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One Size Does Not Fit All: Addressing Adolescents' Needs for Historically and Culturally Responsive English Language Arts Curriculum

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for Historically and Culturally Responsive English
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Angela McKellar

Abstract

In recent years, education initiatives have aimed to link school and teacher effectiveness to secondary students' performance on standardized testing. Consequently, many schools have adapted curriculum to prepare students for the test. As a result, many publishers have filled a need by providing packaged or scripted curriculum seeking to streamline the education process. This project explores the ways in which English Language Arts (ELA) standardized curriculum influences secondary students' motivation and teachers' autonomy. An effective ELA curriculum must meet the diverse needs of all students and allow for teacher autonomy to modify curriculum when and where needed. To meet adolescent students' needs, this project demonstrates how secondary ELA teachers can utilize Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2002) when required to use a standardized curriculum. In doing so, secondary ELA teachers are empowered to address students' learning needs while meeting pre-determined curricular requirements. As a result, they can make necessary adjustments and craft lessons that are engaging and meaningful for all students. Thus, this project provides secondary ELA teachers who are required to use a standardized curriculum a tool to using required curriculum while utilizing a culturally and historically responsive framework (Muhammad, 2020) to support and engage all learners.

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Problem Statement

As educational policies push toward greater curriculum mandates in the United States, teacher effectiveness and increased accountability, which demands high student performance for secondary students on standardized tests, leaves many teachers increasingly overwhelmed by stress and pressure to teach to the test, thus narrowing the curriculum (Berliner, 2011; Dover, 2013; Eisenbach, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Smith & Holloway, 2020). The degradation of student functional literacy abilities is a ramification of the pressures that high stakes testing and educational policies place on educators, such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top (Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016). These policies and laws pressure teachers to emphasize state curriculum standards over using curriculum to respond to and support student learning needs (Berliner, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Hallman, 2015).

As a result, there is an "impoverishment in teaching activities to produce similar and convergent ends" (Berliner, 2011, p. 296) which leads to lessons that emphasize memorization and rote procedures over higher level, critical thinking skills that require students to interpret, analyze, and synthesize their learnings. To bolster student test scores and ensure consistency, many districts across the United States moved to implement standardized curriculum providing educators with daily teaching objectives, lessons and, in some cases, scripts to teach the lessons (Eisenbach, 2012; Hallman, 2015; Wyatt, 2014). This is different from past years where educators were provided with resources such as workbooks and textbooks as tools to inform their instruction. A standardized curriculum is far more rigid and inflexible, sending the

message to educators that they are incapable of engaging or educating students. The message is clear: teachers are not to be trusted to meet the needs of students with rigorous content (Eisenbach, 2012; Wyatt, 2014). Not only that, but the number of students who are not engaged or motivated by their experience in school increases at every grade level and is reaching "epidemic proportions" in high school (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 9).

Around the same time scripted curriculum made its appearance, there was a different shift occurring within the educational realm, this one at odds with the standardization of education, namely culturally and historically responsive teaching (Gay, 2002; Wyatt, 2014). Proponents of culturally and historically responsive teaching argue that students, particularly those who are culturally diverse, do not benefit from a standardization of education; they need instruction that brings personal meaning and cultural relevance (Gay, 2010; Husband & Kang, 2020; Muhammad, 2020, Wyatt, 2014). By its very nature, standardized curriculum is incapable of addressing all of the needs of all learners. It aims at equality, when equity should be the goal as equity requires responsiveness to particular experiences and needs of students, rather than sameness (Milner, 2014). Authors of these standardized curricular materials can only suggest modifications and even then they cannot give every possible scenario, which is why allowing educators to use their knowledge and expertise, even within a standardized curriculum, is critical (Wyatt, 2014). Thus, this project aims to provide secondary ELA teachers who are required to use a standardized curriculum a tool for using required curriculum while utilizing a

culturally and historically responsive framework (Muhammad, 2020) to support and engage all learners.

Importance and Rationale of Project

The ramifications of secondary students' literacy abilities reach far beyond the walls of the school building and into the post-secondary world. In 2005, employers reported dissatisfaction with recent high school graduate applicants in terms of their "ability to read and understand complicated materials, to think analytically, to apply what they learn to solve real-world problems, and with their oral communication skills" (Achieve, Inc.). In 2015 this same organization found that employers' dissatisfaction with recent graduates increased by 38%. This same organization found that college instructors have become increasingly dissatisfied in student preparation regarding critical thinking, comprehension of complicated materials, work and study habits, writing, written communication, and problem solving.

Moreover, related to adolescents' literacy achievement, there is a distinct difference in learning to read versus reading to learn, and often instruction of the latter is lacking in secondary education due to strains imposed by high stakes testing and standardized curriculum. Specifically, "demands for higher cognitive processes, what is ordinarily called thinking skills, are not taught frequently enough in schools that are heavily pressured to improve achievement" (Berliner, 2011, pg. 299). Educators are pressured to teach the lower-level skills and processes in school, such as basic grammar and correct selection on multiple choice questions, to improve their students' high stakes test scores, resulting in a more teacher-centered approach to

education. Not to mention, secondary students find themselves reading texts that are chosen for them, rather than by them, which further leads to decreases in their motivation (Morgan & Wagner, 2013).

However, when the focus is on student-centered learning, students demonstrate feelings of increased autonomy and motivation, and students' learning seems to be almost unlimited when they are permitted to learn in areas that interest them (Berliner, 2011; Thompson & Beymer, 2015). For example, teachers should consider the topic or skills students should demonstrate mastery in, and provide their learners with the space to apply their learning in authentic ways that are of interest to them (Muhammad, 2020). Thus, high school students would benefit greatly from educators who incorporate opportunities to practice autonomy and choice within the classroom. However, most standardized curriculums fail to acknowledge student choice and do little to provide autonomy on the student's behalf (Wyatt, 2014). Standardized curriculums often function as authorities speaking through educators rather than providing resources for educators to implement what they know to be best practices for their own students, as means of increasing student motivation and engagement in literacy practices (Eisenbach, 2012; Thompson & Beymer, 2015; Wyatt, 2014).

Background of the Project

Concern over adolescent literacy is not a recent trend. The authors of the report, *A Nation at Risk*, reported "about 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority

youth may run as high as 40 percent" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, pg. 8). These authors also note that "many 17-year-olds do not possess the 'higher order' intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material" (pg. 9). Unfortunately, the national status of adolescent literacy has not changed much over the years. In fact, twelfth-grade students, on average, scored 7 points lower in reading in 2019 than they did in 1992 (NAEP, 2019). The 2019 scores indicate that students performing in the 10th to 25th percentiles scored 4 points lower in 2019 than students in 2015, and conversely, students performing at the 90th percentile were the only group to see higher reading scores in 2019 compared to 1992 (*NAEP Report Card: 2019 Reading Assessment*, 2019). One reason for this decrease in student performance may be due to the implementation and implied importance of standardized tests in recent years. These tests have not worked to quell the epidemic of illiteracy spreading across the country. In fact, the preponderance of standardized testing has worked to stifle curriculum, teacher autonomy, and the motivation of students (Berliner, 2011; Croft & Roberts & Stenhouse, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2017; Knoester & Parkison, 2017).

When considering policies and directions to correct the rampant functional illiteracy plaguing our youth, many policy makers and administrators fail to consider the needs of the adolescent reader. American psychologist E. L. Thorndike noted a distinction between learning to read and the skills required to comprehend, which requires higher mental demand (Jacobs, 2008). Later, his son, R. L. Thorndike challenged teachers be more inventive in their teaching and to not just teach how to

read, but how to think deeper about what was read and to understand it (Jacobs, 2008). This approach places students at the center of their learning, including establishing purposes for reading as a vehicle for learning information. When students are given space to read and engage with texts that reflect and respond to their experiences with purpose, their motivation and engagement increases resulting in improved literacy skills (Husband & Kang, 2020).

However, pressures on educators to prepare students for high stakes tests force many to adopt teacher-centered pedagogy which they know to not be as beneficial for actual learning. In the secondary classroom, educators are already fighting an uphill battle as intrinsic motivation declines as students age (Thompson & Beymer, 2015; Wolters et al., 2014). Yet, many teachers are bound by standardized or scripted curriculum that stifles any possibility of engaging students with texts that are culturally responsive as avenues to teach skills in favor of explicitly teaching standards based skills when and as prescribed (Dover, 2013; Eisenbach; 2012; Hallman, 2015; Wyatt, 2014). In contrast, one way teachers can positively impact high school student engagement while using a required standardized curriculum is to utilize culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002) which can result in rethinking and teaching ELA curriculum in ways that are culturally and historically responsive (Muhammad, 2020).

