country-wide lack of oral language development within the early grades of academia which is possibly leading to the “inequalities in reading achievement”(Bevilacqua & McGinty, 2016). This research article continues to provide a strong argument and basis for CKLA’s design and operations but fails to mention that these

methods have been seen in other curricular models in the past: Graves, Fountas, Hoffman. Contrary to what was said about these read-alouds “equally supporting the language development of all children”, the authors state that CKLA does not support all children equally, nor does it dismantle the literacy inequalities that its creator had publicly spoken about.

As of 2021, The CKLA website has posted three separate research-based studies on the usefulness and “curriculum coherence” (Cabell, 2016), meaning that the content in each grade level and topic builds upon one another. The studies were created and done by EngageNY, The NYC Department of Education, and Florida State University. In summary, these studies show exceptional evidence on the curriculum’s ability to raise test scores, but there has yet to be a focus on what content is being delivered to students and who is represented in these read-alouds. How does the makeup and relevancy of these demographics in the curriculum affect the educational lives of the children within the classroom?

Representation: Cultural Literacy

The Cambridge English Dictionary (1995) defines representation as “the way that someone or something is shown or described” while the University of Toronto relates the meaning more closely to the educational and curriculum systems that have been created today, as “Representation refers to the basic idea that if students see people like them reflected in course materials, they are more likely to identify with and be able to imagine themselves as belonging in the field” (*Glossary of Terms: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion*, n.d.) This definition allows the stakeholders of the educational environment to see the benefits of representation within the classroom

setting. Allowing students to see themselves within the realm of education allows them to create connections to their own, including their educational experiences. A student who can form these connections can go on to feel welcomed in the diverse learning environments seen outside of the walls of a classroom setting and motivated to pursue further growth for both them and the communities they may influence.

E.D. Hirsch Jr, in 1984, wrote an essay titled *Cultural Literacy*; this would be his first of several attempts to call attention to the need for common cultural knowledge or what he eventually referred to as “cultural literacy” (Hirsch Jr, 1984). Throughout this essay, Hirsch shares his belief that all Americans need to share a common base of cultural knowledge. Cultural knowledge is defined as knowing about some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group. (University of Kansas, 1994). The overall belief is that if an individual is not fluent in the cultural knowledge that is commonly referred to, they will not be able to succeed within that culture and its scenarios (Hirsch Jr, 1984). Hirsch goes on to claim that there are historical references to individuals with “cultural literacy”, but schools are not providing the teaching required to expand on this knowledge. Hirsch goes on to explain that this lack of cultural experience and knowledge is holding back individuals and creating further learning gaps. He also explains that his creation of CKLA could be the solution to these issues.

Later that same year, Audrey T Edwards, a self-proclaimed critic of Hirsch, published a response article in which she agrees that Americans are in need of basic shared knowledge to help communicate with “more efficiency” (Edwards, 1984) but goes on to explain that minority cultures are only allowed to maintain their cultural identities, values, and practices, if

they follow the policies and procedures put in place by the majority society, known as cultural pluralism (Kwan, L. Y.-Y. 2018). Edward's article caused several other critics to begin to question the effectiveness of a core curriculum that has predetermined "cultural knowledge" that could cause districts to focus their teaching on Anglo-Saxon, British and U.S knowledge and literature while ignoring those of other cultures (Edwards, 1984). Hirsch and Edwards would continuously go back and forth on this subject, with Hirsch continually defending his choice of "shared knowledge" materials and focuses within his curriculum.

Independent researcher Aaron Hatley, commented on Hirsch's curriculum, stating that there is historical evidence that shows that this method of curriculum design has been attempted before. Hatley specifically points out that in the times of Thomas Jefferson, there was a belief that democracy could only survive if the voting members and political opponents in society had a "degree of civil literacy" which is equal to what is now being referred to as "cultural literacy" (Hatley, 2016). During this same time frame, Noah Webster was noted as suggesting that the country create and use a "common language" in the hopes of creating unity amongst the cultures seen at that time (Hatley, 2016). It is interesting to note that both previous educational belief systems were met with further criticism, mostly claiming that the creator's beliefs of what is culturally relevant and important for the masses may not represent the minority societies of the time.

Though previous attempts at creating a common system of beliefs and cultural knowledge were documented as unsuccessful, Willaim McGuffey later wrote *Eclectic Readers*, which was a compilation of what he believed were the "true moral virtues" of the United States (Hatley, 2016). McGuffey was able to distribute over 120 million copies of his text, which was

later compared to Webster as being high “Anglo-Saxon” and forcing the Protestant beliefs in such a way to have others accept and join their cultural beliefs, rather than accepting those of others (Hatley, 2016). It is interesting to note however that several stories, including nursery rhymes, that have been part of the previously “failed” curricula, are now seen in the current versions of CKLA in grades Kindergarten through second grade, showing that some of these “Anglo- Saxon/Protestant” cultures are still presented as the default culture to be learned and examined in education (Hatley, 2016).

Though having many critics, Hirsch continued his push towards “Cultural Literacy” by explaining that it is an “open invitation to illiterate folks to join the club” (Hirsch, 1984). This belief system implies that those who are considered “culturally literate”, even if only familiar with their own culture, are seen as the elite, without recognizing the struggles and experiences of the individuals outside of that culture. Who decides what culture is seen as dominant in the educational community? Is it possible for someone who relates to one culture to create a common curriculum that encompasses “Cultural Literacy” and the push for acceptance without showing bias towards their own culture?

