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## Providing a Platform: An Examination of How Teachers Utilize and Practice Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

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Providing a Platform: An Examination of How Teachers Utilize and Practice Culturally Responsive  
Pedagogy

A Research Project Presented to the Faculty of Minnesota State University Moorhead

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ----- 4

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ----- 5**

    1) The Problem ----- 5

        a) The Question and Context ----- 6

        b) Hypothesis ----- 6

    2) Subjects and Setting ----- 7

        a) Description of Subjects ----- 7

        b) Selection of Criteria ----- 7

        c) Description of Setting ----- 7

    3) Research Ethics ----- 8

        a) Permissions ----- 8

        b) Informed Consent ----- 8

        c) IRB Approval ----- 8

**CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ----- 8**

    1) Existing Research ----- 8

**CHAPTER THREE: DATA COLLECTION ----- 14**

    1) Data Collection Procedures ----- 14

    2) Analysis and Interpretation of Procedures ----- 15

    3) Development of Action Plan ----- 16

    4) Limitations and Intentionality ----- 16

PROVIDING A PLATFORM	3
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS &amp; FINDINGS</b> -----	17
1) Results & Findings -----	17
2) Interpretations -----	26
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: ACTION PLAN &amp; PLAN FOR SHARING</b> -----	30
1) A Commitment -----	30
References -----	32

## ABSTRACT

For this study, I posed the following question to guide my research: How do elementary teachers reshape and change curriculum and/or teaching practices when provided the opportunity through professional development? Specifically, the study examined K-2 teachers at two different elementary schools in Minnesota. The study aimed to determine how teachers implemented and redesigned curriculum material when provided optional professional development sessions, focused on educational equity, multiracial/multicultural read aloud(s), and culturally responsive teaching strategies. Further, this study focused on how these teachers successfully or unsuccessfully reshaped components of curriculum and teaching practice in order to be more equitable, relevant, and responsive. More specifically, the study explained which teachers choose to attend the professional development, and which components of culturally responsive practices they chose to use in developing new curriculum. As a part of data collection, the teachers completed a survey that described and documented their experiences writing new curriculum and implementing new learning experiences in their spaces. The study found that teachers who attended the session(s) were convicted in the work and ready to apply their new learnings in their teaching space(s).

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Racial Equity Work; three words frequently circulating the many spaces and places of education, as well as a phrase that is wildly complex and often misunderstood. In the past five years, school systems across the state of Minnesota have engaged in work defined as racial equity – But what is racial equity work, truly? How do teachers implement racial equity work and culturally responsive pedagogy in their daily teaching philosophies and practices? Minnesota holds one of the widest racial achievement gaps in the country, as students of color are consistently performing at academic levels below their white counterparts. Unfortunately, Osseo Area Schools District #279 holds data that is in complete alignment. I work in a district that serves 54% students of color, while our staff is mainly composed of white female educators and school staff.

We, as a district, have an Educational Equity Department, to which I belong and work as an Equity Teacher. An Equity Teacher is an instructional coach and collaborator with a culturally responsive focus. In my role, I often find myself alongside teachers who resist talking about race and the role it plays in both a teacher teaching, and a learner learning. I often work alongside teachers who deeply fear challenging the status quo, of changing “the business of school.” In my third year in this role, a pattern became clear; there is a living, breathing apprehension to change or modify current curriculum, in elementary school classrooms, even when the current content is irrelevant or even harmful to the student population. Because of this, school has become a historically white institution that follows historical and primarily white social norms, which urges us to consider where that leaves scholars of color? How do educators ensure scholars of color feel safe and embedded in a sense of belonging while at school? How do educators ensure

scholars of color are encouraged, validated, and provided equitable learning experiences that are meaningful? How do educators provide content reflective and relevant to the students served? Unfortunately, there is not an easy answer – but there is research.

### **The Question and Context**

For this study, I will pose the following question to guide my research: How do elementary teachers reshape and change curriculum and/or teaching practices when provided the opportunity through professional development?

