Northwest University

Deconstructing to Rebuild

Introducing Simulation-Based Teacher Education Programs to Improve Intercultural

Competency in Long Island School Districts

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Thesis Project

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Introduction

In an increasingly multicultural world, it is more important than ever for individuals to have confidence engaging with other cultures in an appropriate, respectful and authentic way. The ability to acquire these skills requires opportunities to utilize and develop them, which can be difficult in predominantly homogenous areas. Long Island New York is a prime example of these challenges, and as one of the top ten most segregated metropolitan areas in the United States the inability to exercise these skills is strikingly apparent and seeps into all aspect of politics, social interactions and education in the region. Recently, a few school districts have made a significant push to incorporate cross-cultural communication and cultural diversity into their districts. However, according to educators, most are solely student-focused and take shape through quarterly assemblies, and infrequent guest speakers (Sergison; Reisert). In the education field on Long Island many desire to increase the frequency of this culturally inclusive engagement and integrate its ethos and praxis on a daily basis. Unfortunately, there is little support for educators in this endeavor and districts do not provide sufficient resources to prepare educators in accomplishing this. In order for teachers to successfully and confidently establish a culturally inclusive, sensitive and engaged classroom environment, districts must provide appropriate and consistent training. If we desire our teachers to establish such an environment, there must be district-wide training that sets a standard and provides support for educators developing intercultural communication proficiency skills to implement in their classroom. This thesis project will include a project proposal to introduce a quarterly workshop program to districts to that will provide strategies to deconstruct bias and instill confidence in their teachers to appropriately and effectively stimulate cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and cultural identity in their students.

This thesis project will propose a simulation-based teacher education program that will work to prepare educators to establish a safe and inclusive learning environment for all their students. Using a four-step model to Identify, Reflect, Adapt and Implement, the program will focus on educators' personal experiences that contribute to bias or discomfort in order to work through them individually and collectively with support from experienced professionals in the community and the district. The program will also provide opportunities for educators to implement different teaching strategies that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity as well as focus on how to navigate students through controversial discussions.

Personal Background

This thesis project has been an extremely personal endeavor. For the last 26 years, Long Island has been home. This fact has brought on mixed feelings since I was old enough to identify the contributing factors resulting in my homogenous hometown. As well as the systematically unequal and racist structures that dictate many aspects of contemporary education policy, resources and districting. As a college freshman, I began my undergraduate degree at Stony Brook University in New York. With a class size of over four thousand I was overwhelmed at all of the different stories, cultures and languages around me. Unfortunately, upon meeting new friends I found myself feeling embarrassed of my sheltered life: the lack of diversity, the general lack of cultural knowledge, and (what I considered) meaningful experience. As I continued to travel through Europe and Asia in my young twenties, I grew painfully aware of this dearth; I met all of these capable, diverse individuals whose perspectives I regarded as so much more exciting and valuable than my own. Fast forward to Oxford 2019, I am at the start of my graduate academic career and the first project is a presentation on "our culture". Preparing for that presentation, I felt nervous and embarrassed, knowing I was about to be exposed as the

typical middle-class white American girl. So, I got up there and talked about Long Island, with our accents, our beaches, and our bagels, and then took my seat a bit red in the face. As the presentations wrapped up, Dr. Inslee commented he was glad to see such interesting projects in a room of such diverse people and that everyone and every place has a culture. Truthfully, I still wasn't convinced.

During summer fieldwork, I was forced to confront some of the discomfort I feel when speaking about cultural diversity. Little did I know, this would turn out to be the motivation behind this thesis project. I was blown away by the educators on Long Island, their self-awareness of their limitations, their desire to provide for their students and their willingness to develop professionally and personally in areas of cultural sensitivity. However, as impressed as I was by the educators' desire to implement cultural awareness and proficiency into their curriculum, I was equally as dismayed by their fear of actually doing so. Many educators expressed hesitancy towards introducing "controversial" topics in classrooms, for fear of retribution from their districts, student's parents, or community. Throughout the interviews I was able to learn some of systemic barriers educators face in their mission to celebrate cultural diversity, as well as some of their personal challenges, specifically feeling inadequate or ill-equipped to embark on this endeavor seemingly alone.