Cultural Supremacy and Cultural Ignorance in Education

With the growing belief that one’s culture and knowledge of one’s culture do not reign supreme over another’s experiences and worth comes the discussion of Cultural Supremacy. Cultural Supremacy, and the ideology of cultural blindness, are connected by one’s overall lack of interest or awareness in cultures and histories that do not reflect that of their own. This form of ignorance has been documented as a psychosocial and culturally historic issue (Eagleton, 1991). Additional studies have shown that white teachers are often noted for

claiming “Color Blindness” while also mentioning their ignorance or lack of education of the discrepancies seen in the education field toward non-white students. This lack of awareness can create further issues of “Color Blindness” (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2013). Johnson suggests a full immersion experience within the educational community to work on awareness of the diversity issues in and outside of the classroom environment, “an immersion experience in which students live and practice teaching in a racially and culturally diverse community as a requirement of their preservice program. Immersion experiences alone may not increase racial awareness, but opportunities to critically reflect on those experiences can help deepen understanding” (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2013). In a review of educational works, Peter McLaren points out the importance of being critical when choosing a culturally appropriate or culturally sensitive education path. McLaren describes the politics of curriculum creation, especially in literacy, as being created by “people in power” who are often careful not to “threaten the social stability of the established order” (McLaren, 1988). Kristen Buras echoes this thought by stating that curriculums, such as CKLA, can feel threatened when there is a “shift of the narrative from one’s background to structural inequities. (Buras, 1999). In Cornel West’s *Race Matters*, West accuses schools of continuing the spread of white supremacist beliefs by continuing to expose children to curricula and media that do not represent the full extent of the culture seen in the United States, whether it be lack of representation by race, gender, or age (Cornel West, 2017).

CKLA Today

When exploring what CKLA presently offers, there is a link on the foundation’s website that connects the reader to an article written by E.D. Hirsch Jr. Within the article, Hirsch discusses the decision-making process of how the Knowledge strand domain topics

and read-alouds were selected. In order to achieve his original goal of students being able to read “texts that are aimed or written for a general audience” (Hirsch, 2014), he associated with two white male scholars: Joseph Kett, a professor from the University of Virginia, and Physicist James Trefil. The trio set out to identify topics that students “need to know to be strong general readers” (Hirsch, 2014) by reaching out to lawyers, news reporters and professional speakers as they were identified as the careers best suited for identifying what knowledge the general public “takes for granted” when presented with various forms and levels of literacy (Hirsch, 2014). It is interesting to note that the professions chosen to best make decisions for the “common man” are labeled as being made up of over 90% white and male individuals . Choosing this form of representation for curricula decisions that could possibly reach across the nation seems odd, seeing that in 2013 white individuals only made up 62.4% of the U.S. population. Who is representing the remaining 37.6% of various races? Also in 2013, the percentage of individuals identifying as female was 50.6%, yet Hirsch did not seem to target careers more commonly dominated by women, such as education, which wasn’t listed as a professional opinion of interest in Hirsch’s research (Thompson, 2013). Hirsch admits in his article that his approach does not include all topics or necessities for education, but that it’s a “big start” (Hirsch, 2014). He also brings attention to his lack of representation of other cultures by showing that they are fragmentally represented throughout the curriculum as secondary characters and not forefront in the topic. If CKLA continues to choose its domain topics in this manner, what could be the potential impacts on the other cultures and genders that continue to go under-represented or in some cases are completely invisible?

Theory: Sadker's Seven Forms of Curricular Bias

In 1982 David and Myra Sadker introduced their Seven Forms of Curriculum Bias as a way to identify the possibility of gender bias existing in school environments and curriculum. This work was continued by David after Myra's death in 1995, and additional categories were added to continue the dismantling of biases in educational practices and curriculum choices. In 2007, the focus of his work shifted towards identifying not only gender but ethnicity, race, disabilities, multi-language learners and LGBTQIA biases (Sadker, 2007). Sadker's work has been divided into seven distinct categories to assist with analyzing curriculum: invisibility, stereotyping, imbalance and selectivity, unreality, fragmentation, linguistic bias, and cosmetic bias (Sadker, 2007).

The first form of bias identified by Sadker, Invisibility, is described as "what you don't see, makes a lasting impression" (Sadker, 2007). This literally means the act of leaving people or events out of texts. This could be not representing them at all or giving them limited representation which leads students and educators to the second form of bias, Stereotyping. Stereotyping is the act of assigning "rigid roles or traits" to select individuals or groups, most commonly by race or gender (Sadker, 2007). The third form of bias identified is Imbalance and Selectivity, or as Hirsch also refers to it as "a tale half told" often overlaps with stereotyping as it is the act of presenting only one account or perception of an issue, event or an entire group of people (Sadker, 2007). This form of bias can cause long-lasting skewed points of view depending on what portion of the event is being told versus whose story is being disregarded whether intentionally or not. Unreality, or "Rose Colored Glasses", the fourth form of bias, is when texts tend to glorify a nation while glossing over racism, prejudice, exploitation, discrimination, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict (Sadker,

2007). The fifth bias, Fragmentation, refers to texts creating a dialogue that places minorities, whether by race, culture, or gender, as a background character of the text. Sadker calls these background characters an “interesting sideshow” compared to the main topic of focus. This allows cultures to lose their identity and further unintentional stereotyping to be created by the reader. Linguistic bias addresses the language used within a text, such words as “roaming” or “wandering” when used to discuss Native Americans, implying that they did not have specific land to live on, making the historical fact of White society removing them from their land seem less of an atrocity and more of an insignificant act. Sadker also describes common words such as mankind, businessman, and forefather as being so masculine that they deny the contributions and, at times, existence of women of the past (Sadker, 2007). The seventh and final bias described by Sadker is the Cosmetic bias. The cosmetic bias refers to how textbooks or advertisements may present full equity of cultures with the use of pictures or text features, but offer no narratives towards these cultures. This act is often discussed when colleges or universities will have students of varying races on their advertisements, yet there is little to no cultural diversity seen on the college campus in person (Sadker, 2007). Though the victims of the biases are often females and individuals of color, it is important to note that males have also been identified as victims (Sadker, 2007). These biases are seen throughout CKLA with its portrayal of various cultures. One example of this is the Native American Domain in the Kindergarten curriculum. This unit shows Native Americans through a white dominant lens, leaving out important facts and glossing over the trials and tribulations their people had to face. Are these rewrites necessary when working towards cultural literacy? Or does this further the issues of cultural invisibility?