Statement of Purpose

With the increased accountability from the No Child Left Behind Act and the implementation of Common Core State Standards, use of scripted curriculum has

become common (Eisenbach, 2012; Wyatt, 2014). As a result, teaching has become

de-professionalized while leaving students with diminished functional literacy

capacities (Croft & Roberts & Stenhouse, 2015; Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Knoester &

Parkison, 2017). This leaves educators in a state of conflict as they wrestle with their

own ideologies and those that are impressed upon them by educational policies and

administrators (Eisenbach, 2012).

The purpose of this project is to provide a tool for high school ELA teachers

to bridge the gap between what educators know to be best practices and those

practices dictated within secondary ELA standardized curriculum. This tool will

enable high school ELA teachers to survey their prescribed curriculum and determine

areas of merit and weakness in order to comply with curriculum mandates and still

serve the students. This tool may also be helpful for non-high school ELA teachers or

teachers in other content areas who are required to use and teach standardized

curriculum.

This tool is meant to be a resource to support high school ELA teachers

through the process of reimagining a standards based curriculum, with the intent of

meeting the diverse needs of the student populations they serve. This project also

includes two units from a secondary ELA standards based curriculum that have been

adapted and updated, as a result of using this tool. These units serve as examples

about how this tool can be used to ensure curriculum that is culturally and historically

responsive (Muhammad, 2020).

Research supports the use of culturally and historically responsive teaching

within the classroom as a means to increase student engagement and learning (Husband & Kang, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). Since no standardized curriculum will fit the need of all learners in a given classroom, this resource aims to support high school ELA teachers in a quest to make a standardized curriculum more responsive to the students within their classroom.

Objectives of Project

The objective of this project is to provide high school ELA teachers with a tool that will aid in assessing, modifying, and implementing a standardized ELA curriculum to be culturally and historically responsive and to meet the diverse needs of students within the classroom. This project builds on Muhammad's (2020) equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy, with the viewpoint of educators as professionals and experts in their content areas.

The first objective is to create a tool for secondary ELA teachers to follow that aids in their reimagining of previous and/or current standardized ELA curriculum, specifically focused on making changes to ensure that the curriculum is culturally and historically responsive (Muhammad, 2020). This tool will help ELA teachers consider the larger structure of a unit and provide supports for selecting responsive texts.

Using the tool for secondary ELA teachers, the second objective is to provide an example of two units from a standards-based curriculum that have been reimagined to reflect culturally and historically responsive approaches to teaching and learning. These example units will show what the scripted curriculum provided and the modifications made.

Definition of Key Terms

Basic Literacy: according to (Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016), basic literacy is the ability to read or write in at least one language at a simple level.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): set of benchmarked standards that map out expected outcomes for each grade level facilitating knowledge acquisition and skills required nationally ("Common Core State Standards"; Knoester & Parkison, 2017).

Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy: framework for equity which includes the following learning goals: identity development, skill development, intellectual development, and criticality, which are used to leverage students' experiences to increase literacy and learning (Muhammad, 2020).

Functional Literacy: this type of literacy is harder to define, but it often includes the ability to understand printed information and use it at a predetermined and beyond-basic level (Zebroff & Kaufman, 2016). Typically, this requires higher level skills such as the manipulation and application of what was read and/or learned, along with critical thinking skills.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): legislation that was passed in 2001 demanding that every child in public and charter schools be tested to determine their proficiency in math and reading; this legislation aimed to keep teachers and administrators accountable and reduce achievement gaps between poor and wealthy students (Berliner, 2011).

Race to the Top (RTTT): legislation that built on NCLB and linked federal funding to teacher evaluations based on student test scores to ensure they share standards with

other states; under this program, teachers and administrators are rewarded for increased student achievement (Wexler, 2014).

Standardized, Scripted, or Standards-Based Curriculum: a purchased curriculum containing daily objectives, lessons, workbooks and textbooks, and often scripts for educators to use in daily teaching; gained popularity for perceived use in raising test scores (Eisenbach, 2012; Wyatt, 2014).

Scope of Project

This project is geared toward high school ELA teachers who teach a scripted or standards-based curriculum. It will address how to transform a prescriptive curriculum into one that also reflects culturally and historically responsive approaches, intended to better meet students' needs and interests. It will not address creation of individual lesson plans, content areas other than ELA, or grades other than 9-12. However, the information provided may be beneficial to other secondary content area teachers. It will not provide information or tools that can be used to assess the quality of a standards-based curriculum, determining if it does or does not have merit.

Factors that may hinder or obstruct the usefulness of this project include settings where secondary ELA educators do not yet feel comfortable or are unable to stray from the prescribed curriculum implemented in the school. Additionally, the usefulness of the tool will not be effective if time is not spent surveying the curriculum, understanding individual learners' needs, identifying important contextual factors related to specific school and/or community settings, and seeking

out texts and activities that are culturally and historically responsive.

Chapter 2

Introduction

This project focuses on the need for secondary ELA teachers to understand and use an equity-focused framework for instruction and assessment, especially when using standardized curriculum. Thus, this chapter focuses on the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2002). It begins with the tenants of CRP. Then, examples and research connected to applications within the classroom aligned with CRT are discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with the need for teachers to implement a CRP and CRT informed framework when implementing standardized curriculum in a high school ELA classroom setting.

Theory/Rationale

While the American school system is filled with greater ethnic diversity than years past, the American approach to education has not been culturally responsive, particularly to its ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2002). In fact, "these students have been expected to divorce themselves from their cultures and learn according to European American cultural norms" (p. 114). This leaves non-European American students with a greater academic burden, as they are not only required to learn the content, but to do it in unnatural and unfamiliar cultural conditions, potentially contributing to problems of underachievement (Gay, 2002). Thus, there is a need for CRT, in which teachers authentically connect curriculum to students' cultural

identities and cultural practices, prompting students to be more interested and engaged in their learning (Gay, 2002; Muhammad, 2020; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Gay's (2002) CRT is a pedagogical framework that aims to acknowledge and directly integrate the cultures of students' homes and communities into the classroom and curriculum to increase students' academic success. CRT (Gay, 2002) is a theoretical perspective that specifically addressed concerns for educating students of color and was built on Ladson-Billings' (1995b) work connected to CRP. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), CRP must meet the following three criteria:

(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

CRP deliberately attempts to close the growing disparity between characteristics of teachers and students and aims to support students of color who, historically, frequently fail in the traditional academic setting (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). To achieve such goals, teachers need to see themselves as professionals who take ownership of their profession. Moreover, Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) noted teachers who were successful in teaching African-American students were teachers who saw teaching as an art, not a technical task, and who worked to guarantee all students success.

In turn, CRT stems from research for CRP, which pins teaching ethnically

diverse students through their own cultural filters at the foundation of classroom instruction (Gay, 2002). Additionally, CRT centers on a cultivation of a community of learners as a top priority within the classroom. In CRT-focused classrooms, knowledge construction was recycled and responsibilities were shared between teachers and students, further strengthening the classroom community. When these elements are combined, students feel at home within the classroom, they see themselves in the curriculum, and learning is scaffolded so they succeed.

The CRP framework is essential in all academic environments, but particularly those where students of color reside. While Ladson-Billings (1995a) stated that what she proposed is considered good teaching in general, when teaching students of color, "educators traditionally have attempted to insert culture into the education, instead of inserting education into the culture" (p. 159). This left students with the impression that in order to succeed, they must sacrifice part of their identity. However, CRT can provide students with success in education and maintenance of their cultural identity.

According to Muhammad (2020), when students are viewed with such a deficit mindset, educators are burdened with the responsibility to "empower youth or give them brilliance or genius" rather than seeing students as already having "power or brilliance already within them" that just needs to be cultivated (p. 13). Granted, cultivating this genius, as Muhammad (2020) said, takes time and work as it requires the teacher to know their students' histories and ancestries deeply in order to help them grow and develop their genius. Yet, this "explicit knowledge about cultural

diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students" (Gay, 2002, p. 107). Furthermore, Gay (2002) stated that acquiring factual information about specific ethnic groups' peculiarities is necessary for engaging, representing, and responding to ethnically diverse students. Thus, multicultural content is just as important as multicultural strategies when drawing on CRT (Gay, 2002).

In fact, Gay (2002) argued that culture belongs at the forefront of the classroom community as it "strongly influences the attitudes, values, and behaviors" (p.114) that students and teachers bring to instruction and problems. Connected to CRT, Muhammad (2020) similarly asserted that to be culturally responsive, teachers must actively incorporate Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy (CHRL), which calls for authentically responding to "students' cultural (and other) identities, the cultural (and other) identities of others, and the social times (historical and current)" (p. 48). Responding to students' identities within the classroom community promotes a cohesive community founded in acceptance and safety.

