**Module 7, Assignment 1:**

***Final Project***

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**61653-80: Trends and Issues in Curriculum and Instruction**

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**Section 1: Summary and Research Base for Trend**

During the 2020-21 school year, my school, Hanawalt Elementary in Des Moines had undergone building-level professional development that focused on anti-racism. The staff in my building were challenged to ponder the meanings of “white privilege”, “racial bias”, “white fragility”, and “institutional racism”. We were also challenged to understand how those terms play a role in shaping school and classroom culture, then finally challenged to consider what role we have in creating a school climate that is anti-racist.  
 As we were receiving that professional development, there were state legislators and bureaucrats drafting laws and policies that were to stifle discussions about race in schools.  
 In the meantime, the COVID pandemic has affected our school climate.  
 What kind of professional development could our school consider that would integrate societal affects of the pandemic with the structural effects of societal biases in our school climate – and to do it in a way that would not have our work misconstrued as politically partisan?  
 I have chosen for this final project to develop a plan creating culturally responsive environments. (I would suggest that a plan on Culturally Responsive Teaching, the term currently used for this approach, but the acronymic spelling, CRT, might be easily misunderstood as Critical Race Theory, and the focus of the work could be unnecessarily lost.

My vision of creating a culturally responsive environment (CRE) in this plan will have a two-pronged approach. One of my approaches is demographic, learning about the “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant” (Todd, 2021).  
 In addition to the ethnic diversity piece component, I propose adding learning more about Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACES, such as witnessing domestic abuse, substance abuse, emotional and physical neglect, having an incarcerated family member, parental separation, or divorce. I believe that surviving these factors are just as important in our lives and the lives of our students, as our cultural background and ethnic identity.   
 In her 2018 article, “Teaching with Trauma”, Emily Pitts Donahoe states, “Since childhood trauma is so common (over half of 17,000 adults surveyed in that study reported at least one ACE, while one-fourth reported two or more), it’s inevitable that some of the adults working with children with ACEs are themselves dealing with the lasting effects of trauma.”  
 My proposal is for professional development that allows us to get to know our students as well as ourselves as we need to keep our minds and hearts open to different kinds of people, and accept who we are as work with, and for, others.

**Section 2: Alignment of Trend to Vision, Mission, and Goals**

The vision of the Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS) is “Becoming the model for urban education in the United States.” The DMPS the mission states that “The Des Moines Public Schools exist so that graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful at the next stage of their lives.” (Des Moines Public Schools, 2021).   
  
The following are expectations for students in the DMPS:

1. They demonstrate proficiency in literacy; mathematics; and science. Students demonstrating below grade level performance will demonstrate significant growth each school year.
   1. Gaps between the lowest and highest performing students will be eliminated, including disproportionality by race, socio-economic status, and/or zip code of residence.
   2. Gaps in performance between students identified as Males of Color and other student groups will be eliminated.
   3. Third grade students will read at grade level. Students grades K-3 demonstrating below grade level performance in literacy skills will demonstrate significant growth each year.
   4. Students will demonstrate proficiency and understanding of Algebra.
   5. DMPS Preschool students will be socially, emotionally and academically ready for Kindergarten.
2. They demonstrate financial and economic literacy.
3. They demonstrate an understanding of the value of fine and performing arts in society.
4. They demonstrate proficiency in technological and information literacy.

Creating culturally responsive environments in school is about the whole child. Striving for creating culturally responsive environments requires us to ask ourselves, “Who are our students? Who do our students see in our classrooms? How can [I, as an educator,] move further toward cultural responsiveness?” (Todd, 2021)   
 Alignment with this proposal and district ends takes between the district mission and vision as educators in several ways…. Embracing the cultural diversity of our student body and staff is one way. Another is to make meaningful connections with students, to learn where they come from, both geographically, and personally as their experiences from their home life are integral in their overall development. If we can understand our students better, then we can better apply our skill sets to theirs.

**Section 3: Impact of Trend on Engagement, Learning, and Achievement**

Culturally responsive environments (CREs) are ones that impact the student in several ways. Additional training on Adverse Childhood Experiences is a fitting supplement in getting to know the whole child, making the classroom and learning even more impactful and engaging for all of its students.

Listed below *in italics* are a list I pulled from the New America blog. I’ve added some thoughts of my own to the components of this list, titled “Five Ways Culturally Responsive Teaching Benefits Learners” (Muñiz, 2019):

* *CREs motivate and engage students*. Connecting personal experiences to learning experiences make the learning meaningful, motivational and engaging.
* *CREs cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills.* Higher order thinking skills flourish when applied to relevant issues of social justice.
* *CREs strengthen students racial and ethnic identities.* Acceptance and belonging enhances a person’s pride in who they are.
* *CREs promote a sense of safety and belonging.*
* *CREs facilitate brain processing.* This is directly connected with making learning relevant.