Theory: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist, created the Sociocultural theory, which describes the effects that culture, or the absence of culture, can play on the lives of learners, especially in their early development stages. Vygotsky suggested that social learning comes before cognitive development and that young children can construct their knowledge actively. He states that “cognitive development in early childhood is advanced through social interaction with other people” (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky suggested that community, defined as a group of people living in the same place or having characteristics in common, including common attitudes, interests, or goals (G Carruth et al., 1980), plays the central part of “making meaning” to life (McLeod, 2020). This theory moves into the classroom community by discussing how young students learn best by connecting their classroom learning to their own lived experiences or cultural history connected to their families on a personal level. These connections and interpretations are typically passed down through interactions with adults prominent in the child's life, such as family members, education providers, and local acquaintances. Vygotsky describes that the reactions and meaning adults put into objects or events provide the witnessing child a background knowledge for them to access and use in future scenarios (McLeod, 2020). These social interactions and the growth of social knowledge allow students to create connections to their learning; this is only amplified by teaching specific academics that relate culturally to the student. “When children are not able to find themselves or their lives reflected in classroom literature, they are less engaged and interested in the reading process. Beyond that, the subtle message is that school is for someone else, not people like you” (Cherry, 2022). Having resources throughout a curriculum that reflect the many different cultures and lifestyles our children represent in their everyday lives

could cause a higher response and appreciation for education. This could be the catalyst for higher retention and graduation rates as well as test scores (Cherry, 2022). With this knowledge, one may question why CKLA has areas of significant cultural invisibility when it is claimed to be promoting Cultural Literacy.

The Impacts of Race/Ethnicity Invisibility

The University of Miami sociologist Liza Hayes analyzed the relationship between “race invisibility with discrimination, social recognition, and group affiliation” (Hayes, 2017). This analysis highlighted the claim of “colorblind racism.” Colorblind racism, “is the belief that racism is no longer a problem and that we all have equal opportunities. People who subscribe to colorblind explanations claim they do not see the color of people's skin and believe everyone to be equal.” (Hayes, 2017). There is a belief that this form of racism is at times more harmful than the blatant more commonly discussed forms of racism since the individuals who claim “color- blindness” seem oblivious to their racist beliefs and actions, (Hayes, 2017) allowing them to claim they are not part of the racism issue. “Color-blind racism” sustains stereotypes allowing for further inequalities based on race and ethnicity (Marx, 2005). By not acknowledging “seeing color”, people are invalidating the existence of the race or ethnicity.

Charles W. Mills, a philosopher, states that the act of “color-blind racism” is an act of privilege, as majorities cannot deny that they do see minorities but are instead “choosing to live as if minorities are invisible (Mills, 2017). Mills and Hayes both describe the consequences of “color-blind racism” as causing the further invalidation of minority races while creating larger gaps in “experiences in marginalization.” (Hayes, 2017).

The psychological effects of this form of racism can include thoughts of self-deprecation while fostering feelings of not deserving respect or even basic acknowledgment from society (Hayes, 2017). This leaves minorities working on validating their cultures and demanding visibility while being forced to create their own social rules and policies that cater to the needs of their communities to create a sense of belonging (Hayes, 2017). While doing this, minority cultures begin to strip away aspects of their own cultures to adapt to the ways of the dominant society, in finding a way to be visible (Hayes, 2017). Are majority cultures unintentionally erasing minorities by treating them as not culturally relevant?

In 2002, Anderson Franklin and Nancy Boyd-Franklin wrote about the lasting effects of prejudice and discrimination on African Americans, termed “Invisibility Syndrome” (Franklin, Franklin-Boyd 2000). Franklin and Boyd-Franklin’s research shows that consistent racial rejection can cause feelings that Black individuals are not “being seen as a person of worth.” (Franklin et al, 2000). Peggy McIntosh also stated this while adding that most white individuals are taught to ignore their white privilege, in the same way, men are told to ignore their male privilege in society (McIntosh, 1988) This act of ignorance leads minorities to censor their cultural beliefs and experiences to accommodate the comfort levels and acceptable behaviors of the majority, most often white society (Franklin et al, 2000).

More recently, there has been a country wide push for diversity within the classroom experience. Though we are seeing many action steps towards this change, studies also show that diversity, when it relates to curriculum, has become an after thought and is instead coming across as “under-developed” (Kohli, et al., 2017). Education is seeing a common theme of white, middle class-focused curriculums that occasionally give a glimpse or “shout out” to the

experiences of other cultures, instead of the goal of offering a fully diverse curriculum lush with diverse histories and perspectives (Kohli, et al 2017). This white, middle class-focus can somewhat create a stigma that these other cultures are less important to society. Students of color and white students are consistently given lessons that reinforce that being white is the superior race while supporting the internalized “self-racism” (Huber, 2006). Who holds the power of making curriculum decisions? When looking at Lawrence Public Schools specifically, does the CKLA’s push for “Cultural Literacy ” and its lack of cultural representation of minority cultures encourage this act of self- censorship?

The Impacts of Gender Invisibility

LGBTQIA+ rights have been a topic of discussion and policy, starting around 1969 during the Stonewall riots. These conversations have helped the LGBTQIA+ community to become part of the educational policies and curriculum debates ever since, including current day. However, we have seen very limited LGBTQIA+ representation in curriculum and classroom discussions, especially in early childhood education (Linville, 2017). Many opposed to the increase of LGBTQIA+ representation in the classroom have been noted as calling the LGBTQIA+ topics “inappropriate” and that they “endorse immoral living and would ultimately promote being LGBTQIA+”, this creates a belief that being part of the LGBTQIA+ community is a choice (Linville, 2017).