Drawing on Gay's (2002) CRT, Muhammad (2020) created a curriculum framework for teachers to use as they re-think their pedagogies, practices, and curriculum. This framework was grounded in principals and contributions of 19th century Black literacy societies in combination with responsiveness to social, cultural, and political contexts. Throughout Muhammad's (2020) research into Black literacy societies, she unearthed the important value literacy had on members of the societies to better themselves and find fulfillment, while also tying literacy to action that

shaped the sociopolitical landscape of the country and challenged oppression. Literacy was founded in a call to action, which seems to largely be missing from modern classrooms. Muhammad's (2020) framework arms teachers with a practical tool that combines tenants of CRT with curriculum to best teach students.

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Research/Evaluation

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Standardized Curriculum

Standardized or scripted curriculum has gained momentum in the years after No Child Left Behind came into effect, as this type of curriculum offers administrators and educators a complete package of texts and materials, including professional development (Eisenbach, 2012; Wyatt, 2014). The allure is that this curriculum will increase teachers' use of scientifically based strategies while allowing educators to meet the needs of "all children in effective and convincing ways" (Wyatt, 2014, p. 447). Additionally, a scripted or standardized curriculum is often considered helpful for new or inexperienced teachers to ensure that they can provide a quality education to all students as many standardized curriculums offer teacher supports and behavioral suggestions (Eisenbach, 2012; Milner, 2014; Wyatt, 2014).

Standardized curriculum also purports to provide consistency across classrooms and vertical alignment of curriculum across grade levels, providing premade lesson plans for educators to submit to administrators in charge of monitoring teachers' effectiveness (Wyatt, 2014). Additionally, according to Title 1 regulations, schools must use funding to implement programs that utilize proven methods and scientifically, research-based practices, which scripted curriculums are

often considered to be (Ede, 2006). In the classroom, this often looks like explicit, systematic instruction that is skill focused and the effectiveness of the outcomes is typically reliant on the teacher following a script correctly. However, generally the research for these programs are sponsored by the companies selling them, which may call its validity into question (Demko, 2010).

Consequently, standardized curriculum has been popularized by the testing culture that places a "disproportionate emphasis" (Smith & Holloway, 2020, p. 462) on the test scores of students, causing teacher identities and their work to shift to place greater emphasis on preparing students for standardized tests. Since student test scores are increasingly prioritized in teacher evaluations, teachers are forced to embrace and promote the preparation of students for these tests. Scripted curriculum aims to support teachers in this work, but it often constrains teachers' instructional decisions and expertise by often requiring them to follow a script and keep a particular pace (Eisenbach, 2012; Wyatt, 2014).

Little literature exists on the effectiveness of standardized curriculum within the secondary classroom, and what there is pertains to narratives of educators struggling to meet district curriculum demands while simultaneously meeting the needs of their students (e.g., Eisenbach, 2012; Myers, 2019). For example, Eisenbach (2012) interviewed middle school teachers about their experience implementing a standardized curriculum, resulting in three separate findings. One finding indicated that teachers were expected to embrace the standardized curriculum despite personal ideologies. A second was that teachers sought to balance a standardized curriculum

with materials and activities that needed to be added based on students' needs. A third was to reject the standardized curriculum entirely and continue teaching how the teacher saw fit. Based on the findings from these interviews, Eisenbach concluded that teachers have professional responsibilities to meet the needs of all students that enter the classroom; thus, educators must adjust instruction to serve those needs, even if it means straying from the prescribed curriculum. Without providing teachers the freedom to adjust the curriculum or differentiate for their learners, teachers assume a managerial role rather than professional, which conveys a message that teachers cannot be trusted to provide for their students' needs.

However, standardized curriculum is not so much concerned with engaging students as it is with increasing their testing performance and supporting teachers to know what to teach and when and how to teach it, which can make teachers struggle to respond to the diverse backgrounds and needs within the classroom (Golden, 2018) In a study that took place at a High School Equivalency center, part of New York City's Department of Education, Golden (2018) sought to understand how long-term teachers understood their shift in roles over the years. Narratives of the participating secondary alternative education teachers revealed that they felt district-level curriculum choices did not work in their classroom as they were impractical and failed to connect to the realities of students and the teacher-student relationship. Teacher narratives also expressed the perception that administrators lacked an awareness of the practices within the classroom and what the actual needs of the students and teachers were. Teachers voiced resistance to these district-level

curriculum changes having previously used individualized curriculum that was successful, but the curriculum change forced teachers to lose the individualized approach and, thus, some strong relationships and flexibility to make curricular decisions within the classroom. In this study, these teachers experienced "a shift from a professional understanding of their work in which *they* make decisions based on students' interests, desires and needs to a framing in which the educative process is driven by financial concerns" (p. 12). This results in finances taking precedence over the interests of students and teacher professionalism and autonomy to decide what is best for students.

Aligned with standardized ELA curriculum at the secondary level, Costigan (2018) looked at the experiences of preservice teachers in student teaching and novice teachers in their first to third years. In the study, Costigan found the very nature of ELA curriculum had changed to look like something other than English as preservice teachers were taught in university. Most of the time, participants found the standardized curriculum they were expected to implement and teach to be "strange, counterintuitive, confusing, disheartening, and ineffective" (p. 223). To illustrate, the argumentative writing done within the curriculum failed to represent any real world similarities. In fact, the results of the study showed curricular mandates prohibited participants from creating a meaningful and personalized curriculum that would engage students. Consequently, students became resistant to English as they mainly read for textual evidence using short samples of texts. Costigan noted this change in focus of the curriculum was likely due to the difference in the definition of ELA as

the Modern Language Association (MLA) defines it and how Common Core State Standards (CCSS) defines English. Specifically, the CCSS emphasizes ELA as a tool for college and career readiness, whereas MLA highlights the transaction between reader and text which deepens creativity and understanding of human nature and the world.

Despite potential benefits of standardized curriculum, Ede (2006) wrote, "the diverse ethnic and cultural makeup of today's classrooms makes it unlikely that one single curriculum will meet the needs and interests of all students" (p. 31). Yet, with the prevalence of standardized curriculums, teachers' skill and expertise is often forced into the background in favor of promoting a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching that claims to be founded in research-based content and strategies (Paris, 2012; Wyatt, 2014). In a study of 7 Kindergarten to fifth grade teachers in Hawaii, Wyatt (2014) found teachers were able to effectively pull from the prescribed curriculum and add deeper meaning and relevancy for students through incorporating elements of CRT (Gay, 2002). While this study looked at elementary teachers, it demonstrated that teachers were able to work within the boundaries of the provided curriculum to ensure students were successful. The nature of standardized curriculum places teachers at the center of learning as materials focus on explicit and direct skill instruction in order to boost test scores. However, if curriculum designers created curriculum that allowed teachers to adjust to the needs of students, it may help to serve diverse learners and re-professionalize teaching.

Adolescent Motivation

Adolescent literacy has become a concern because after elementary school, students receive little formal education in reading as the shift occurs from learning to read to reading to learn (Cimbricz & McConn, 2015). When adolescent students sometimes struggle with literacy, it prompts teachers to become central to the learning process. When this happens curriculum also becomes less rigorous and students lose their sense of autonomy, ultimately leading to a decrease in student motivation (Berliner, 2011; Thompson & Beymer, 2015).

Deci et al. (1991) relied on multiple studies that spanned from elementary to college age students seeking to explain student motivation and educational outcomes in which several patterns emerged. First, students who learned content in order to use it later reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation and demonstrated greater understanding of the material than students who just learned material in order to be tested on it. Additionally, higher intrinsic motivation was also tied to higher standardized test scores, positive emotions within the classroom, enjoyment of academic work, school satisfaction, and self-esteem. Furthermore, students developed autonomy when they felt a relatedness and closeness to their teachers, demonstrating the importance of taking time to build the teacher-student relationship. Lastly, it was best for student motivation and self-determination when teachers were able to promote autonomous behavior versus using controlling behaviors which are a result of concern for student achievement. Similarly, Patall et al. (2013) found in their study of 9th-12th grade students that student autonomy played an important role in their intrinsic value, thus motivation, for a course. According to the study, students who

had more option and action choices within the classroom felt more autonomous which lead to greater interest in course material (Patall et al., 2013). However, Patall & Sylvester & Han (2014) studied 18-65 year-olds and found that motivation of an individual was enhanced only when the perception of the task competency was high, whereas motivation decreased when task competency was low. This means that in order to provide students with choice as a means to build autonomy and increase motivation, students need to first feel competent in the task at hand. Unfortunately, if a secondary ELA instructor is mandated to stick to a particular standardized pace, it may interfere with how much time they can take to re-teach or fill in background information to ensure students are competent with the material.