**Section 4: Discussion of the Ethical Decision Making Model**

I believe that my plan for addressing cultural responsiveness in my building is a logical, ethical, and necessary step that can take place after having anti-racist training in the past year. Students, their parents and families, and our building staff are all integral to creating culturally responsive environments.   
 First, educators need to realize ethical issues that come into play in creating a culturally responsive classroom where students feel safe, represented, and valued. Can a student sense that their presence and voice is valued, solely tolerated, or not desired?  
 Secondly, get the facts that you need to make connections meaningful. It’s best if you could learn them from the students and their parents. Be careful getting anecdotal notes from colleagues who know them. If you use that approach to learn more about a student, have a filter that can separate gossip from fact. That filter also needs to be able to detect biases in that person’s words. Speaking of biases, can we find biases that might hinder us from better understanding others?  
 Thirdly, how does the Markkula Center’s “lenses of their ethical decision making model apply to this plan and our practices? My plan and our practices need to respect the rights all of its stakeholders (The Rights Lens). The focus of the plan needs to create awareness that stakeholders can be in the wider community, not just students and staff (The Common Good Lens). Treating all stakeholders fairly regardless of any biases we have utilizes The Justice Lens. Will our practices in creating culturally responsive, ACE-safe school and classroom environments be spaces that produce the most good and the least harm? (The Utilitarian Lens). Finally, can we utilize our strengths and accept our weakness to still be the best educator we can be? The Virtue Lens should carry anyone through many situations.

**Section 5: Professional Learning Plan**

**Rationale:**

As demographics have shifted in our student and family populations there is need to ensure that our staff are prepared to meet the needs of the students they are teaching. At Hanawalt Elementary, there is also need for cultural competency training because even though the student demographics have changed, there has not been a change in the demographics of the staff. Hanawalt has seen an increase in “early indicators” for not being on grade level and future academic success. Due to the uptick in “early indicators”, this plan emphasizes that cultural competency work needs to be rooted and connected to the student experience and student outcomes.

**Intended Outcomes:**

1. Every staff will study the current demographic data for Hanawalt’s community.

2. Every staff member will learn about Adverse Child Experiences (i.e., ACES), including an individual look at how ACES impact everyone’s life and how ACES impacts our students’ lives.

3. Staff will learn about cultures, dynamics of relationships, supportive accommodations, and ethical practice as we learn about each other and how to build a caring community.

**Proposed Timeline** (NOTE: This proposal assumes we start at the beginning of the school year and progress through this plan for 6 months)**:**

**● August (during pre-service professional development):** Presentation of demographic data to staff to be lead by one district leader and one member of the community

After presentation staff will record questions that they have after seeing and discussing the data.

**● End of August**: Provide to small groups such as grade levels the answers to the questions provided after the demographic data presentation. –This could be achieved as a video of the questions and answers as well.

* Staff will look at demographics for classroom groups.
* Discuss any correlation between classroom demographics and community demographic data.
* Discuss how to build a classroom learning community.

**● September:** Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) training

Focus on your own ACES and how it has shaped you as an individual; How does knowing that many students have ACES impact our classroom expectations, rules, and communication?

**● Mid-September:** Discuss ACES in our own students… What do *we* know? How do we provide quality SEL experiences as we build community and support individual students? How does ACES and SEL work together?

**● October:** Have community resources available and community partners (ideally parents) to share information about ethnic cultures of students in our school

Staff will submit questions after these presentations raised from this information.

**● Mid-October**: Follow up on the questions asked after the ethnic cultures learnings in early October

In grade level teams connect how culture can be used to support learning and support building a positive and supportive classroom environment

**● November:** Learning session about the key components/indicators of a culturally responsive classroom.

Teacher/staff teams will assess classrooms for these culturally responsive practices/actions.

**● Mid-November:** Staff will identify a specific component of a culturally responsive classroom to study, develop a classroom implementation plan, implement, evaluate, and reflect. \*This process will take at least 1 month.

**● December:**  Leadership and support staff will be providing resources to aid staff in the implementation and evaluation of the individual’s culturally responsive classroom plan.

**● Mid-December:** Staff working directly with students will provide evaluation data on culturally responsive classroom action plans and complete a reflection.

**● January:** Use data from classroom action plans to highlight successes and to evaluate overall progress of the previous 5 months work around demographics, ACES, and culturally responsive classrooms

The work around culturally responsive classrooms does not end with this plan. This is one loop of what would be an ongoing cycle committed to understanding our students, ACES in our students, and culture.

**Professional Learning Standards**

Throughout the work of this plan, staff will be working within PLCs, likely by grade level at Hanawalt to engage the content, challenge each other’s thinking, and help implement, evaluate, and reflect.