The invisibility of any outside the gender binary can be harmful to the entire spectrum of gender. Due to this form of invisibility, the LGBTQIA+ community, especially youth, faces additional struggles of identity such as feelings of “confusion, uncertainty and isolation” (Austin, 2016). The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) completed a survey

on the impacts of invisibility on LGBTQIA+ students in the U.S. (Linville, 2017). One of the more common findings was that LGBTQIA+ students are often at a greater risk of bullying compared to their straight peers (Linville, 2017). LGBTQIA+ students are also more likely to show signs of mental health issues and truancy in school. Due to their school struggles, LGBTQIA+ students are twice as likely to end up in juvenile detention systems (Linville, 2017). This is even more prevalent in the Transexual identifying part of the community. The conclusion of this survey stated that “heteronormality and sexism are to blame for society’s lack of affirmation for gender fluidity” (Linville, 2017).

The University of Minnesota completed a children’s mental health review in 2017. This review showed the invisibility of a minority population within society, especially in schools, can result in severe long-term mental health issues. A “minority stress perspective” shows that internalized negative attitudes, including stereotypes, and even the act of being part of a minority group can put them at higher risk of mental health problems (Maguire et al, 2017). These mental health issues are identified as extreme stressors that can cause individuals that identify as part of these minority groups to hold negative attitudes toward their community and their own identity. These self-deprecating thoughts and feelings of invisibility from the majority public eye have been noted to lead to “higher drug and alcohol use, academic failure, higher rates of depression and anxiety, and extreme rises in suicide” (Maguire et al, 2017). This review concludes by suggesting that increasing the visibility of the LGBTQIA+ in curriculum, even in early childhood, could decrease these effects drastically (Maguire et al, 2017).

The Impacts of Stereotyping

Stereotypes are often related to an individual's race/ethnicity or gender. This type of prejudice is largely based on a public attitude toward a race or gender, in other words, people may attach characteristics to an entire community, based on their experiences or beliefs of one member of that society (Katz & Braly, 1933). Some common stereotypes are that Asian Americans are very good at math, or that African Americans are seen as lazy or violent. These forms of stereotypes cause a threat of "psychological discomfort" on the minorities involved (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). "Psychological discomfort" is defined as non-specific symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. High levels of psychological distress are indicative of impaired mental health and may reflect common mental disorders, like depressive and anxiety disorder (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). Stereotypes can cause individuals, specifically, those whose cultures have negative stereotypes against them, to feel threatened in times of evaluation when they can relate to the stereotype or fear they are perpetuating that act (Katz, D., & Braly, K., 1933).

In 1995, to test the effects of stereotypes and the threats felt from them, Claude M. Steele and Joshua A. Aronson completed a study on students in the U.S. at the university level who identified as being of African American descent. The initial part of this study relied on the stereotype that African Americans were not intelligent. When presented with an exam, the African American students were made aware of the stereotype and were told that their scores would be entirely based on their intelligence level. Steele and Aronson saw that the threat of perpetuating a stereotype against their culture created a level of stress that caused the students to perform poorly. When given another with the understanding that intelligence was not a

factor in the scoring, the students performed significantly higher (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). These findings, among other similar studies that showed comparable results, are signs of the lingering effects of stereotyping, while also possibly highlighting the effects of invisibility that lead to the creation of such stereotypes (Appel & Kronberger, 2012).

Data Memo

Total Visibility k-2

Lawrence, Massachusetts has a unique demographic makeup (Figure 1), and with the projected minority majority U.S. population by 2044 (Figure 2), is Core Knowledge the best choice of curricula when the educational system is calling for a more Culturally Inclusive Curriculum (CIC) to be used within the public school classroom. The benefits of CIC have been documented in various communities of varying demographics throughout the United States. (Figure 3).