After fieldwork was completed, I decided a research project was best suited to represent this research and propose practical solutions. Specifically, I realized I wanted to initiate a district-wide teacher-education program for educators who, like me, didn't grow up in diverse communities and are unsure how to start conversations in appropriate ways or celebrate cultural identity. This program will consist of activities, simulations and reflection exercises for teachers that will work to identify and deconstruct implicit bias and prepare them to teach in a culturally

responsive way. The program will be adaptable to every school depending on many factors such as budget, time restraints, and specific areas of interest. I believe this program will be successful as the research has shown that the desire to learn is there. Educators would like to know more, but lack the resources, experience, or know-how.

History of Segregation on Long Island

Despite its geographic isolation, Long Island's population is relatively diverse, with one-third of its residents consisting of minorities (Metzler). This may come as no surprise seeing as it borders one of the most diverse cities in the world; however, the somewhat unexpected phenomenon is that, opposite its western neighbor, Long Island is one of the most segregated regions in the United States, ranking tenth place on a national scale ("Heading"). As Long Island continues to become more diverse, it remains stagnated in a state of separation dictated by race and culture.

Residential Segregation: Long Island is composed of tight, homogenous communities that are bound by race and culture with little integration into neighborhoods that vary. Sociologist John Logan analyzed segregation in metropolitan regions and found that "race is a much more important factor in segregation than income" (Logan 3). In other words, residents are more likely to live in a neighborhood based on its residents' race or culture despite its different economic status. In fact, compared to National American Community Survey data in which Logan uses indices to rank the level of isolation between race and culture groups, Long Island ranks well above the national average and the study indicated that "black households at all income levels on Long Island live in areas with few whites, while whites of all income levels live in very white neighborhoods" ("Heading"). The misguided assumption is that minorities choose

specific neighborhoods because of income, when, in fact, despite financial status, they are separated by a different underlying classification: race.

The fallacious concept that most minorities earn below-average income and therefore are confined to specific lower-income neighborhoods may cause the public to regard them as weak, in need, or of having failed. In Beck's *Unclean,* he analyzes how feelings of this nature engender a visceral disgust and, thus, rejection. He states, "Disgust pushes away all reminders of our biological need, contingency, vulnerability and dependency" (Beck 174). To assume that minorities are lower on the income scale may contribute to regarding them as inferior or vulnerable. This mindset adds to further injustice, racism, and ethnocentrism.

This prejudice is apparent on Long Island where housing discrimination is a genuine and current issue. A 3-year undercover investigation released by Newsday in November 2019 exposed unethical real-estate practices aimed at maintaining the racial division between neighborhoods. The newspaper hired diverse groups of people to pose as potential home buyers, and the results were indicatory of the forced segregation on the island. The study showed that people of color were 40 percent more likely to be mistreated, and Hispanic individuals were close behind at 39 percent (Ferré-sadurní). When meeting with potential buyers of similar age, income, and house specifications, real-estate agents would show or withhold particular listings solely based on race or ethnicity, an illegal practice for real estate agents who are required by law to provide equal guidance regardless of race.

School Segregation: Racial and economic segregation on Long Island continues to contribute to ethnic isolation in schools where, again, despite growing diversity, the level of discrimination remains constant. The separation creates a considerable disparity in resources available to enrolled students, and the outcomes are as expected. Districts with limited access to

resources are classified as "high need" and students are not provided with the same opportunities or tools as those in "low" or "average" need districts. Although only 8 percent of students on long island are enrolled in "high need" school districts, according to 2009-2010 NY State School Report Cards, "91 percent of those students are black or latino" (Logan 3). This realization is increasingly frustrating considering above mentioned housing discrimination, which could indicate that it's possible that despite financial resources, students are being placed in high need districts based on ethnicity, creating repetitious injustice with no end in sight.