The leadership plays an integral part in providing additional supports and resources especially when a staff member is working toward implementation and evaluation. Leadership will provide the accountability behind this work so that the information from demographics, ACES, and the indicators of culture responsiveness are more than just words. Leadership will also be able to highlight successes and help classrooms connect.

Data is critical because each classroom will have a list of students that goes beyond name, date of birth, and address. Staff will be adding information about students specific to what is learned about culture, past experiences, ACES, and notes as relationships are being built and community is established. Data from the implementation of culturally responsive practices will help identify successes and where additional work is needed.

Within this plan, using community members and parents is key. There is no one better to help us learn about our students then from their parents and the people in the community who also serve the students. It truly does take a village and this plan taps into the knowledge and expertise from the community.

**Section 6: Overview of the function of the curriculum leader in plan implementation**

*Function 1: Leaders of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment*

This plan focuses on keeping students at the center of this culture work. I do not want the work to get lost in what adults are doing and learning and then not connect back to the students who we serve. By learning about our students, relationships will improve, communities will strengthen, and academic success will rise. The action plan does not directly identify focusing on those “early indicators” that students are behind such as test scores but certainly those data points would be monitored to help assess the effect of this plan.

*Function 2: Leaders of Data Analysis*

The “data” about our students is critical to this plan. Even though much of this data is far more qualitative, it is the data that defines our students. We are collecting data about ethnicity, religion, ad identifying ACES. We are working with families and community members to help paint the picture of our diverse community. Staff are connecting past experiences and identifying how ACES impacts individuals and the community as a whole.

As staff develop an implementation plan for the culturally responsive practice, there will have to be some data to help monitor the effectiveness of this practice. The leadership team will need to help connect the dots about all of the practices being implemented. I thought about having a singular practice approach but in a building with staff at various points as it relates to being a culturally responsive educator, I felt it was important to meet people where they are and to help them advance their own learnings.

*Function 3: Leaders of Processes*

In thinking about processes, I thought it was important to create a plan where new information was provided but then staff had the opportunity to ask questions and seek more information. This request to extend learning is then given priority in the middle of the month. To often, professional development is sit and get without any follow up or ability to personalize the learning. This opportunity to ask and learn more will lead to higher engagement.

The implementation plan, evaluation, and reflection will be one standard model for all staff as they develop a plan around culturally responsive practices.

*Function 4: Leaders of Learning and Professional Development*

The work staff would do in studying a culturally responsive practice, developing a plan, implementing the plan, evaluating the plan, and reflecting is critical to quality professional development. Each step is important and requires equal attention and support from the leaders in the building. Leaders also need to monitor each of these pieces. Leaders can help identify the points of celebration and what to share from the collective work.

By working in grade level professional learning communities, PLCs, this also provides a conduit for support. This support would be generated by the staff but also from the monitoring and data collected by building leaders. The PLC provides a support structure and a safe space to explore. This safe space becomes an important factor as you work with the staff on ethical practices.

*Function 5: Leaders of Relationship Building*

This entire plan is going to require an establishment of relationships with our colleagues. Working on cultures, ethnicities, religion, discussing race, and applying what is happening in our own classroom is difficult work. It is not difficult because it is necessarily “hard” but it can be very personal and can be uncomfortable to look at one’s self in the job of teaching. There is also a component in this plan to connect our school to outside resources and to use our families to help us learn together.

The work is still centered around education but we are putting the human element of the student at the center. The academics will come when we know each other, understand each other, and work together to help each other.

*Function 6: Leaders of Performance*

The focus on performance may truly come after this plan. I see this plan requiring a great deal of evaluation and reflection to help the staff and entire school community to reflect on the benefits of this culturally responsive work. It can be difficult to monitor the impacts when your focus is on human qualities and improving the dynamics of people being people and helping each other.

There would be an accountability piece for all staff again in the actual implementation plan and evaluation of the chosen culturally responsive practice.

*Function 7: Leaders of Operations*

This plan really is not one centered around spending funds but rather spending time and making the commitment to learn more about our students then what is on Infinite Campus. The plan is designed to keep learning in a loop. Demographics are studied and then we loop back to follow up questions and curiosities. We learn about ethnicities and then we loop back to follow up questions and curiosities.

There is also a component of providing support by having grade level teams work together. This allows the work to be targeted to a grade level but also provides a point where school support staff, administration, and district supports can step into help and reinforce this work.

*Function 8: Leaders of Change*

To quote the Iowa ASCD “The primary responsibility of curriculum leaders is to develop the collective capacity of the organization to assure that all students are successful.” This plan puts students at the center of our work. We are looking at demographics, ACES, ethnicities, and culturally responsive practices through the lens of our students.

Our school has identified that we have minority groups that are behind academically, have more attendance concerns, and are early indicated as behind their peers. If a school collectively rallies around culturally responsive practices and understanding who our students are then success will be achieved.

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