Figure 1 Lawrence, Ma demographics -2020

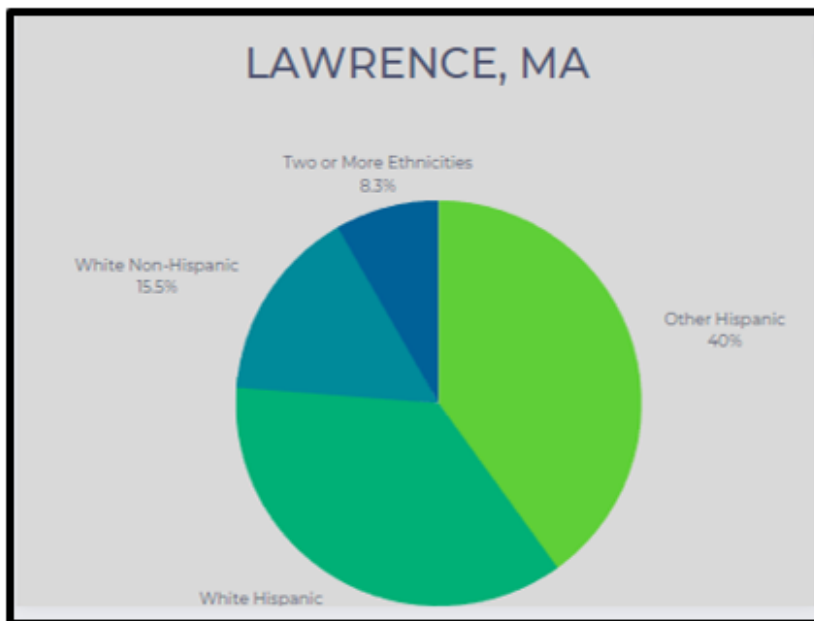


Figure 1B

K-12 Revenue per child in Massachusetts - 2022

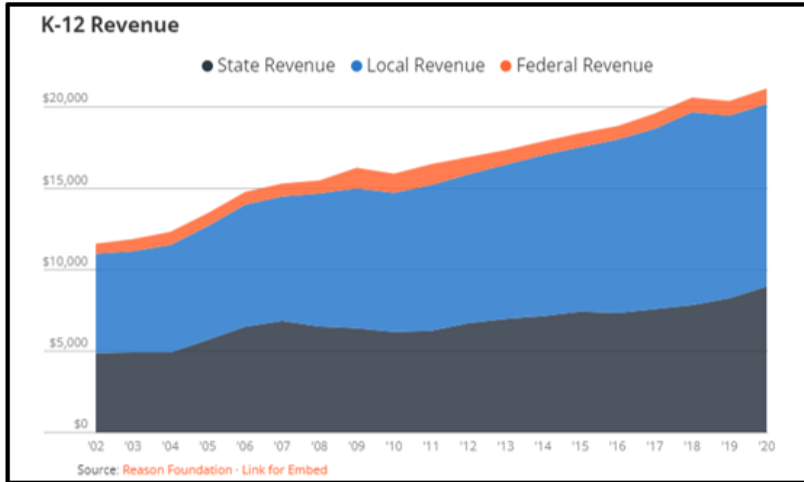


Figure 2

The projected racial make-up of the United States population- 2044

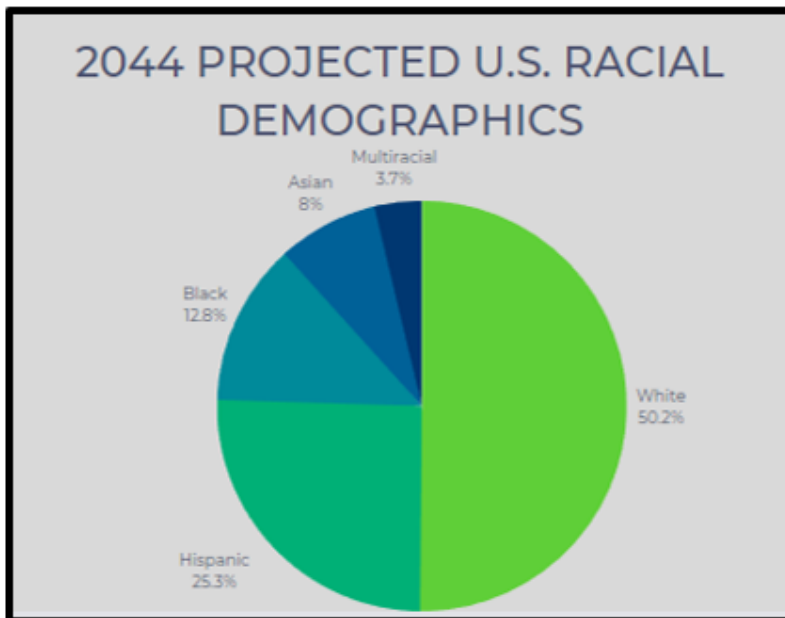
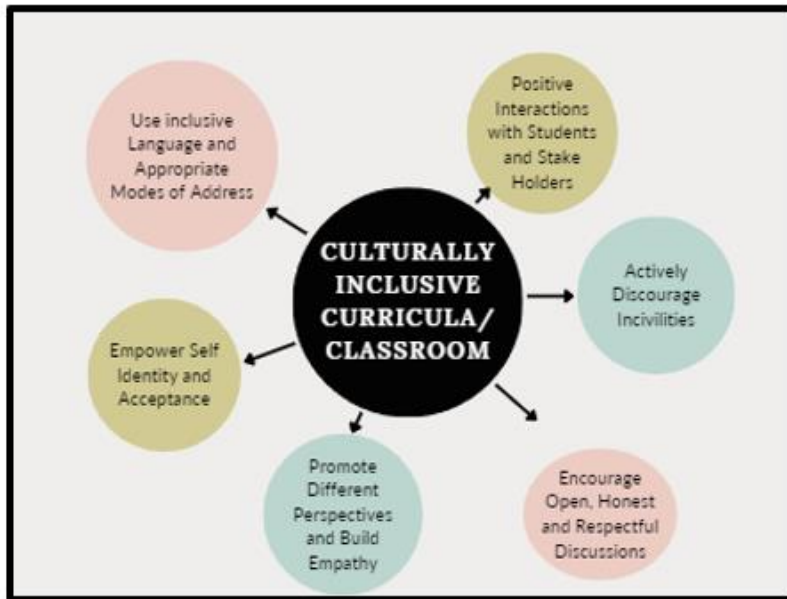


Figure 3

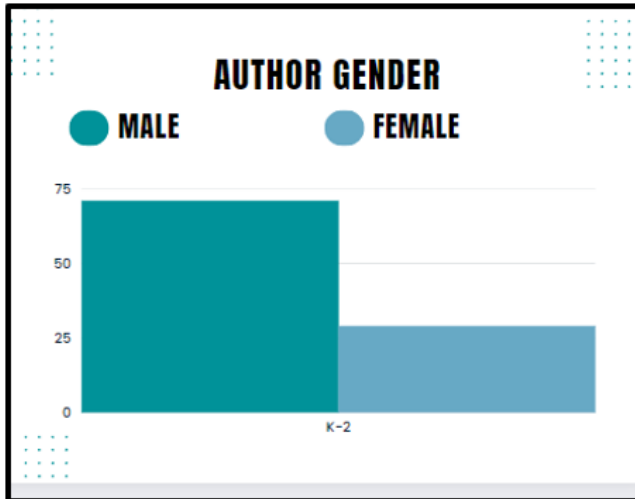
Benefits/Characteristics of CIC

**Authors- Gender and Race.**

Throughout the CKLA curriculum, very few of the authors are identified or given credit for their work, which makes it difficult to gauge the impact that the authors' gender identity has on the user. In total, there are seven authors listed out of the 338 read-alouds for grades k-2. This means that only 2% of the read-alouds have known authors, leaving credit for the remaining 98% to be given to the CKLA editors. Out of the seven authors, five are identified as male, and two are identified as female. This means that 71% of the identified authors are male while 29% are female. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