I will be examining K-2 teachers at two elementary schools. I will be studying how these teachers implement and redesign curricular material when provided optional professional development sessions, focused on educational equity and culturally responsive teaching strategies. I will be focusing on how these educators successfully or unsuccessfully reshape components of curriculum and teaching practice in order to be more culturally responsive. More specifically, I will focus on which teachers attend the professional development, which components of culturally responsive practices they choose to use in developing curriculum, followed by a survey of their experience implementing the curriculum.

### **Hypothesis**

Due to a low level of conviction and commitment among elementary school teachers, teachers who opt into the professional development sessions will continue to produce similar curriculum, even with access to meaningful collaboration and culturally responsive resources or tools.

### **Subjects and Setting**

For the purpose of this study, I will be examining elementary teachers in a public school located in an urban/suburban area in Minnesota.

**Description of Subjects.** For this study, the research participants will be K-2 elementary teachers from two different elementary schools in the district. I will be studying how teachers implement and redesign curricular material when provided optional professional development sessions focused on educational equity. I will be focusing on how teachers successfully or unsuccessfully reshape components of curriculum, and teaching practice in order to be more culturally responsive.

**Selection of Criteria.** One of the main components that will fuel my research is the optional professional development sessions I will be providing to elementary teachers. These professional development sessions will be offered to teachers and school support staff. All who are interested will be welcome in attending.

**Description of Setting.** This study will take place in two elementary schools within the district. One of the schools will have a wide range of racial diversity in the student population and the other will have a relatively low range of racial diversity in the student population. Both schools employ teachers who identify as white and are in the majority. Both schools employ teachers who identify as female and are in the majority.

## Research Ethics

In order to ensure ethical research procedures, I obtained informed consent documents and have IRB approval.



**Informed Consent.** Before participating fully in the professional development sessions, I obtained consent from the elementary teachers who participated in the study.

**IRB Approval.** Before completing the research study, I will obtained IRB approval.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The topic of culturally responsive pedagogy is most definitely a 'buzz phrase' in education. It seems that most teachers want to be culturally responsive but are unsure of an actual way to reach that goal. Becoming a culturally responsive educator is more than the introduction of new strategies and/or the inclusion of new racially radical content. It is about examining your own practices, your own racial identity, and your own philosophies of education – which is a complex and comprehensive process that can sometimes be messy, time-consuming, and challenging.

Many times, becoming a culturally responsive teacher starts with becoming racially and culturally conscious. This has multiple meanings – understanding own racial identity, connecting race and culture to both teaching and learning, and making transformational change to teaching practices and content. Griner and Stewart (2012) confirm schools and teachers who adopt culturally responsive teaching practices have the ability to transform into “change agents” or professionals who are truly moving education to a more authentic and meaningful space. The tricky component is the lack of understanding teachers and school staff demonstrate in connection to “clear examples and tools for best practice that will aid them in addressing the achievement gap and disproportionality effectively within their schools and classrooms,” (586). Griner and Stewart argue that culturally responsive pedagogy is necessary within educational environments for multiple reasons – the disproportionality of students of color designated as special education students, the existing cultural divide between students/parents/communities and the school system, as well as the increasing number of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students.

Griner and Stewart argue that in order to best implement culturally responsive teaching, based on their findings, multiple perspectives is absolutely necessary. This means that parents, community members, and other stakeholders need to have a voice in the conversation, and if they do not, cultural responsiveness will not be achieved in the classroom. Further, Griner and Stewart (2012) support this idea by sharing results, or the major themes, found from their study – outreach, representation, and classroom management strategies. After examining the results of their multiple case studies focused on culturally responsive pedagogy, Griner and Stewart create a ‘culturally responsive teaching checklist for schools and teachers,’ which underlines and pinpoints how each of these major themes is being addressed within a given school or building. Griner and Stewart (2012) strengthen their points by noting, “we must also remember that it takes a long-term commitment to issues of social justice in education to find useful and meaningful ways to address the inequitable structures and belief cycles and contribute to issues such as the achievement gap and disproportionality,” (603).