Lack of resources in higher need districts contributes to lower graduation rates among students. According to graduation rates on Long Island, 65 percent of black students and 61 percent of Latino students are districted to the lowest-performing schools on Long Island compared to white students at 10 percent ("Heading"). This evident inequality in schools plays a role in our mental programming, which affects how we perceive situations and behaviors around us. According to Hofstede, in his book *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* school is one of the main places that mental programming starts (5). Allowing Long Island to continue promoting stark segregation in neighborhoods and schools will on create an environment in which children naturally segregate themselves based on ethnicity, and it will hinder their ability to traverse ethnocentrism and integrate.

Current Underrepresentation of Minorities in School Districts

One issue that contributes to the cycle of marginalization and inequality for students is the underrepresentation of minority teachers or staff in their school districts. On Long Island, there is a significant and noticeable disconnect between the demographics of the students and the demographics of the teachers, administration and staff. This claim has been confirmed by many of my interviewees who confirmed that their colleagues were almost all white. Dr. Joe Famularo,

Ed.D., the superintendent of Bellmore Schools on Long Island, offered some interesting insight into hiring diverse staff. He explained that he wished he could hire a more representative staff for his student body, but that "the applications just aren't there" (Famularo). He reported that he does not receive very many applications from minority teachers, an unfortunate truth that concerns him. He is currently looking into why, and wonders if his district is not appealing to minorities and if so, why? This reality reinforces the cycle of underrepresentation, and it is important to analyze and understand the underlying causes and the ways they can be addressed.

Having a staff that accurately represents your student body may seem trivial; if teachers are qualified and the students are learning, should having a diverse teaching staff be a priority? Research has shown that there are many benefits to having a same-race teacher, including higher test scores (particularly in math and reading), and an increased likelihood of students continuing on to higher education (Gershenshon et al. 5). According to a study conducted by the Nation Bureau of Economic Research, "black students randomly assigned to a black teacher in grades K-3 are 5 percentage points (7%) more likely to graduate from high school and 4 percentage points (13%) more likely to enroll in college than their peers in the same school who are not assigned a black teacher" (Gershenson et al. 1).

The researchers believe that teachers who share their students' race or ethnicity may be more effective in teaching content because of a heightened level of cultural competency. It is likely that same-race teachers can relate to challenges their students face and connect on a level that is beneficial to their success as a scholar. This is also in part due to the "role-model effect", which is the idea that many black students raised in segregated areas do not often encounter educated, professional black adults (Gershenson et al. 4). If this is true, same-race teachers may serve as a counterexample to that sentiment, encouraging increased curiosity and importance

surrounding academics, as well as broadening their aspirations and goals. School district faculty and administration strive to facilitate this mindset in their student body, and foster necessary changes to increase student retention rates, and encourage higher education. Establishing safe and inclusive learning environments for minority students is essential to promoting socioeconomic mobility with an increased potential for employment and higher earning abilities. This practice would help break cycles of inequality and marginalization.

While having a teacher workforce that equally represents its students is ideal, it is necessary to address that this is not always possible. Due to genuine lack of diversity in homogenous areas, or instances of transition as Dr. Famularo mentioned when speaking of his district, it may not be for lack of trying that school administration cannot create this environment for their students. However, this hurdle should not all together abolish the existence of cultural connection and competence in classrooms. Lifelong educator and avid advocate for culturally responsive teaching, Geneva Gay, asserts that there are many strategies to incorporate into the classroom setting that would increase cultural competency and empathy among students. Educators can create space for students to explore and share their identities by utilizing those unique features to celebrate cultural identity. This is a way to promote acceptance and acknowledge and respect differences in cases where same-race teachers may not be a current reality. On Long Island, many teachers report feeling disconnected between themselves and their students. This is where a teacher-education program would be utilized to train teachers on implementing these strategies to ensure they are prepared to build optimal and individualized learning environments for their classes.

Fieldwork Applications

In preparation of this thesis project, I conducted 60 hours of qualitative research and interviewed twelve educators in various positions across Long Island and New York City. The information I learned from these educators was invaluable and offered crucial insights into how the workshop will be most effective. It will address specific issues they experience and provide support in the areas they've chosen as well as others. On the topic of celebrating cultural identity, various teachers expressed personal and professional challenges that have hindered their ability or confidence to implement activities that would stimulate cultural awareness, or controversial conversations. Without training or sometimes even support from their district, this intention often falls to the wayside behind all of their other responsibilities.