In an article about building student interest tied to neurological research, Hidi (2006) noted that neuroscientists in recent decades rediscovered the importance of emotions and feelings on interest and the important role it played in education. Moreover, there exists implications for education in that when skills are taught in combination with interest in mind, students should perform better than in situations that lack interest. Earlier, Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) noted in an article about motivating unmotivated students that neuroscientific data supported the use of interest as a motivator for students and encouraged educators to focus on developing student interest, claiming individual interest would help students overcome low ability. Additionally, they discussed a body of research that specifically looked at texts as tools to enhance situational interest concluding that texts contributed to interest depending on factors such as ease of comprehension, novelty, vividness, and

character development, and when texts were interesting they increased comprehension and recall. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) further explained how individuals can utilize various strategies to make boring tasks more interesting, such as turning the task into a game, especially when there was a clear and reasonable value to the task. While individual interest cultivation is ideal, reality rarely allows for educators to create and manage individualized education plans for every student. Thus, in order to stimulate situational interest, Hidi and Harakiewicz (2000) postulated educators could cultivate an appropriate classroom environment, through activities such as jigsaw or other cooperative learning techniques to create situational interest and promote individual interest which, in turn, might encourage intrinsic motivation. Later, Hidi and Renninger (2006) argued the importance of external support, from the teacher or other significant individual, to encourage initial interest to evolve. External support might look like verbal encouragement or through organization of the class, such as inclusion of group work, or consideration of how a problem is presented. Using approaches that engage students' interests prompts connection to the content and establishes relevancy while building competency.

Unfortunately, many adolescent students feel disconnected from their classroom experience through engagement with irrelevant text or curriculum that requires students to cope with a curriculum that fails to respond to their lives (Muhammad, 2012). Muhammad (2012) selected 16 black adolescent girls between 11-and-17 years old for a five-week writing institute at an urban Midwest university. One of the girls confided in Muhammad that her engagement within the writing

institute drastically contrasted with her experiences within the ELA classroom, the latter of which did not affirm her identities. She felt the need to conform and censor herself in order to meet the standards of her teacher. Through the use of literature that connected to the girls' lives and experiences, and a space to explore themselves through writing, these girls began to see writing as a tool to learn about themselves and challenge oppressive ideologies. When the girls were not censored, they were motivated to engage in writing that made them feel good and connected them to their learning. Muhammad (2012) applied tenants of CRT (Gay, 2002) in that she provided space for the girls to exercise their expertise and cultures within an educational context, thus recognizing and supporting their cultural identities, which added interest and motivation for the girls.

Within secondary classrooms today, many students, especially students of color, are disengaged and disconnected from texts present in standardized curriculum. Muhammad (2020) provides some reasoning for this, including: White-centered curriculum; students' lack of involvement in text selection; lack of diversity in representation, authors, and areas of thought; texts that fail to respond to different students' identities and histories; lack of multiple literacies present within the curriculum; and texts selected for development of skills or for response only.

Teacher Autonomy

Adolescent students' success in academics is based on many factors which cannot be demonstrated on a multiple-choice test, but rather through thinking through motivating topics, hypothesizing ideas, and spending time inquiring and applying

what is learned (Tanner, 2013). While NCLB's original aims were admirable with the purpose to close the achievement gap between low-achieving and high-achieving students, it has actually perpetuated a slew of inequities within education such as steep penalties for schools who fail to meet expectations of the tests (Ramsey, 2009).

Smagorinsky, Lakly, and Johnson (2002) followed one teacher, Andrea's, journey from student teaching through her first year teaching full-time in a large, diverse district in a major Georgia metropolitan area. In an attempt to hold teachers accountable and increase test scores of lower performing schools in the district, a strictly enforced standardized curriculum was implemented. According to Andrea, the scaffolding of skill lessons and cohesiveness of the curriculum were frustrating. She saw the curriculum as disconnected from the interests and needs of students, and it was hard to reconcile this disconnection with what she was taught in her university coursework. Initially, Andrea accepted and complied with the curriculum and noted that her colleagues were reluctant to question or challenge the change in policy. Eventually, Andrea accommodated instruction, feeling stuck some place between what was required and her own teaching values instilled in her through her college coursework. Finally, Andrea found ways to resist the curriculum out of the understanding of what was best for her students. She used instructional practices that met her goals and engaged students' interests as she found the prescribed curriculum to lack interest for her students.

According to Smagorinsky, Lakly, and Johnson (2002), Andrea felt that the curriculum did all of the planning for her, yet her identity was tied up in being a

teacher; it robbed her of fulfilling that identity which caused her to dislike the person who was teaching her classes. Andrea's frustration with the mandated curriculum stemmed from the impression that the curriculum was better than her professional expertise and that it did not seem suitable for her students. She desired to apply the tools and strategies she knew to be effective and that she was taught to utilize, leaving her constrained and unable to exercise autonomy as a professional because of the perceived value of the curriculum.

Chisholm et al. (2019) reviewed 21 studies to learn about ways in which ELA teachers exercised agency, within their classrooms. The researchers mentioned a variety of definitions that constitute what agency is, however a majority of the studies cited understood agency to be the individual initiative to act based on environment and knowledge base, which stemmed from an autonomy supporting environment. Of the reviewed studies, 19% were conducted in an elementary setting, 24% in middle grades, and 67% in secondary ELA settings. Constraints to teacher agency included curricular mandates on how to use the materials and the prevalent testing culture. Curricular mandates made some teachers feel like there was more trust placed in the packaged curricula than in teachers, leaving teachers feeling disempowered. In one study surveyed (Smagorinsky et al., 2011), a teacher resorted to authoritarian, teacher-centered instruction, despite her student-centered philosophy, because she did not know how to exercise her agency within a standardized curriculum. Instead, she fell back into the controlling practices supported by her mentors. In contrast to this situation, teacher agency was supported through collaboration with colleagues and the

community. For example, Bender-Slack's (2010) case study of how 22 ELA teachers committed to teaching social justice. Three of the ELA teachers were confident enough to act with agency through emphasized activism and ideology that culture was created, not just passively given. Content was related to life and the community through community service projects or assignments that directly connected to their communities. The teachers used the experiences to develop students' voices within their communities, resulting in the cultivation of agency within students. The importance of teacher agency was further supported in Francois' (2014) study, when teachers and administrators worked together to promote a culture of literacy in a school-wide effort. Results of this study indicated that teachers acted on their agency when they expected to influence students. When teachers exercised agency, it was to meet the needs of and be more responsive towards their students. This looked like giving students choice in curriculum decisions (Vaughn & Faircloth, 2011), adding new genres (Dierking & Fox, 2013), and modifying the scripted curriculum (Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008). Similarly, other teachers included opportunities to get to know themselves better and incorporated social justice projects into the classroom (Baker-Doyle & Gustavson, 2016; Bender-Slack, 2010). These findings reflect how when teachers have the autonomy to act with agency, they find meaningful ways to adapt top-down policies regarding curriculum to meet the needs of students while meeting administrators' expectations.

More recently, a team of six middle grade teachers designed an interdisciplinary curriculum using a backwards by design framework (Trinter &

Hughes, 2021). The study sought to demonstrate the value of teachers struggling through curriculum design as a beneficial endeavor since the teacher would have a deeper understanding of the curriculum through the process, thus creating more meaningful learning experiences for students. These researchers found that teachers initially were adapting curriculum, but eventually gained confidence and improvised lessons. Findings indicated that struggling a little through curriculum design was beneficial. Since challenging and diverse learning experiences are not possible if teachers are expected to teach what someone else designed, especially when the curriculum was not designed for specific students and contexts, teachers should be encouraged to grapple with curriculum and modify it to meet the needs of their students (Trinter & Hughes, 2021).This also suggests the importance of involving teachers in curricular design or allowing modifications of a packaged curriculum to cultivate a deeper understanding of the curricular aims and in order to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences for students.

Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy

In Paris' (2012) review of literature regarding the necessity of culturally sustaining pedagogy, he tracked changes in the approach to teaching that shifted from a deficit approach in the 1960s and 1970s, which aimed to remove linguistic and cultural practices of students of color and replace them with 'better' ones, to an approach that sought to provide interventions and support for educators of diverse students, such as Moll and Gonzalez's (1994) funds of knowledge as well as Ladson-Billings's CRP (1995). Both pedagogies recognized that students of color have

knowledge and educators could build on cultural knowledge in a formal setting, making learning relevant and responsive. Paris (2012) offered a new term, culturally sustaining pedagogy, saying that being "responsive" or "relevant" is not enough; rather, young people should be supported in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competencies of their communities. He stated that youth need to become competent in their own communities while being taught how to access the dominant culture. Culturally and historically responsive pedagogy seeks to challenge the created idea of a 'mono-culture' based on White, middle-class norms that standardized testing promotes with the goal of serving and empowering all students.

When drawing on CRT (Gay, 2002) to inform their pedagogies and practices, Muhammad (2020) charges teachers with the recognition and cultivation of their own genius as educators. Muhammad's (2020) Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy (CHRL) Framework is a model that helps to cultivate the genius already within students and create space for them to become empowered and build their confidence. The CHRL framework rests on four literary pursuits: identity, skills, intelligence, and criticality. Combined, these pursuits engage students in meaningful critical thinking about the world around them and themselves while developing the skills necessary for academic and life success.

Muhammad (2020) referred to literacy as education, meaning it can be woven into other content areas, not just ELA. Muhammad's framework is intended to be used by teachers to rethink and redesign their curriculum to ensure CRT (Gay, 2002). In doing so, Muhammad (2020) argued that students' engagement and motivation for

learning increases, as does their learning. The purpose of this framework is that educators rethink and redesign their pedagogy and curriculum to address the four pursuits in order to be responsive. This framework seeks to disrupt educators' teaching practices of teaching ethnically diverse students from a deficit perspective (Muhammad, 2020).

According to Muhammad (2020), many traditional practices within modern school systems portray students, particularly students of color, with a deficit perspective through anti-intellectualism which can look like prescribed/packaged curriculum, over-reliance on skill objectives, leveling of texts and tracking students, mandates of curriculum that teachers are given, and teachers not being seen as intellectuals within the classroom. Thus, Muhammad argued that educators can elevate literacy learning today by looking at tenants of Black literacy societies who valued meaningful and diverse literature and saw that literacy provided access to "mental freedom, political power, and agenda building" and "[navigation of] extremely racist and oppressive systems and structures of the United States," (p. 19) including school systems.

Perhaps the reason there has been little growth in literacy within recent decades stems from the view of literacy solely as a skill rather than as a tool that provides access, prompts actions, and promotes community. The goal in a culturally and historically responsive classroom is not just the acquisition of skills and knowledge, but the development of deeper thought and a more critical consciousness, one where students are able to recognize oppression, then question and challenge the

politics that lead to it (Husband & Kang, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). The very heart of this responsiveness is action and the promotion of social justice. To illustrate the ways this framework reflects tenets of CRT (Gay, 2002) as well as promotes a culturally and historically responsive classroom and curriculum, the four components of Muhammad's (2020) framework are discussed in the following sections.

Identity Meaning-Making

The first goal's focus is identity. Students should understand their identity within an immediate and a broader context and use this understanding to guide their actions and behaviors. Connected to literacy and meaning-making, Muhammad (2020) suggested educators ask: "How will my instruction help students to learn something about themselves and/or about others?" (p. 58). The purpose of this question is to provide students with the opportunity to understand their different identities and how these identities play into the world and within sociopolitical issues. This component is foundational. Muhammad (2020) claimed that having a strong identity and sense of self prevents individuals from being taken advantage of or allowing others to tell them who they are, which may not be accurate or positive. An ELA-focused activity she provided that can start the discussion of identity included asking students to share how they see their various identities in their own words through conversation or writing their stories and then critiquing the deficits that have been attributed to others who share similar identities.

This type of work requires teachers to consider themselves – their histories, biases, identities, etc. – so they can model and guide students in this work. For

example, teachers need to do the work themselves. This may require a confrontation of personal biases or creation of a plan of action to not just profess support for a cause, but to become an agent of change. Teachers also need to consider curriculum design and how to creatively engage their students. Muhammad (2020) argued that teachers cannot get to skills until students are able to see themselves within the curriculum and truly know themselves.

Skills

Connected to secondary ELA classrooms, skills include reading, writing, and speaking. These are often aligned with CCSS or other state standards, which frame lessons and that educators deem important for students to learn. Skills are necessary for students to engage in understanding texts, find meaning in language, and use their voices to communicate. Connected to skills, Muhammad (2020) suggested educators ask: "How will my instruction build students' skills for the content area?" (p. 58). In addition to teaching the writing skills, Muhammad said teachers also need to teach students assessment language and how to look at rubrics and provide lots of examples. Skills should not be taught in isolation, but rather alongside the other pursuits – identity, intellect, and criticality. Since educators want students to act on what they know, skills need to be seen as a pursuit, not a disconnected and disengaging activity. In order for students to see the relevancy of skill, it should be put in context or accompany authentic, real-world type application, not skill and drill type worksheets or through lecturing. When integrated within an engaging activity with meaning, students may come to understand mastery of skills allows access into

the dominant culture and see the importance of mastering such skills to better

navigate mainstream society.

Intellect

The pursuit of intellect (Muhammad, 2020) calls into question the unchanging

nature of many U.S. standardized curriculums that fail to constantly transition in light

of world events, which impact the human condition. She argued that curriculum

should be dynamic and constantly changing while also historicizing content; this is a

stark contrast to standardized curriculum that predominantly changes once a new

version is purchased. The development of intellectualism promotes capacity for

students to express their ideas and creates space to authentically apply their learnings.

Educators should ask: "How will my instruction build students' knowledge and

mental powers?" (p. 58). Muhammad argued that intellect, or knowledge, is

exercising the capacity to better understand and critique the world. It represents the

ideas educators want students to become smarter about and requires the space to put

their learnings into authentic action. This pursuit reaches beyond the classroom

through helping students plan for their quality of life, navigation of society, and

social-emotional awareness.

To cultivate intellect and intelligence, educators must set the tone for students

within the classroom so that intellectualism is expected and nurtured. Nurturing

intellect should light passion and interest in students. It is not only about academics,

but emotional intelligence and self-awareness and planning for the future. For

example, teachers should consider the classroom environment and how to structure it

so that intellectualism is expected and nurtured. This may also require educators to critically consider their approach to teaching within the classroom such as whether or not factory-created worksheets are prevalent, types of professional development they attend, or how the classroom environment speaks to students. Debates that encourage students to look at a topic from multiple perspectives, lenses, or positions is one way students can become engaged in the pursuit of intellect as it requires them to become smarter about a topic and argue a point. Either way, the pursuit should be tied to action and make students feel valued as intellectual beings so they think of themselves highly.

Criticality

Learning should transform the reader and push for change as one analyzes oppressive ideation, and readers should challenge injustice and misrepresentation when they encounter it in texts. Termed, "criticality," Muhammad (2020) explained that criticality asks students to engage with literacy to understand power, privilege, and oppression and critique it. When they do so, they can build agency to change it. Educators should ask: "How will my instruction engage students' thinking about power and equity and the disruption of oppression?" (p. 58). This approach cultivates empathy and compassion as it humanizes instruction. For example, student can examine and interrogate current and/or historical examples of media to understand how racism has been in existence and how it impacts individuals and society in order to understand the current sociopolitical landscape. Through this pursuit, students are given tools to honor marginalized voices and to respond to inequities they see around

them. Teaching with criticality requires students to be responsible for actively

engaging with the information, not passively consume it. This pursuit also puts

everyone within the room in the position of teacher and learner as different

perspectives are honored and valued.

Summary

In contexts where standardization has infiltrated secondary schools and

curricula, many students are expected to separate themselves from their own cultural

identities in favor of adopting White, middle-class norms by which to learn content

which is aimed at test preparation (Gay, 2002; Husband & Kang, 2020; Muhammad,

2020). Standardization of curriculum is beneficial in its goals of providing educators

with texts, materials, and lessons that are aligned with state standards; supporting new

or inexperienced teachers with research-based strategies and content; and promoting

consistency and alignment across content and grade levels (Eisenbach, 2012; Milner,

2014; Wyatt, 2014). However, these standardized curriculums often fail students,

particularly students of color. And instead of further motivating adolescents and

developing student capacities and critical thinking beyond the basic state standards,

the use of standardize curriculum diminishes student motivation and learning

outcomes (Muhammad, 2020).