Takafor Ndemanu and Jordan (2018) describe how and why culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is important for students who identify as African immigrants. Although many schools may indicate support and inclusion of multicultural pedagogy, this notion alone is not nearly enough because teachers often possess a lack of exposure to accurate and meaningful information about certain demographics of students (Takafor Ndemanu Jordan, 2018). In order to uncover information that is missing from textbooks and overall curriculum content, teachers must take the time to learn and discover new content themselves. We cannot teach what we don’t know (Howard, 2006) and therefore to teach what we don’t know, we have to learn it (Takafor Ndemanu and Jordan, 2018). This is the work of becoming a culturally responsive

educator; challenging the assumptions and stereotypes made about your students and interrupting them on a regular basis by providing curriculum and learning experiences that are authentic, meaningful, and reflective of racial and cultural identity.

Takafor Ndemanu and Jordan (2018) describe the several factors that influence African immigrant children in United States school systems, including language development, the idea of parental involvement, and becoming familiarized to a new country. The authors also argue that teaching in a way that is inclusive of multiple frames of reference is beneficial to both non-white students and white students because scholars are encouraged to view the world from another perspective and to interact with that perspective in a constructive and collective way (Takafor Ndemanu and Jordan, 2018).

Many words have been used to describe what it means to be culturally responsive, however the central ideas remain the same throughout all theories (Brockenbrough, 2016). To practice culturally responsive pedagogy, a teacher must identify the cultural identity and background from which his/her/their students derive from. Teachers must use these authentic experiences to shape learning within educational spaces. Culturally responsiveness ensures that interactions, dialogue, and learning experiences capitalize on student cultures in order to make the learning true and meaningful (Brockenbrough, 2016). Banks (2010) describes “Teachers need in-depth knowledge about ethnic cultures and experiences to integrate ethnic content, experiences, and points of view into the curriculum. Many teachers tell their students that Columbus discovered America and that American is a “new world” because they know little about the diverse Native American cultures that existed in the Americas more than 40,000 years before the Europeans began to settle in the Americas in significant numbers in the sixteenth

century. As Gary Howard (1999) states in the title of his cogent and informative book, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know.*"

Culture and its definitions are not exclusive to race and ethnicity. In fact, when thinking of cultural responsiveness, it is essential to think of how multiple cultural backgrounds interact with one another to form experiences and perspective. Brockenbrough studies how Black and Latino Urban Queer Youth (BLUQY) are traditionally marginalized in school systems and explains how culturally responsive pedagogy serves as one way to create safe spaces and inclusive learning experiences.

When tasked with culturally responsive teaching, teachers need to recognize the amount of critical work and reflection needed to truly shift the way learning looks and feels in respective spaces. Culturally responsive teaching focuses on how teachers examine and include students' cultural identities and backgrounds into what is taught and most importantly HOW it is taught. Also common among resources, is the idea of teacher learning and taking the initiative, as the educator, to learn more about your students and to cast a deeper and more encompassing net when it comes to building learning plans that are culturally responsive. In my perspective, it takes diligent and dedicated work to be a culturally responsive teacher and the research I found aligned with this notion.

As Banks (2010) states, "a curriculum that focuses on the experiences of mainstream Americans and largely ignores the experiences, cultures, and histories of other ethnic, racial, cultural, language, and religious groups has negative consequences for both mainstream students and students of color. A mainstream-centric curriculum is one major way in which racism and ethnocentrism are reinforced and perpetuated in schools, in colleges, in universities,

and in society at large.” So, what? What should educators be doing to raise their cultural and racial consciousness? How can teachers embody practices that are reflective of transformational and radical change in connection to the materials they provide in classroom spaces and lesson plans? One of the ways that K-12 teachers can begin to become culturally responsive leaders is through the development of storytelling and critical literacy skills. Rather than following status quo, teaching with a framework of critical literacy encourages teachers to evaluate the texts and narratives shared in class differently.

According to Soares and Woods (2010), “the term critical literacy describes a pedagogical approach to reading that focuses on the political, sociocultural, historical, and economic forces that shape young students’ lives. It is an approach that teaches readers to become critically conscious of their own values and responsibilities in society (Ciardiello, 2004). Accordingly, the goal of critical literacy is to raise students’ responsiveness toward societal problems in the world and to prompt students to ask why and for what reason are things the way they are, to question who profits the most, and then to act on making the world a better place (Beck, 2005; Comber & Nixon, 1999). Furthermore, critical literacy allows students to bring their own lived experiences into discussions, offering them opportunities for participation, engagement in high levels of reading and discussion, and to understand the power of language.