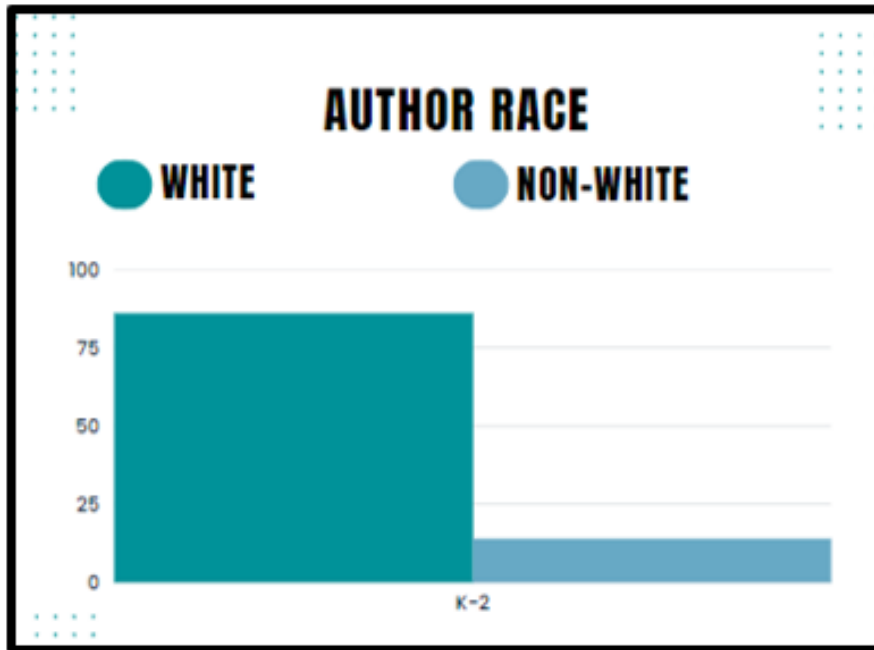
CKLA K-2 Representation: Author Gender



Of the seven authors listed for k-2 read-alouds, six are White Anglo-Saxon, and one is Black American. There are no West Asian, East Asian, Latinx, African, Middle Eastern, Indigenous, Mediterranean, White Irish or Italian authors present within the three grade levels examined. This means that of the 2% of authors identified, 86% are White Anglo-Saxon and 14% are Black American, with 0% representing any other races. (Figure 5)

Figure 5

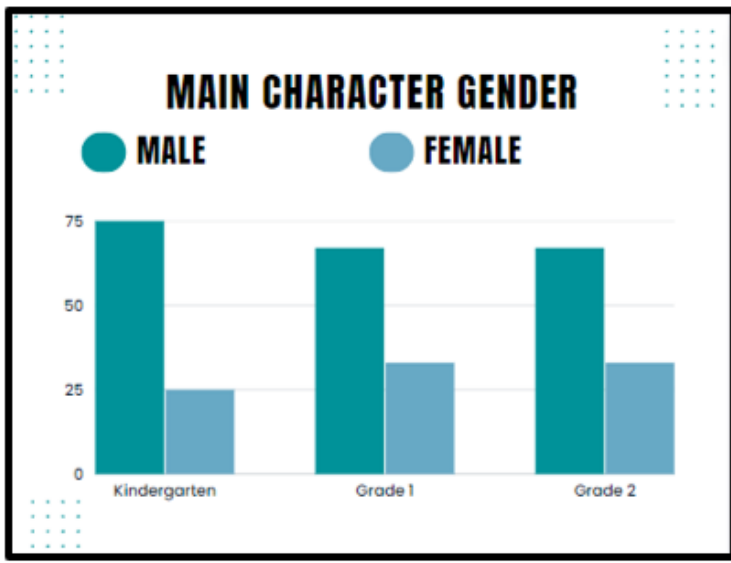
CKLA K-2 Representation: Author Race

**Main Characters- Gender and Race**

Two hundred forty four of the 338 (72%) of the K-2 read-alouds feature main characters, with the additional 94 using a more anonymous narrative voice. Of the 244 main characters included in the texts, 181 are male identifying and 63 are female. This means that 74% of the main characters are male leaving only 26% to be female. (Figure 6).

Figure 6

CKLA K-2 Representation: Main Character Gender



Forty six of the main characters used throughout the three grades are featured as talking animals/creatures, rendering them “raceless”. Of the remaining 198 main characters, 118 are White Anglo-Saxon, 21 are Black American, 1 is West Asian, 10 are East Asian, 1 is Latinx, 3 are African, 9 are Middle Eastern, 14 are Indigenous, 20 are Mediterranean, 1 is White Irish, and 0 are Italian. In percentages, this means 60% are White Anglo-Saxon, 11% are Black American, 0.5% are West Asian, 5% are East Asian, 6% are Latinx, 2% are African, 5% are Middle Eastern, 2% are Indigenous, 10% are Mediterranean, 0.5% are White Irish, and 0% are Italian. (Figure 7).