Educator's Fears, Hesitations and Limitations

Most educators consistently push themselves to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for their students. This type of environment is not as easily established as one may anticipate, and to genuinely realize this goal requires constant personal and professional growth and support. Sara Staley and Bethy Leonardi from Colorado University are Queer educators dedicated to educating and preparing practitioners of gender and sexual diversity (GSD). Staley and Leonardi outline what is required of educators to fully adopt inclusive praxis which extends far beyond the walls of the classroom: "embodying GSD-inclusive praxis involves disrupting normativity across several domains, including the personal, pedagogical, curricular, social and institutional domains of schooling" (30). These are the measures required to thoroughly and holistically support our students and provide environments conducive to inclusive and empathetic learning. If educators are not taught how to provide this level of dedication to disrupting normativity, we cannot expect these outcomes. The realization of this goal requires

district-wide collaboration, administrative support, consistent training and support for those involved.

Personal Challenges

Throughout my fieldwork I learned of some of the personal challenges faced by educators in their endeavors to create culturally inclusive classroom environments. Krystin Reisert is a Spanish teacher at Longwood Middle school on Long Island. She and I grew up in the same hometown. Sayville is a small school district on the south Shore of Suffolk, Long Island and its student body is 92% white. In an interview, Reisert said that she is very aware of the diversity in her classroom now, as it wasn't something, she had previously experienced before; she stated, "I just want to be sensitive about anything I say or talk about...it's been something I've thought about since I started working there because I've never been in that situation before" (Reisert). Reisert is one among many teachers who want to know how to appropriately engage all her students, but perhaps lacks the personal experience and support to be prepared to do so.

Another educator I spoke with echoes Reisert's sentiments. Erin Murphy is an English teacher at Copiague Middle School on Long Island. Murphy also grew up in Sayville and was not exposed to much diversity throughout her childhood or early adulthood. In the district that Murphy works in now, white students are the minority. Copiague is primarily Hispanic or Latino with 60 percent of its student representing that ethnicity, and 22 percent black or African American. Murphy has made attempts to discuss current social events with her students, but found her activities were not as successful as she'd hoped. In a discussion about the disconnect between primarily white staff and a mixed-race student body, Murphy said, "I wish I could do more. I wish I could connect with the students more...but I just like don't know how or I don't

want to overstep or make them uncomfortable" (Murphy). She explains that a lot of this fear and hesitation comes from where we grew up and that she is frequently afraid to make a mistake and come off as culturally insensitive. Like Reisert, Murphy has also not received cultural sensitivity training from her district.

Professional Challenges and Fears

In addition to personal challenges, there are professional challenges, fears and hesitations that educators face in their journey towards culturally inclusive teaching. First, the majority of the teachers I was able to interview, 9 out of twelve, reported little to no training on cultural sensitivity, or inclusive practices implemented throughout their districts. A few others noted an effort but felt that it was not enough or was just for show. Many districts do not prioritize celebrating diversity or cultural inclusion, and that lack of support puts tremendous stress on teachers who then must navigate this journey on their own.

Many of the teachers I was able to speak with expressed a desire to implement changes in their district but received some type of pushback to their suggestions. Julia Sergison is in her third year as a Spanish teacher in Sayville High School. An energetic and determined force, she has tons of ideas to make this very homogenous community a little more open minded. Unfortunately, she has received a lackluster response to her proposals. Sergison expressed her frustration: "I'm young, I'm enthusiastic and I have all these ideas and they're like..'oh, we don't do it that way." (Sergison). This type of reaction from colleagues and superiors can be incredibly defeating for an educator and alienate them from what should be a support system.

Sergison is not alone feeling some disappointment towards her place of work and their lack of support. Another educator, who requested to remain anonymous, is the sole minority teacher working at an elementary school on Eastern Long Island and notes that it's a reality she

feels often. She is an elementary school Spanish teacher, and one of her largest frustrations is the lack of effort the school puts forth in communicating with some of the parents who are non-native English speakers. She specifically noted that when schools first started changing procedures during the Covid-19 pandemic, they sent home notices to the parents regarding information on the hybrid programs. The letters included information on when/ if the children should come to school, and how their work would be administered from the online platform. None of the letters were translated to Spanish for the native Spanish speaking parents, and this teacher received multiple phone calls from parents who did not know what the procedure was moving forward with the ongoing pandemic. This teacher expressed her frustration at this oversight on the school administration's part especially since the responsibility consequently fell on her shoulders to keep many parents in the loop with no support.