### CHAPTER THREE: DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes several components of the study related to data. First, I describe the participants who are involved in the study. Next, I explain how I collected data and the processes involved in obtaining relevant and meaningful data. Then, I provide context as to what I plan to do with the data I collect and how I will make meaning of the data. I then describe how I developed and executed the research plan. Finally, in the last subsection, I describe limitations and intentionally of this study.

#### **Data Participants**

For this study, I will be examining K-2 elementary teachers from two different elementary schools in the district. The two elementary schools serve different student demographics – one school serves families, communities and students who are racially and culturally diverse, the other school serves families, communities, and students who are not racially and culturally diverse, meaning many of the students identify similarly racially. I hope to study at least ten teachers, but no more than twenty teachers. I hope to engage teachers who bring multiple perspectives and experiences (racial identity, gender identity, age, and years of experience.)

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

In the upcoming months, I will be completing multiple tasks at two different elementary schools. These sites will have different racial and cultural student demographics. Both sites will have similar racial and cultural teacher demographics. I will implement two optional professional development sessions focused on culturally responsive lesson planning, and critical literacy practices through the use of read aloud and storytelling.

After providing information focused on what these sessions will be about, I will document the number of teachers who indicate interest, as well as the number of teachers who are in attendance at the session. I will also take note of how many principals and building leaders allow this type of professional development interaction to take place. During professional development, I will document which components of the districts' culturally responsive framework teachers choose to use when building new curriculum. The final component of data collection will be to send out a survey after the professional development sessions. The purpose of the survey will be to obtain information focused on what was helpful in terms of instructional practices, meaningful resources, and district support moving forward.

To analyze data, I will use pre-existing tools used in the district. Along with anecdotal records and documents, I will be using the CLEAR lesson planning framework and the ending survey to analyze how teachers are using the new curricular materials and content effectively or ineffectively.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Procedures**

From the teachers who choose to attend the professional development, I will analyze their racial, gender, and age demographics, followed by their total years' experience as a classroom teacher. I will also document the grade level of each teacher or school support staff. The basis of this analysis is to understand which teachers choose to engage in culturally responsive curriculum building, and if race, gender, age and classroom experience are variables in attendance or absence.

Based on the districts' culturally responsive curriculum building framework and culturally responsive strategies from outside organizations, such as the National Urban Alliance (NUA), I



will analyze how teachers are making specific choices to include multiple elements, minimal elements, or no elements at all. I will take careful note of which resources teachers choose to integrate into their lesson plans.

The survey will include both multiple choice and open-ended questions. I will analyze how teachers answer the multiple-choice questions and I will also examine their open-ended responses and what the responses mean for how teachers implement culturally responsive practices.

### **Development of Action Plan**

As an equity teacher, my role is similar to an instructional coach. The school district has a policy in place that requires educators to implement culturally responsive teaching practices. There are dedicated professional development days to support teachers in building CRP skills. However, there seems to be a lack of skill and fidelity to this process and policy among teachers. Therefore, the timeline for the implementation for this action research will be from January 2019 to April 2019. Throughout this time, I will recruit teachers and implement two professional development sessions at two different elementary schools. This timeframe will allow me to choose the best location and date that can involve as many educators as possible in the study. In order to implement this, I need sufficient time to gather texts and resources that are specifically designed to support K-2 elementary teachers in becoming more culturally responsive.