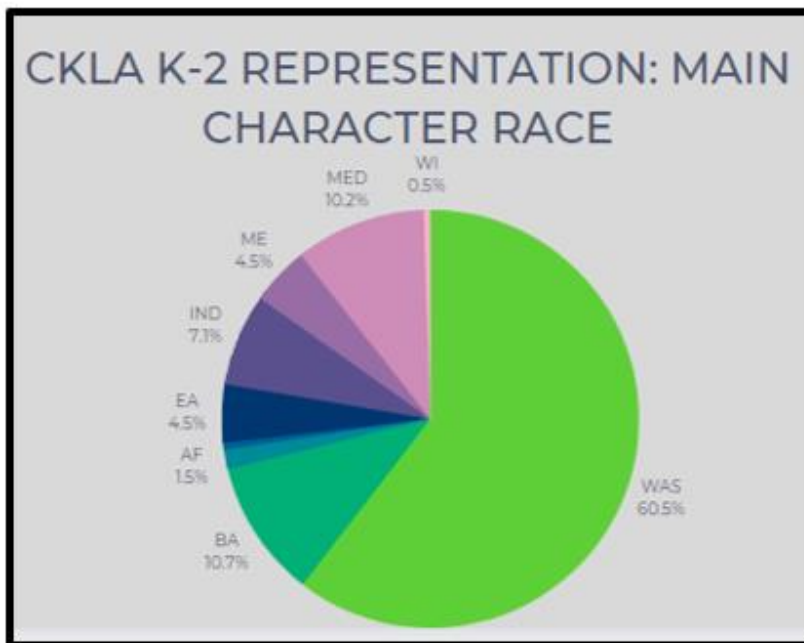
CKLA Representation K-2 : Key

Racial Category	Abbreviation
White Anglo Saxon	WAS
Black American	BA
African	AF
West Asian	WASIAN
East Asian	EA
Indigenous	IND
Middle Eastern	ME

Mediterranean	MED
White Irish	WI
Italian	IT
LatinX	LA
Not Applicable or Not Credited	N/A

Figure 7

CKLA K-2 Representation: Main Character Race

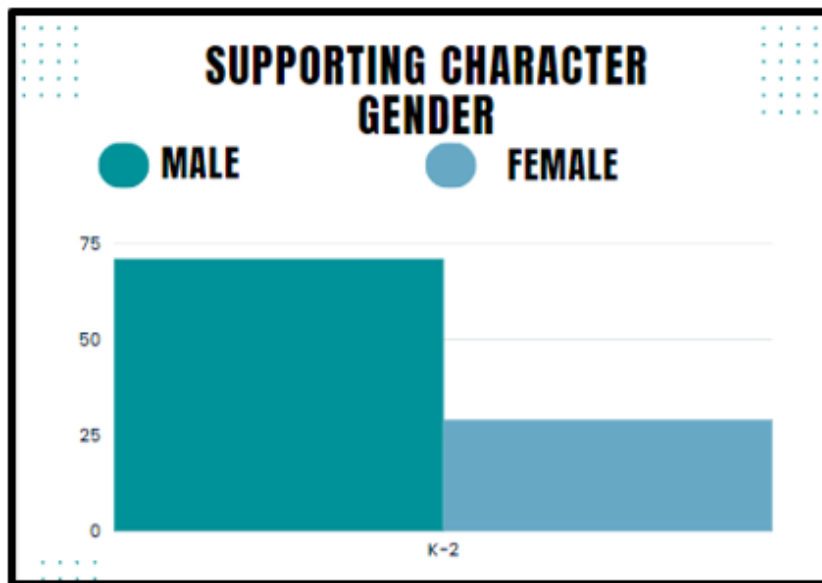


Supporting Characters- Gender and Race

Of the 338 k-2 read-alouds, a total of 83 use supporting characters as part of their narrative. Of the 84 supporting characters, 60 are identified as being male, while 24 are identified as female. This means that 71% of the supporting characters are male leaving on 29% to be female. (Figure 8)

Figure 8

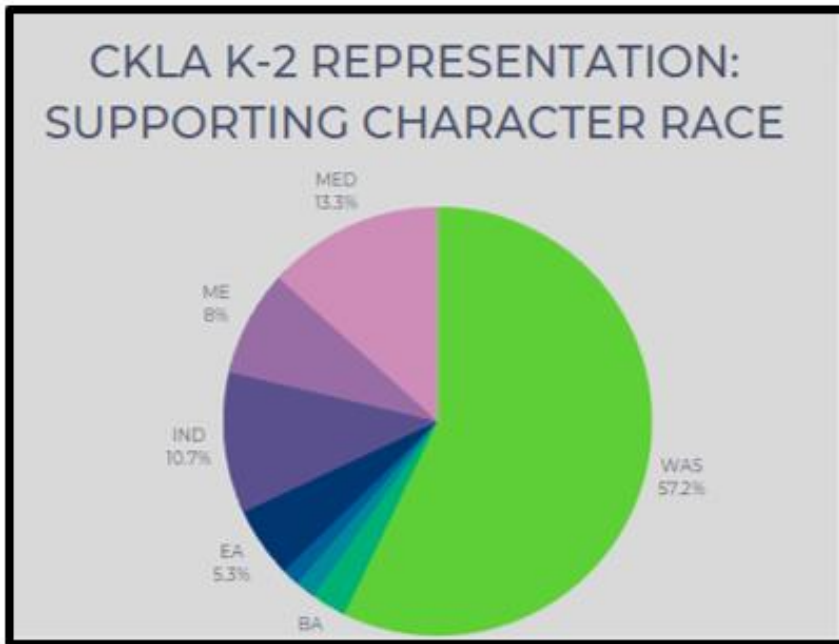
CKLA K-2 Representation: Supporting Character Gender



Six of the supporting characters are talking animals/creatures, rendering them “raceless”. Of the remaining 77 supporting characters, 43 are White Anglo-Saxon, 2 are Black American, 1 is West Asian, 4 are East Asian, 5 are Latinx, 1 is African, 6 are Middle Eastern, 3 are Indigenous, 10 are Mediterranean, 1 is White Irish and 1 is Italian. In percentages, that means 57% are White Anglo-Saxon, 3% are Black American, less than 1% are West Asian, 4% are East Asian, 1% are African, 8% are middle Eastern, 11% are Indigenous, 13% are Mediterranean, 1% are White Irish, 1% are Italia, and 0% are Latinx. (Figure 9)

Figure 9

CKLA K-2 Representation: Supporting Character Race



Recommendations

While CKLA may improve students' literacy scores and costs very little financially to interested districts, the data shown here may prove that the curriculum is far too costly for the students placed in racial and gender margins who are forced to embrace Eurocentric and cis-male-centric visions of reality.