Noted previously, CRT (Gay, 2002) supports tenets of Muhammad's (2020)

culturally and historically responsive framework, which was designed to meet all

learners' needs, particularly when taught using a scripted or standardized curriculum

as it offsets some common issues within implementation, such as lack of engaging

and diverse literature and low intrinsic motivation of students. Moreover, the use of this framework promotes teacher autonomy and student buy-in. In many cases, standardized curriculum restricts teachers' ability to exercise professional judgement and modify lesson plans or content to best meet the needs of the learners within their classrooms (Eisenbach, 2012; Wyatt, 2014).

Moreover, there is a need for educators to implement diverse texts and materials that speak to students' individual identities and interests while promoting opportunities to think critically about the world and systems around them which promote harmful ideological principals and oppression (e.g. Husband & Kang, 2020; Muhammad, 2020; Wyatt, 2014). With the flexibility to implement culturally and historically responsive pedagogy within the classroom, even when faced with implementing standardized curriculum, teachers have more opportunities to ensure that their students will become more engaged in their learning, learn more about themselves and others, and think more critically about the world around them (Muhammad, 2020).

Conclusions

In order to improve adolescents' engagement in their ELA classes as well as their pursuit of deeper and more critical thinking, teachers should be given the autonomy to deviate from a standardized curriculum to best meet the needs of their students (Trinter & Hughes, 2021). It stands to reason that while some may argue that standardized curriculum may have a place in the secondary classroom, it should not be the sole foundation of students' education (Eisenbach, 2012; Smagorinsky, Lakly,

& Johnson, 2002). Recent legislation, such as NCLB and ESSA, have painted teachers as inadequate and in need of extra accountability in the fight against adolescent illiteracy, but standardizing curriculum has also failed to engage and include all learners, especially those from diverse backgrounds (Ede, 2006). In secondary ELA classrooms, students long to engage with literature that is representative of themselves, their interests, their struggles, and the world around them (Muhammad, 2020). Thus, it stands to reason that secondary ELA educators are in the best position to support students when given flexibility to exercise their expertise, even within standardized curriculums. Not only permitting, but encouraging, teachers to use CRT (Gay, 2002) not only provides administrators with peace of mind that standards are being taught and that content is covered, but ensures students are interacting with curriculum in a way that engages them and meets their individual needs. It cultivates students to be critical, active, democratic citizens.

Chapter 3: Project Description

Introduction

Growing pressures for increased teacher accountability and student achievement on standardized tests encourages the adoption of standardized curriculum (Wyatt, 2014). While there are some excellent qualities these packaged curriculums can potentially offer, some shortcomings interfere with teacher autonomy and the ability to meet students' needs (Chisholm et al., 2019; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002). Moreover, when schools and districts implement these purchased, packaged curricula teachers are expected to implement and use them, which can be

challenging for teachers and students alike. Thus, it is up to teachers to ensure that even when using standardized curriculum products, they must do so while also keeping their students' learning needs central to the teaching and learning that occurs in their classrooms.

Using the standardized curriculum while ensuring CRT (Gay, 2002) can aid teachers in modifying prescribed curriculum to engage students and create lessons that meet students' needs and attend to their identities, with the foundations from the provided curriculum. Thus, this project provides a tool for secondary ELA educators who use standardized curriculum. Specifically, this tool outlines how to plan and incorporate the four different literary pursuits of Muhammad's (2020) culturally and historically responsive framework into ELA lessons. It begins with details regarding the objectives of the project and explains the components of the tool. This project includes a template for lesson planning, two sample high school ELA units planned out using the tool, an end of unit student feedback questionnaire, and an end of unit teacher reflection. This section concludes with plans for implementing this resource.

Project Components

The author of this project works in a large public high school in Michigan. The population is relatively diverse with the student demographics being roughly 47% White, 37% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 5% multiracial, and 3% African American (MI School Data, 2020). About 37% of students are considered economically disadvantaged (MI School Data, 2020). The high school recently adopted a standardized ELA curriculum from the company StudySync

(https://www.studysync.com/). Upon completing a semester's worth of the StudySync curriculum, for the author, it was clear that in order for students to succeed, the lessons needed some reframing. This project comes from the author's desire to create opportunities for all students to learn more about themselves and the world around them while following district guidelines by teaching this particular standardized curriculum.

StudySync's curriculum allows for educators to teach using multiple instructional paths including: thematic units, novel studies, or a shortened path of integrated reading and writing. The author's school district allowed professional learning communities (PLC), divided by separate grade levels and comprised of ELA teachers, to select texts and organize units of instruction while maintaining fidelity to StudySync's provided curriculum. Administrators recognized treating the program as a scripted curriculum was not beneficial for students for multiple reasons and recognized teachers needed some autonomy to adjust the packaged curriculum to fit the needs of students. The district provided a couple of days for PLCs to meet and make decisions about common texts, common formative assessments, and common summative assessments. Administrators allowed tweaking of assessments and essential questions by the PLC, only if what was provided was faulty or unusable.

Based on this author's own experiences and the development of the tool (see Appendices), this project offers a solution for secondary ELA educators who teach a standardized curriculum and who also recognize their students' needs are not fully met with the provided materials. The foundational pedagogical framework comes

from Muhammad's (2020) culturally and historically responsive literacy (CHRL) framework which aiming to engage students in deeper, more critical thinking about themselves and the world around them. Using this approach ensures that teachers still teach standards, and it makes the content more relevant and relatable, which will increase teachers' and students' motivation (Deci et al., 1991; Muhammad, 2020; Paris, 2012). While it would be best for this project to be utilized in curriculum design across an entire ELA department, individual teachers will find it beneficial as well.

The first component of this project is a blank lesson template, namely the CHRL Lesson Template (Appendix A) that provides space to lay out the specifics of what is being taught and think through the four literary pursuits of Muhammad's (2020) culturally and historically responsive framework. This template is intended to be completed by secondary ELA teachers for each text or set of layered texts covered, meaning there may be multiple sheets completed for a given unit. It should also be understood there may be times that secondary ELA educators may pull texts from outside the purchased curriculum to support or offer an alternate perspective to what is curated within the unit from the publisher. Space is provided to attend to elements of CRT (Gay, 2002) specifically to track elements such as representation, of minority groups and identities, and genre of the text, which may be important depending on the essential question and/or summative assessment focus. Space is provided for teachers, individually or in groups, to plan for addressing each of the four literary pursuits (i.e., identity, skill, intellect, and criticality) as they pertain to the text(s) taught. This

template (Appendix A) is intended to get teachers thinking in terms of the bigger picture in order to grapple with larger aims of a lesson or unit and wrestle with unit structure (Trinter & Hughes, 2021).

This project also includes the course outline that the author's PLC originally planned to teach in Fall 2020 after receiving the new curriculum (Appendix B). The PLC considered which texts StudySync's units originally included and selected a few text to be common required texts. The Curriculum Outline (Appendix B) was a staff created outline of texts the PLC selected as required teaching and other texts could be added in if the teacher chose. Next, the project includes a Revised Unit 1: CHRL Unit Plan Sample (Appendix C) and Revised Unit 2: CHRL Unit Plan Sample (Appendix D), which are revised lesson plans for each unit using the CHRL Lesson Template (Appendix A). The samples map out two units of study that the author previously taught and revised based on the culturally and historically responsive framework. Using the newly developed CHRL Lesson Template, the author redesigned both units that were taught during the first semester by focusing on the application of CHRL to each lesson within the unit as an example of how this tool helps teach a standardized curriculum using CHRL.

The CHRL Lesson Template (Appendix A) starts with the essential question (EQ) of the unit. Effective EQs are helpful for framing learning goals within the unit (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). The purpose of an EQ is to strengthen and deepen student understanding and support the connection of isolated skills to larger, more abstract thought processes within the content area (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013). EQs

should be engaging and open-ended with no singular, correct answer. This is why the EQ is the starting point of the template. In revising Unit 2 (Appendix D), for example, the author changed the essential question from "What will you learn on your journey?" to "How do journeys influence us as people?" The original EQ was too vague and unappealing to students, not to mention hard to apply to or use to frame texts within the unit. Keeping with fidelity of the prescribed curriculum, the modified EQ came from a lesson within Unit 2, and offers more focus and a better lens through which to read unit texts. The revised EQ also is more relevant and relatable to students. With the revised EQ, the teacher can better meet the tenants of CRT (Gay, 2002) by ensuring academic success with a question that is relevant and likely to engage students, allows for the development or maintenance of cultural competence through its application across cultures, and it challenges the status quo of social order by critically analyzing the ways in which privilege and oppression promote or hinder a journey or an individual's learning/realization.