### **Limitations & Intentionality**

Because I am in a position of influence with very little power, lack of teacher participation may become problematic. The study revolves around information teachers value, the extent to which teachers are willing to participate AND change their existing materials, and how teachers

collaborate in a space of collective brainstorming and processing. Because this study is optional, low numbers of teacher participation would get in the way of my ability to answer my research questions and draw inferences from the findings. I will be intentional about how to pose the study to teachers, highlighting the benefits and opportunity for growth. I will also be intentional about what schools I offer the opportunity to. As an Equity Teacher, I am assigned to six different buildings across the district. I have different relationships with each of those buildings. I am choosing to complete this study at two elementary schools where I have relationships with the leadership team and with many of the teachers. I am hopeful that by being intentional, I will gain more leadership and teacher buy-in. Much of my time as an Equity Teacher has been spent conversing with other educators about the need for accessible resources – the statements, “I just don’t know what to do,” or “I don’t have time to find resources,” are commonly heard throughout the district. I want to provide an opportunity to bypass this detour in terms of how to “do” racial equity work. I am intentional because I recognize that this is a platform for teachers to create exactly what they’re asking for, and a space to collaborate not only with me, but also with other educators in their building(s).

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS & FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to determine how elementary teachers engage in professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy, when provided an opportunity to do so.

**How do elementary teachers reshape and change curriculum and/or teaching practices when provided the opportunity through professional development?**

To answer this research question, I provided optional professional development sessions at two different elementary schools within the district I serve. The offered sessions were focused on how to embed storytelling and absent narratives into the content and curriculums we already use. At each session, I provided multiple mentor texts, that I chose in collaboration with the Department of Educational Equity and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I also provided a lesson plan template that I created, that teachers could use to accompany the mentor text. Each session was structured in a way that provided teachers time to complete each segment of the provided lesson plan template (Attachment 1.0).

Attachment 1.0

**Each One, Teach One: A Storytelling Curriculum**

If you are creating a lesson plan ELECTRONICALLY, make a copy of this document. Rename it using the title of the text you are using and the grade level. For example, "Drum Dream Girl, Primary."

Created By \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP ONE: WHICH TEXT ARE YOU USING AND WHAT IS IT ABOUT?**

TITLE & AUTHOR OF TEXT (find in the table of contents)	QUICK SUMMARY (find in the table of contents)	AREA(S) OF FOCUS (find in the table of contents)	GRADE LEVEL Primary (K-2) or intermediate (3-5)?	THE CLEAR MODEL Which letters of CLEAR show up in this lesson?

**STEP TWO: BENCHMARK & BALANCED LITERACY**

**Benchmark & Balanced Literacy**  
What skill or strategy will the students be working on?

**To complete this section, refer to balanced literacy learning statements. If there is not an aligning statement, create a learning objective (i.e. social emotional learning, historical/social studies, science). Share where this text "fits."**

**STEP THREE: DEVELOP 2 INTENTIONAL ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

These questions should be used to drive your instruction.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

**STEP FOUR: DESCRIBE THE HOW.**

How are you going to facilitate instruction? Which NUA strategy fits? Which best practice fits? Attach all necessary components. Explain in the box.

**STEP FIVE: BE SPECIFIC, BE CONCISE, BE INTENTIONAL.**

For example, If you plan to stop on specific pages in the text, name them here.  
For example, If there are specific details you are going to include or highlight, name them here.

At each building, I offered two separate dates in which teachers could attend professional development in the morning before school. I sent out informational emails about the sessions, along with dates and times, two weeks prior to the earliest start date. At Building 1, 5 teachers responded to the email indicating interest in attending one of the sessions. On the morning of the first session offered, 3 teachers were in attendance and 1 teacher who was passing by decided to join last minute. There was not any interest indicated for the second session; so obviously, there were not any teachers present at the second session. While administration indicated strong interest and need for this type of professional development, there were not any administrators present at the session.

At Building 2, 7 teachers responded indicating interest in attending one of the sessions. On the morning of the first session offered, 4 teachers were in attendance. On the morning of the second session offered, 2 teachers were in attendance. The building principal was not present at either session and the instructional administrator was present for 1 of the sessions.