One final and important note to mention is that in addition to discouragement and frustration some teachers even feel fear in reaction to bringing up new ideas, or constructive criticism. Three of the twelve educators I interviewed, all of whom represent different roles in the education system, asked to remain anonymous because they were afraid that their thoughts about their place or work would have some type of professional retribution. An additional two specified certain conversations in their interviews that they did not feel comfortable having recorded or used for the thesis project. It is essential to establish an environment where teachers, staff, administration, and students can collaborate to meet the needs and be considerate of everyone involved. In this way educators can model for students how to come together to offer their services to provide for the community more holistically.

Community Pushback

Another challenge faced by educators in their efforts to incorporate culturally inspiring curriculum is pushback from the community. Historically, social justice issues have been polarizing topics and school districts may prefer to keep any potentially sensitive or controversial issues out of school for fear of offending students or parents. This misguided perspective is not only harmful towards students and staff who may be personally experiencing these issues, but also is taking away an opportunity for students to learn how to respectfully engage in delicate conversation topics.

During the interview with Sergison, she recounted a story of intense community pushback in response to an assembly she organized to celebrate cultural diversity in her school. Sergison became part of a team in the Sayville School district to promote inclusive teaching and celebrating diversity. Her team organized a diversity day, in which they had different speakers come to the school and speak about their experiences. Their guest speakers included the daughter of a holocaust victim and Muslim women in the community who came to speak about the practices of Islam, and perceptions about those practices. The assembly was designed to expose students to different perspectives, cultures and ideas to increase curiosity, empathy and promote communication about diversity. However, on the day of the assembly, Sergion reported that "200 to 250 were signed out by their parents because they thought it was just assemblies that they didn't need to go to". These actions from parents send their children a message that learning about other cultures is not important and doesn't need to be a priority.

Collaboration Efforts

There are many ways for school districts to get the community involved to ensure all students are being represented equally. One such way is creating a diverse school board. In

November of 2020, Vladimir Kogan, an associate professor of political science at Ohio State University conducted a research study to determine who elects school board members in California, Illinois, Ohio and Oklahoma. The results indicated that those who elect the school board members are likely to be Caucasian and affluent, even in the student body is primarily minority (Samuels). The disconnect of representation is damaging to the district in a few ways. The study indicated that when the board does not accurately represent its students, there is a larger gap in academic performance between white and minority students. This discrepancy demonstrates that the entire student body is not being considered and the needs of every child not met. It is exceedingly difficult for an entirely Caucasian board to understand the challenges of minority students and therefore, makes it nearly impossible to properly advocate for them.

A solution to this problem would be increased district outreach in the community to encourage diversity on the school board. Although districts cannot choose leaders, they can inform parents on how to get involved and provide information sessions to establish a support system to simplify the process. Chairman of the National Hispanic Council of School Board Members, Armando Rodriguez states that some people need a push to get involved and that most will not run for the board "until something triggers them" (Samuels). He later reinforces that their involvement is crucial and necessary, he states "The excuse that there's not enough people to represent [all] areas is a sad excuse (Samuels). Diversification of the board has proven to be effective not just for minority students, but has also resulted in lower rates of school suspension for all students. There is tremendous value in community collaboration in school decisions that will help to ensure the needs of all students are being represented equally.

Another opportunity for community engagement is through collaboration between districts. District leaders should use one another as a resource to further expand their horizons.

Though no district is the same, there is much to be gained by learning vicariously through successes and failures. Additionally, opening a space for professionals in the field to bring their pools of knowledge expands the scope of creativity for administration and board members. Dr. Famularo reported that his school is identified as a "school to watch" and superintendents from other schools all around the Island will come to observe the implementation of their leaderships program and its core values (Famularo). This type of collaboration can be helpful for all districts to gain perspective and be able to imagine how different practices would play out in their school with their respective students.