Based on the Lawrence, MA demographics, this curriculum renders nearly 90% of Lawrence Public School students grades k-2 invisible, furthering the marginalization and further disconnects from their educational journey. Lack of representation for students of color allows the white community to continue to live as if students of color are truly invisible, thus continuing the daily living cycle as if people of color are invisible, further perpetuating the color-blind racism that continues to rule society. With Early Childhood years being labeled as a time that a

student can find their own educational integrity and personality, the Latinx and Spanish population of Lawrence's Early Childhood grade levels are most affected by this invisibility. What steps can be taken to begin the process of identifying and fixing the lack of representation issues in these most transformative years?

Suggestions and Recommendations: Anti-Oppressive/Culturally Inclusive Curriculum

With the current push in the education community for inclusivity and educational accountability, it is necessary to be teaching multiple perspectives of content. The first steps towards more inclusive content is to first examine what is currently being taught in public schools as part of the core curriculum. One must recognize and reject the belief that the only "right" culture is the dominant culture, previously identified as the White Anglo-Saxon Heterosexual culture.

Based on the data shown in this paper's literature review, I believe the first step to increasing improvement outcomes is for educators to become aware of their own intersectionality. To do this, teachers must be offered a preservice teacher education program that addresses reassessing curriculum needs and concerns, while also looking into the pedagogies' intersectionality. These programs are offered in many ways, but each comes at this topic as a way of searching one's own life and biases. Lawrence Public Schools has access to this style of professional development by using the Standards Institute hosted by UnboundEd. Through the Standards Institute, teachers are given a week-long experience focusing on the common core standards while exploring opportunities to add representation that reflects the student in each school building, rather than focusing on a "blanket solution" that does not fully represent the students and their experiences. This institute, and others like it, emphasize the power of culturally relevant and responsive teaching (CRT), high-quality instructional materials,

activities, and pedagogies that enforce and reinforce culturally developed instructional planning. Sending teachers to tProfessional development like this allows districts to begin the process of allowing teachers to see their own biases, explore the different curriculum styles available, and most importantly, start the internal work of reevaluating one's own teaching style and ways of creating a culturally responsive environment for themselves and their students. However, it is important to note that the work does not stop when this training ends, and it must continue through building-based and district-wide professional development opportunities. This learning should focus on the need for the "history of the intersectionality of marginalized groups" to be studied and taught to empower the intersectional marginalized students within the classroom. Though this process may seem obvious to researchers, it requires educators to fully research and process what needs to be done. It is the duty of administrators and educators to be constantly breaking down and dismantling their own stereotypes and ideations. This allows teachers to center their classrooms around their students' voices and lives, rather than suppressing them to fit into a scripted curriculum and lesson plan.

Another step to improving outcomes is to have the adults in the learning community-educators, family members, and administrators-come together to discuss the differences seen within the community and the various voices that are seeking to be raised. Allowing this community to work together and come to the table when making curricular decisions is a way of acknowledging the lack of local representation not just in the curriculum, but in the decision-making process as well. This entire process requires self-reflection along with working on understanding the historical systems of oppression and the theories behind their reasoning. During this process, it is important that the current use of CKLA is discussed, and the effects and psychological damages, stereotypical threats, and continued promotion of the White Anglo-

Saxon male-dominated culture as the dominant culture are not ignored. Though it is likely that there will never be one curriculum that meets all the representational needs of every district. These discussions and educator training are a great catalyst toward the creation of a more humanities-driven and representative curriculum that represents each student while allowing for further changes as demographics change over time. The transition to this curriculum style allows students and staff to “reclaim” their educational experiences/curriculum. This can be accomplished by adding in stories, both fiction and non-fiction, that represent cultures that are seen as dominant in the current texts to be shown from other perspectives. An example of this would be depicting the harsh conditions of slavery, which currently is glossed over in many texts. The new focus would not be simply on the differences between cultures, but would include rejoicing in the similarities and the shared experiences as well.

With this professional development and further community engagement, I would strongly recommend administrators and educators break down the needed changes and take on each area as a team to create a more culturally responsive and accepting learning space. In the area of curriculum, I would suggest educators understand that though they may not have full control over curriculum choices, their advocacy and voices should be heard. Educators need to understand how their curriculum represents their students and, when needed, how to bring appropriate changes and suggestions forward for continuous growth and progress. Educators should reflect on their curriculum and ask, whose stories are being told? Who is writing? And who is missing? This form of curriculum reflection is a great start to understanding the needs of the community.

Schools need to research and model social emotional learning, inviting students to understand and create their own narratives for their personal identities. Additionally, teachers

should be encouraged to use their academic knowledge of texts to fill their classrooms with “multicultural reading materials” as a way of creating and implementing their own form of anti-racist education. This allows students to be exposed to texts that incorporate different racial identities in both texts and learned experiences while allowing for state-recommended curriculum to continue to be implemented. With these academic changes, comes environmental change. Classroom décor should be a visual representation of the values of both the educator and the students, having visual representations that allow the student to feel a sense of belonging . This inclusivity fuels bonds to be created between student and educator as well as the community.

With these classroom changes, professional development, and community engagement, there can be a true sense of belonging that allows the learning community to feel ownership over their academic experiences and brings focus to the need for cultural inclusion.

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