Table 1.0 offers contextual information, including demographics of participants. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Table 1.0

*Participant Demographics*

Teacher	How does the teacher identify racially?	Gender	Age	Years of Experience
Lisa	White	Female	50-60	10+
Michelle	White	Female	30-40	10+
Debbie	White	Female	40-50	10+

Annika	White	Female	40-50	10+
Lindsey	White	Female	30-40	10+
Lucy	White	Female	50-60	10+
Jill	White	Female	40-50	10+
Julie	White	Female	40-50	10+
Charlie	White	Male	40-50	10+

After the professional development sessions focused on culturally responsive pedagogy and storytelling as classroom practice, I provided an exit survey to participants. The results of the survey are indicated in the Table 2.0, Table 3.0, and Table 4.0 below. The information is segregated into three tables: pedagogy and teacher behavior before attending the session, the impact of the resources provided, and what is/was missing from the professional development (or what the teachers need moving forward). The survey was anonymous, and therefore names of each teacher is not included. Additionally, some teachers completed the survey, while others opted to not.

Table 2.0

*Question(s): Before attending this session, how do you feel your teaching practice(s) were reflective of being inclusive?*

*Before attending this session, how do you feel your teaching practice(s) were reflective of culturally responsive teaching practices?*

Teacher #	Before attending this session, how do you feel your teaching practice(s) were reflective of being inclusive?	Before attending this session, how do you feel your teaching practice(s) were reflective of culturally responsive teaching practices?
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1	I feel I do my best to be inclusive with all students.	I would say my teaching practices are reflective of culturally responsive teaching a majority of the time.
2	I feel I was generally forward in using teaching practices that were reflective of being inclusive.	I also believe I utilized literature that was purposely selected to reflect non-white race and culture.
3	Average to reasonably good with plenty of room to grow	Average to reasonably good with plenty of room to grow
4	I felt like I was sensitive to being inclusive and striving to find opportunities to learn to be even more inclusive in providing windows and mirrors for my students. We have a morning meeting everyday so that each student has voice.	I felt that I was beginning to be more culturally responsive due to my continued learning this year, knowing that I had A LOT to learn and being open to learning.

Table 3.0

*Question(s): When you are given new resources, as an educator, how often do you truly attempt to use the new resources/strategies/texts with your students? Please be honest and explain your thoughts.*

*When you attend professional development sessions, as an educator, how often do you truly attempt to use what you learned with your students? Please be honest and explain your thoughts.*

*On a scale of 1-10, how likely do you think you are to use the resources provided in your teaching space?*

*Which resources were helpful to you and/or which resources do you plan to use in the immediate future?*

*Which resources were helpful to you and/or which resources do you plan to use over the summer?*

*Which resources were helpful to you and/or which resources do you plan to use next school year?*

*Do you feel your teaching practice(s) might change, as a result of attending this session? If yes, explain how you feel your daily practice might change.*

Survey Question	Teacher 1 Response	Teacher 2 Response	Teacher 3 Response	Teacher 4 Response
<i>When you are given new resources, as an educator, how often do you truly attempt to use the new resources/strategies/texts with your students? Please be honest and explain your thoughts.</i>	I probably try to incorporate at least 75% of the new resources I learn about. I at least try them and then use those that work the best.	I am currently not a classroom teacher. I did use a fantastic book for a first grade read aloud and loved it!	It depends on how teacher-friendly the materials are. If they are text-dense, then probably not. If they are well organized, easy to access visually, and fit the age group I teach, then I am more likely to give them a try.	I am eager to try and implement new strategies and resources when I know they have a positive impact on students and learning. I also need to be well prepared prior to implementing and know exactly what I am teaching so that students benefit.
<i>When you attend professional development sessions, as an educator, how often do you truly attempt to use what you learned with your students? Please be honest and explain your thoughts.</i>	If I attend professional development, I always attempt to try one new thing.	I am generally a front runner on using PD session learning with students.	About half the time	Same as above.
<i>On a scale of 1-10, how likely do you think you are</i>	10	9	10	10



*to use the resources provided in your teaching space?*

*Which resources were helpful to you and/or which resources do you plan to use in the immediate future?*

All read aloud books will be used.

Any

I plan to use some of the lessons (1-2) in these last weeks of school. I noticed that the book we worked on is in the Scholastic book order form that I passed out today. (:

Cultural books and lessons made on the equity team and Hannah, my new grade level books for our classroom library

*Which resources were helpful to you and/or which resources do you plan to use over the summer?*

I do not know that I would use any resources over the summer.