Contact Theory

One effective method utilized in reconciliation practices to increase cultural competence is contact theory. Contact theory is a practice that encourages cross-cultural engagement and contends that "contact between members of different groups...can work to reduce prejudice and intergroup conflict" (Everett). A study published in the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning corroborates this method's effectiveness and reports that a positive correlation between classrooms that introduces elements of contact theory and reduces levels of colorblindness and acknowledgement of racial social justice issues (Conner and Erickson 54). Contact theory could be more effective still if introduced to primary and middle school aged children who are more likely to accept new ideas because their brains have more neuroplasticity than that of a fully formed adult ("Backwards Brain Bicycle).

Unfortunately, contact theory is not always possible if the diversity simply does not exist in a certain context. However, we may achieve similar results by integrating core tenants of contact theory, such as building empathy and exposure to new perspectives, into other simulation-based training methods.

Simulation-Based Training

This project will utilize strategies from Simulation-Based Training. Through a four-step method: *Identify, Reflect, Adapt and Implement* the program aims to decrease implicit bias in educators and prepare them to incorporate culturally responsive teaching praxis.

As our national demographics continue to change, the health care industry has used simulation-based training to ensure health professionals can effectively navigate different cultural backgrounds. In 1973, at an APA Conference on Levels and Pattens of Professional Training in Psychology, it was decided that it is unethical for these healthcare professionals not to develop skills in cultural competency to ensure the holistic treatment of a patient (Benjamin et al. 2). I contend the same must be true for education. Education is an essential steppingstone for students' future success. In *The Rules of the Social Game*, Hofstede talks about "Culture as Mental Programming" (Hofstede et al. 5) and lists schools as one of the main places in which the programming starts. This programming, in large part, determines how we react to or perceive things that are outside of our normal social environment. A child's school experience and educational opportunity affect emotional wellbeing, likelihood of socioeconomic mobility, and sets a trajectory for higher earning potential. In order for students to receive the most inclusive, safe and effective beneficial experience and increase the likelihood of student retention for future education, educators must also develop skills in cultural competency.

In healthcare, cultural competency training is considered a professional responsibility, as opposed to a personal preference (Benjamin et al. 3). This shift ensures that there is consistency in the approach and methods used, which makes it easier to provide guidance and feedback; this should be duplicated in districts through workshops for educators. Simulation-based training has been instrumental in the foundation of this project and the technique is defined by its practice-

centered approach. Simulation-based training utilizes livestreamed video recordings and simulation centers to allow participants to learn new strategies and then provide opportunities to apply them.

Though a relatively new area of study, there have been many benefits attributed to the use of simulation-based training in healthcare and has been shown to that can be transferred over to education. The method is generally designed by two major sections: didactic and practicum in which participants in the workshop are given the primary objectives, provided useful tips and strategies to achieve them, and then given the opportunity to put them into practice. This style has been proven to increase flexibility as participants adapt to lifelike simulations and unpredictable situations. Training in this way allows for an authentic approach with guided feedback to implement moving forward. It has also been shown to reduce remarginalization as "Trainees can make mistakes, learn to recognize them, and respond accordingly, all within the context of a simulated educational session" (qtd by Benjamin et al. 4).

Another added benefit that would provide specifically relevant help in schools on Long Island is that the training technique could "facilitate the dissemination of multicultural training and experiences to programs regardless of their geographic region and patient population" (Benjamin et al. 3). This aspect is invaluable because it means that educators would be able to remain current on culturally responsive curricula and practices even though there may not necessarily be day-to-day exposure in their professional and personal life.

Simulation-based training is also conducive to collaboration and may promote opportunities for interprofessional sharing. Though the practice has been primarily used in the healthcare industry, it is also an "especially appropriate area for interprofessional training, because the skills and attitudes necessary are shared across professions" ("Interprofessional").

This stance reinforces the potential to integrate these methods into education, as the outcomes are similar and encourage all participants to operate in a more culturally inclusive manner to ensure an inclusive environment for all involved.