When revising the units, the author used the CHRL Lesson Template (Appendix A) and filled in the EQ and text selection first as those components were provided from the prescribed curriculum and PLC decisions. Next, the author wanted to note the types of genres of texts students were exposed to during the unit. With the StudySync curriculum, one of the end of unit summative assessments is a multiple-choice reading test in which students need to demonstrate proficiency reading certain types of texts. Tracking genres throughout the unit is helpful in ensuring students have had enough exposure to the necessary genres and also that other cultural

literacies are cultivated, too (Muhammad, 2020). As a result, space to track representation was added to this template as a way to survey the types of experiences and/or perspectives students would be exposed to via the texts. Since standardized curriculum often neglects minority students' experiences, the author wanted to be sure to track the types of experiences students were exposed to.

Next on the CHRL Lesson Template (Appendix A) is the four pursuits of CHRL (Muhammad, 2020). When revising the curriculum, the author considered the deeper meanings of the provided texts and how, using the text(s), they would engage students in these pursuits. A few secondary texts were added to round out an instructional path and better address the literary pursuits. For example, the Curriculum Outline for Fall 2020 (Appendix B) did not exactly divide up the common texts into a specific order. In fact, when the author originally taught the first unit, *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2008) was taught independently. When revising the unit (Appendix C), the author considered how *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2008) related to the essential question of belonging and why some feel the need to belong. Rather than providing students with a single perspective, the author looked through the rest of the unit provided and found two poems that provided perspectives in conversation with *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2008). In her poem, "Welcome to America", Rashed (2016) recounts her struggles as a Palestinian, raised in Syria relocating to America to flee civil war. The second addition, "Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question" (Burns, 1989), conveys responses to a series of intrusive questions that a Native American may be asked, which demonstrates how insensitive

others can be. Adding these texts allows for empathy to be cultivated and for students to think critically about the impact of stereotypes and what it might mean to belong in America.

Other times additional texts were added because a singular text was not complex enough engage all four literary pursuits on its own or in order to add alternative experiences. For instance, in Unit 2 (Appendix D), "Bessie Coleman: The Woman Who 'Dared to Dream' Made Aviation History" (U.S. Air Force, 2012) is an informative article about Bessie Coleman's perseverance and accomplishments. Yet, as an independent text, it was unable to meet all four literary pursuits. However, when taught in addition to "Volar" (Cofer, 2006), students can see how Bessie Coleman achieved her dream through creating a plan, whereas the narrator's mother in "Volar" was unable to live her dream for lack of a clear plan to follow. Pairing the pieces also presents the opportunity to discuss the ways in which systems can oppress others and how to persevere toward success in light of it.

The author started with text selection and the alignment of the text(s) to the EQ and what the selected text had to say about identity. The author considered how students might engage with a discussion or activity that would likely pique their interest in that literary pursuit. When considering the skills, the author looked at the curriculum to see which skills the curriculum intended to be addressed within the unit and how those skills may be applied to teaching the text. For example, StudySync embeds skill lessons such as looking at text structure; author's purpose and point of view; and language, style and audience, especially when introducing a new genre of

text. In this instance, the author was able to utilize many of the identified skills from the StudySync materials in addition to skills the author knew would be natural to tie in when envisioning the lesson.

The author also considered which ways the already identified text(s) could serve a mentor text(s), in terms of writing or author craft, and what other standards or skills could be addressed within the lesson. Given the content within the selected text, the author thought about how students could become more intelligent about something related to the text. For example, in revised Unit 1 (Appendix C), students will read the short story "The Necklace" (de Maupassant, 1884) and, with the story and other activities, students will consider ways in which poverty impacts society and individuals. This could launch into a research activity where students explore the various ways in which poverty plays a role in society or how individuals are impacted by poverty.

The criticality pursuit (Muhammad, 2020) is the final pursuit of the CHRL framework where students critically look at power and oppression. For example, in revised Unit 1 (Appendix C) students would apply what they learned about how poverty impacts society and individuals to analyze the power socioeconomic status wields and how that, in turn, can influence individuals. This lesson could offer a possible answer to the EQ: "Why do we feel the need to belong?" based on what students have learned about socioeconomic status and its role in influencing the behaviors of individuals.

Project Evaluation

The goal of this project is to make a secondary ELA standardized curriculum more equitable and engaging for students. The school this author works in tracks proficiency of students' learning connected to how many students pass or fail using the Danielson (1996) model. Given the broad nature of ELA content, constructing an effective ELA curriculum and assessing it is somewhat subjective. Thus, to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the proposed solution outlined in this chapter, educators and administrators should observe the types of conversations secondary ELA students engage in, the depth at which these conversations go, and the language that is used between students and with educators. If the usage of the proposed solution is effective, observers should see students actively engaging in tough conversations while considering multiple perspectives and asking questions that are not easily answered. Observers should hear students thoughtfully offer opinions, evidences, and viewpoints in verbal and written formats that respectfully challenge or deepen their peers' understandings. Teachers and students will mutually be engaged in learning from each other as the questions that are posed to the class for consideration will be complex and may not have any definitive answer.

Another way the effectiveness of the implemented solution can be assessed is through End of Unit Student Feedback (Appendix E). Providing space for students to specifically reflect and report their learnings helps teachers, department heads, and administrators know what is working and what needs work. Student responses are submitted without student names and have no impact on the students' grade; they are purely to inform the educator on what the students perceived to be effective. Students

are also encouraged to be specific in their response citing specific readings and activities and an explanation of why something did or did not work. If students can thoroughly and clearly articulate the specifics of why something did not work or why another did, it helps the educator determine the best course of action – keep the lesson as is or how, specifically, to revise the lesson or to eliminate it. It is also important to note if texts were deemed irrelevant or ineffective in engaging students. If the entire department is following this framework, looking at general feedback at the course level and across the department can give insight into which topics and learnings resonate with the student body and which areas may need improvement and requires modifications across or within the courses.

An End of Unit Teacher Reflection (Appendix F) was included to provide a space for the teacher to reflect over the unit. The use of a culturally and historically responsive framework is only as effective as the educator is reflective over their process (Sellars, 2017). The reflective component is intended to provide space to consider which topics and activities worked or did not work and for the teacher to consider improvements. Additionally, considering the fact that using a responsive, equitable framework may require teachers to navigate topics they may feel inexperienced and challenged by, a question is included to reflect over which areas they felt inadequate or needed more learning in and to create some next steps to be better prepared for the future.

Areas for further research may include studying the impact of standardized ELA curriculum, especially for under-represented and minority students.

Additionally, more research is needed on how teachers can take and use existing curriculum to revise and rework it in order to better serve their students' needs.

Project Implementation

This project will be presented to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and the principal overseeing the author's ELA Department for evaluation of and approval for implementation. This school is rather large and some high school classes are taught across three separate buildings. Encouragement and approval from an administrator to utilize this approach could also begin conversations amongst the different ELA grade level teachers about which texts have merit and should be focused on, as they seek to cultivate students' identity, skills, intellect, and criticality (Muhammad, 2020).

Project Conclusions

Approaching standardized secondary ELA instruction using CRT (Gay, 2002) rewrites the script, placing the instructor, not the publishing company, at the forefront of the instructional planning. Using this tool, secondary ELA teachers can improve student engagement with scripted curriculum while regaining their autonomy and meeting the needs of diverse student populations. Engaging students in conversations that are of interest to them and exposing them to relevant literary texts can captivate their passions and attention to learn skills and concepts needed to perform well on standardized tests and throughout life as a democratic citizen (Muhammad, 2012; Muhammad, 2020).

In turn, developing curriculum using CRT (Gay, 2002) should improve

secondary students' literacy scores on state mandated and summative assessments as critical thinking abilities of students are more routinely challenged. This will require teachers to function more autonomously within the school as they stray from some specifics of standardized curriculum, but ultimately it should increase their satisfaction and ownership over their work.

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Appendix A

CHRL Lesson Template

Unit # __ : _____ Class: _____

Essential Question:	
Text:	
Genre:	
Textual Representation:	Ethnic Diversity Teen Other: _____ Disability LGBTQ+ Mental Illness Socioeconomic
Identity: (How are students learning about themselves/others?)	
Skills: (CCSS or Standards)	
Intellect: (What are students becoming smarter about?)	
Criticality: (How are students thinking about power, equity, and disruption of oppression?)	