Any

I am not sure how much time I will spend on it over the summer.

Hannah's resources through email and google drive, as I have needed more time to read and plan.

*Which resources were helpful to you and/or which resources do you plan to use next school year?*

I will use the read aloud books next school year.

Any

I certainly plan to make use of these lessons that we have created for the books which offer more culturally relevant messages and images.

Cultural books and lessons, classroom library resources, compass with students

<i>Do you feel your teaching practice(s) might change, as a result of attending this session? If yes, explain how you feel your daily practice might change.</i>	Yes, by analyzing text and books, I am more aware of what materials I use. My goal is to use text with diverse characters more often.	Again, I am not in the classroom teaching.	Absolutely. Our conversations have been very helpful in growing my thinking about how important using children’s literature as a mirror or window can be.	I can’t say that I will change but enhance my ability to bring mirrors and windows to my students so there is more inclusiveness.
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Table 4.0

*Question(s):*

*What feedback do you have? How could this session have been better?*

*What do you feel you need to become a more conscious, intentional, and inclusive educator?*

Survey Question	Teacher 1 Response	Teacher 2 Response	Teacher 3 Response	Teacher 4 Response
<i>What feedback do you have? How could this session have been better?</i>	It was a great session.	I needed more time to complete my task.	I think the conversation part of the planning a lesson is truly the most beneficial parts for me, personally. I don’t have suggestions to make it better.	The session has met my expectations because I feel like I am doing something to provide experiences for my students that I wouldn’t have had previous resources I now have.
<i>What do you feel you need to become a more conscious, intentional, and inclusive educator?</i>	Continued training on appropriate resources	Your leadership... Keep it up!	Continued rich conversations about culture, race, bias, and how they have affected peoples’ lives.	Keep educating and providing me with resources to be an even better inclusive teacher!

---

Reading stories  
(for adults and  
kids) has pushed  
me to grow in  
my thinking this  
past year.

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### Interpretations

After completing this research, there are three conclusions I can make from this work; not many teachers are interested in changing current practice, there are few teachers truly convicted in the worth of racial equity work, and finally, the teachers who are convicted in the work are willing to make changes even when it makes them uneasy, uncomfortable, or unpopular at work.

#### *For Times, They Are A-Stayin' the Same*

The first conclusion I interpret is that not many teachers are interested in changing what they currently do, even if it might better their teaching practice(s). I do not say these words with ill intent; I fully recognize that teachers are extremely busy, often stressed out, as well as overwhelmed. This being said, I tried to be extremely intentional about planning and implementation components of these professional development sessions. I sent out an informational email to both schools, to all staff members two weeks in advance. This email included the location, the time(s), and the date(s) of the sessions. I provided choice as well by having two identical days of professional development, rather than just one. I did this to ensure teachers had options of when they could attend. I also strategically placed these optional professional development days after spring break and after MCA testing at both schools to reduce feels of stress and being overwhelmed. I also provided breakfast to those who attended,

as an incentive. At Building 2, a staff member whom I have a relationship with asked if she could send a follow up email to my original email – encouraging staff members to attend. I happily accepted her request.

Both schools house nearly one hundred licensed staff members. Out of approximately two hundred licensed staff members collectively at both schools, less than ten licensed staff members attended the optional professional development sessions. While I am not surprised by the numbers, I am disappointed and discouraged. The district has been engaging in racial equity work for six years and yet, there is still strong resistance to the ideologies that uphold it.

I am encouraged to wonder, do teachers think they are already practicing effective culturally responsive pedagogy? Do they not believe it matters enough? Do they believe they are super-teachers, and know all that can be known about best practice? Or can it all be equated to a general fear of change or more work? I think for some, the reason for not engaging is a combination of all of these factors.

### *The Few*

The second conclusion I would like to share is the idea that there are few teachers in our district truly convicted in the worth of racial equity work. From the nature of my work in general, I already had this notion; however, providing these optional professional development sessions solidified my position. The teachers who are convicted in this type of work have little to no self-interest involved, rather they are focused on providing learning experiences to their students that are complete, rounded, and that tell a just story.

### *Convicted and Committed*

The final conclusion I would like to share is the teachers who are convicted in the worth of racial equity work are willing to do complete a wide range of tasks to make both small changes in their classrooms and/or large transformational changes that are system wide. These are the teachers who will spend their free time working on better lesson plans for their students on the weekends, rather than use what they had last year. These are the teachers that attend a diversity and inclusion seminar on a week night, hoping to gain knowledge to help their students of color succeed. These are the teachers who are always practicing reflexivity, owning their own role(s) and engagement in implicit bias, and naming how their racial identities conform to whiteness at an expense to their students who do not identify in any given “normed” group (i.e. transgender student, student with two moms, biracial student).

These are the few teachers who attended the optional professional development sessions. In Building 1, I knew all the teachers who decided to attend and they all knew each other. We decided it would be most efficient and effective to work together as a small group. I provided the team with ten minutes to peruse the text selection I brought. The group collectively chose the text entitled, *Mommy's Khimar*, written by Muslim author Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow. After choosing the text, one of the team members read the text aloud to the rest of the group. The team then used the lesson plan template to create a accompany learning experience to use with the text. While the content of the lesson was primarily focused on how the students could make connections to the characters in the story, what I found more intriguing was the dialogue that began based on the some of the information in the book. For example, one participant brought up how some (herself included) might be fearful of reading some of the words in this text wrong. This conversation brought the group to a space of researching the different types of

scarves Muslim women wear on their bodies. One of the teachers found a great resource with on a blog post authored by a Muslim woman. The post had photos and descriptions of how some Muslim women choose to wear scarves. I appreciated this dialogue because it helped the group better understand the meaning behind wearing a hijab or khimar; and it encouraged each of us to think about the many intricacies of the culture(s) we do not identify with. We talked about how quick we are, as white women, to “box” others without necessarily digging deeper to uncover the whole truth. This dialogue led to one of the teachers emailing the author, asking if she would be willing to Skype with students to read the text a loud and perhaps answer questions about the Muslim faith and culture. These types of interactions and dialogue communicate the difference between teachers who are willing to engage and teachers who are not. In Building 1, the participants were thinking outside the box and digging for activities that would prove to be meaningful in their spaces.

In Building 1, we eventually ran out of time. I shared with the group that there was not any interest to meet on the second proposed day. Surprisingly, the group proposed the idea of meeting again in late May to finish our lesson plan and continue the dialogue we started. This action communicates that those who attended are willing to go further and to take more time out of their day(s) to practice culturally responsive pedagogy and its connection to storytelling. This shows that the teachers feel the session was worth their time, and worth returning to.

## CHAPTER 5: ACTION PLAN & PLAN FOR SHARING

### A Commitment

Completing this research confirmed a few of my firm beliefs about racial equity work in the district to which I belong. Although there are few of us who are truly ready and willing to make changes not only in our professional work, but also in our personal work – I must remember that small changes can lead to incremental ones; and a strong group of leaders can have the potential to access and change the way education lives and breathes for both students and teachers. I am choosing to continue building a storytelling curriculum that is focused on absent narratives, invisible perspectives, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

I recently submitted a proposal for a \$50,000 budget, for a summer curriculum writing team that was approved by the Department of Educational Equity. This work will allow me to lead a group of thirty teachers this summer in planning and exploring culturally responsive read aloud texts. These texts and lesson plans will be used next year in their respective classroom and learning spaces. Our team is going to monitor engagement, participation, and the sense of community and belonging in classrooms based on the racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse texts being provided to students.

This said, I would like to share and declare a few of my commitments. I commit to racial equity work even when I am standing alone. I commit to racial equity work in all forms, even when it feels like nobody can hear my voice, my ideas, or my intent. I commit to providing an educational experience for scholars of color that is welcoming, inclusive, and loving. I commit to interrupting racist and discriminatory practices, even when it's uncomfortable or messy. I commit to owning when and where I conform to whiteness. And lastly, I commit to celebrating

even the smallest of wins in hope that we can collectively impact how race is lived in Osseo Area Schools.



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