Appendix B

Curriculum Outline for Fall 2020

Quarter 1	Quarter 2
Unit 1	Unit 2
Driving Question: Why do we feel the need to belong?	**Driving Question: What will you learn on your journey?**
Genre Focus: Narrative	**Genre Focus:** Informative + Research
Anchor Texts: • American Born Chinese • *Of Mice and Men*	**Anchor Text:** • Excerpts from The Odyssey
Required Secondary Texts: • Marigolds • The Necklace • Braving the Wilderness	**Required Secondary Texts:** • Bessie Coleman: Woman who 'dared to dream' made aviation history (Informational) • Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail (Informational) • Restless Genes (Informational)
Highly Recommended Texts/ Resources: "Glare of Disdain" by Gene Yang	**Highly Recommended Texts/ Resources:** "Ulysses"- Tennyson

Appendix C

Revised Unit 1: CHRL Unit Plan Sample

Unit # 1 :   Divided We Fall   Class: English 1A

Essential Question:	Why do we feel the need to belong?
Text:	*American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang Layered with: "Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question" by Diane Burns "Welcome to America" by Sara Abou Rashed
Genre:	Graphic novel + Poem
Textual Representation:	(Ethnic Diversity) (Teen) Other: _____ Disability LGBTQ+ Mental Illness Socioeconomic
Identity: (How are students learning about themselves/others?)	Students will consider their community identities and how these identities intersect to allow them to belong with or to be left out of a group. Students will also consider how belonging or being left out shapes who they become.
Skills: (CCSS or Standards)	Students will analyze how a theme is developed over the course of a text. Students will analyze how text structure can create mystery and tension.
Intellect: (What are students becoming smarter about?)	Students will better understand the experience and challenges of first generation immigrant children.
Criticality: (How are students thinking about power, equity, and disruption of oppression?)	Students will learn about stereotype threat and how stereotyping, whether positive or negative, has harmful effects on individuals and groups.

Unit # 1 : _____Divided We Fall_____ Class: English 1A

Essential Question:	Why do we feel the need to belong?
Text:	"The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant
Genre:	Short story
Textual Representation:	Ethnic Diversity Teen Other: _____ Disability LGBTQ+ Mental Illness (Socioeconomic)
Identity: (How are students learning about themselves/others?)	Students will think about how their socioeconomic status influences their choices.
Skills: (CCSS or Standards)	Students will learn how it identify theme and track its development across a work. Students will learn to identify irony.
Intellect: (What are students becoming smarter about?)	Students will consider the impact of poverty has on society and the individual.
Criticality: (How are students thinking about power, equity, and disruption of oppression?)	Students will analyze how socioeconomic status can influence societal powers and influence of individuals.

Created by: Angela McKellar 2021

Unit # 1 : _____ Divided We Fall _____ Class: English 1A

Essential Question:	Why do we feel the need to belong?
Text:	*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
Genre:	Novel
Textual Representation:	(Ethnic Diversity) Teen Other: _____ Disability LGBTQ+ Mental Illness (Socioeconomic)
Identity: (How are students learning about themselves/others?)	Students will consider their various identities and the ways these identities provide advantages or disadvantages.
Skills: (CCSS or Standards)	Students will analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text and interact with other characters to develop the plot. Students will cite strong, thorough textual evidence to support analysis of the text – explicitly and with inferences.
Intellect: (What are students becoming smarter about?)	Students will have an understanding of what it was like living as a migrant worker during the Great Depression.
Criticality: (How are students thinking about power, equity, and disruption of oppression?)	Students will consider ways in which the oppression of others (women, disabled, elderly, poor, and non-white peoples) still exists in our society and how our school can combat some of these harmful ideologies within our student body.

Appendix D

Revised Unit 2: CHRL Unit Plan Sample

Unit # 2 : _____The Call to Adventure_____Class: <u>English 1A</u>

Essential Question:	How do journeys influence us as people?
Text:	Excerpts from *The Odyssey* by Homer
Genre:	Poem/graphic novel/TV mini series
Textual Representation:	Ethnic Diversity Teen Other: _____ Disability LGBTQ+ Mental Illness Socioeconomic
Identity: (How are students learning about themselves/others?)	Students will learn that they have different skills/abilities that will help them be successful in life and others that may hinder them – much like Odysseus.
Skills: (CCSS or Standards)	Students will analyze how representation of a story changes through different artistic mediums.
Intellect: (What are students becoming smarter about?)	Students will learn about epic poetry and some basics of Greek mythology and how it shaped the lives of ancient Greeks.
Criticality: (How are students thinking about power, equity, and disruption of oppression?)	Students will analyze the portrayal of misogyny and the different roles that women play within *The Odyssey* and what sorts of characteristics are assumed to be good for females vs males.

Unit # 2 : _____The Call to Adventure_____Class: English 1A

Essential Question:	How do journeys influence us as people?
Text:	"Bessie Coleman: Woman Who 'Dared to Dream' Made Aviation History" by U.S. Air Force

"Volar" by Judith Ortiz Cofer |
| Genre: | Informational text & short story |
| Textual Representation: | (Ethnic Diversity)   Teen   Other: _____

Disability   LGBTQ+

Mental Illness   (Socioeconomic) |
Identity: (How are students learning about themselves/others?)	Students will learn that not all dreams are realized, but they can also make plans for achieving them.
Skills: (CCSS or Standards)	Students will learn elements of informational text structures. Students will compare themes across different texts.
Intellect: (What are students becoming smarter about?)	Students will learn what requirements are necessary for a career they are interested in pursuing and create a plan for pursuing it.
Criticality: (How are students thinking about power, equity, and disruption of oppression?)	Students will learn about barriers that detain people from achieving their dream after high school (trade, college, or job training) and how to combat those barriers.

Appendix E

End of Unit Student Feedback

Student Feedback Form

Course: _____   **Unit #:** _____

Directions: Please consider the unit readings, activities, discussions, and assessments that we have just completed and respond as thoroughly, specifically and honestly as you can. Your responses are anonymous and will not, in any way, have an impact on the grade you will receive in this course. The information you provide is purely for your teacher to consider how to approach this unit in the future.

1.   What went well for you this unit? What are you proud of?

2.   What was a challenge for you this unit?

3.   What did you learn (or what previous learning was reinforced) about *yourself or others* throughout this unit?

4.   How was your thinking challenged throughout this unit? How did you put this thinking into practice?

5.   Based on this unit, what did you learn about power, equity, and/or oppression and the role it plays in our society? What action, if any, are you inspired to take?

6.   Which lessons/activities/readings stood out to you as extremely beneficial? Why?

7.   Which lessons/activities/readings did you feel weren't as helpful or engaging for you? Why?

8.   Is there anything else you'd like to say about this unit?

Appendix F

End of Unit Teacher Reflection

Teacher Reflection

Course: _____   **Unit #:** _____

1. Overall, how do I feel this unit went?

2. How was pacing and sequencing? What changes should I make for next time?

3. How successful were activities and lessons in balancing rigor with developmental level? How might this need to be adjusted in the future?

4. Which strategies, texts, and lessons were *most* effective in engaging students? What improvements can be made?

5. Which strategies, texts, and lessons were *least* effective in engaging students? How might I change them in the future to improve them?

6. Which other viewpoints or perspectives may need to be added? Will these be taught in addition to what was previously taught, or will they replace what was previously taught?

7. During this unit, were there topics or conversations that were brought up that I felt uncomfortable talking about? Why? What are next steps so I can be better prepared and deepen my understanding for next time?

Appendix G

Copyright Permission Form

April 14, 2021

Michelle Woods
woodsm@westottawa.net

Dear Michelle:

I am currently enrolled in the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Graduate Studies in Education Program, and I am writing a project for the completion of my Master's in Education. My project is entitled "One Size Does Not Fit All: A Guide for Historical and Cultural Responsivity with Standardized Curriculum." May I receive permission to include in the appendices a copy of the following item?

English 1 StudySync Course Skeleton, which outlines the essential questions and texts the English 1 PLC taught during the 2020-2021 school year.

Your signature at the bottom portion of this letter confirms your ownership of the above item. The inclusion of your copyrighted material will not restrict your re-publication of the material in any other form. Please advise if you wish a specific copyright notice to be included on each page. My project will be cataloged in the GVSU library and will be available to other students and colleges for circulation.

Sincerely,

Angela McKellar
(616) 786-1100 ext. 6104; mckellara@westottawa.net

PERMISSION IS GRANTED to you Angela McKellar to include the requested material in her GVSU Master's of Education project.

West Ottawa High School
Permission granted by: _Michelle Woods_ Title: _Assistant Principal_
Date: _4/14/2021_

Data Form

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Angela Dawn McKellar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

_____   4-26-21_____
Erica Hamilton, Project Advisor   Date

Accepted and approved on behalf of the   Accepted and approved on behalf of the
Literacy Studies Program   Literacy and Technology Unit

_____   _____
Elizabeth Stolle, Graduate Program Director   Sean Lancaster, Unit Head

_____4/20/21_____   _____4/24/21_____
                Date   Date