Four-Step Method: Identify, Reflect, Adapt, Implement

Teaching Together is a teacher education workshop that will utilize strategies from Simulation-based training to identify implicit bias in educators and staff, work to deconstruct it, and implement a more culturally responsive curriculum. Ideally, the professional development workshop will meet once a month for a two-hour training session, though this will be dependent upon the partnering organizations' budget and other logistical factors. It will be strongly encouraged that all members of the administration, faculty and staff attend the program to provide consistency and offer opportunities to learn from one another's individual experiences.

The workshop will be divided into two major sections, the didactic portion and the simulation portion. In the didactic part, the main goals of the class will be discussed, and relevant vocabulary for the day's objective will be introduced. Participants will be given an opportunity to ask questions regarding the primary objectives or share relevant personal and professional experiences concerning the topic. This section will work with the group as a whole and is intended to be primarily educational in which new information will be introduced. As new theories are introduced organizers will engage participants to demonstrate its relativity and importance.

The second part will be the simulation. This section will be dedicated to practicing the skills introduced in the earlier section to execute the day's aims. In preparation for this practical section, the class will be broken up into smaller groups of about three to four individuals to create a more intimate environment as the role playing in the simulation phase may leave some

feeling vulnerable. Each group will also have a facilitator to guide the group discussion provide support and answer questions. Facilitators will consist of cultural experts, social workers, psychologists or educators who have extensively studied cultural competence and have experience with its implementation. The compilation of this facilitator group will require networking in the community to work together with school social workers, graduate students in relevant fields of study, local community college and university professors, etc.

In this portion, all students will take turns representing different roles in a simulation (ex. teacher: student: student or teacher: parent: student). All roles save one will have a prompt to read from. The educator in the simulation will not have a prompt but instead will respond to the dialogue in a way that allows them to explore different options on how to navigate the situation. The dialogue should present opportunities for the educator to explore the themes presented in the didactic portion. The roles will rotate so each participant will have the chance to represent each role in the simulation and each will take a turn as the educator who is responding based on their capabilities. The prompts will simulate challenging situations in which teachers are called upon to resolve conflict between two conflicting students, explain their choice of curriculum to a skeptical parent; or introducing to colleagues and administration a new school policy designed to celebrate diversity and cultural inclusion.

The simulation phase of the workshop will be structured using a four-step model that will reinforce the underlying philosophy. It is designed to promote individuals to intimately understand their bias in order to work towards deconstructing it and sustaining inclusive practices. Utilizing the skills presented in the workshop, participants will work together with their colleagues and facilitators to determine successful ways to increase cultural competency on an individual and group level.

Identify

The first step in the model will be Identify. This step will take place during the simulation portion of the workshop and will give the participants the ability to recognize their feelings, thoughts, bias and/or stereotypes regarding the topic of the day's training. Conflict and Reconciliation expert John Paul Lederach states "the potential for constructive change lies in our ability to recognize, understand and redress what happened" (35)**.** Identifying bias is a crucial first step towards changing your associated thoughts and consequential behaviors, whether they are conscious or not. It also teaches that we all have some implicit bias, that may not align with our explicit behaviors; in fact, most neuroscientists agree that "the vast majority of our cognitive processing occurs outside of our conscious awareness" (Staats 30). This information is intended to be unifying, and to normalize discussion about implicit bias, it is not wrong to hold bias, it is inevitable, but it is also an individual's responsibility to understand it and mitigate its damaging effects.

The Identify phase will be the first part of the practical section of the workshop. This section is dedicated to illuminating implicit bias through the simulation activity. At the conclusion of the didactic portion, participants will form smaller groups to prepare for the practical section. All breakout groups will have a facilitator who will guide the learners through the simulation and offer guidance through the experience. Once the groups are formed, the facilitator will prompt the participants with a series of questions in response to what was discussed during the didactic section, and all will be encouraged to give their thoughts on the subject or share experiences.

The facilitator may choose to share a particular instance in which they held a preconceived notion that was proven wrong or had caused them to act in a way that was not

culturally appropriate. The intention of this anecdote it to open a space of honesty and vulnerability as well as to show this is a judgement free-zone and all are here to work together with the same intentions and goals. It is imperative to the success of the workshop that the participants feel they can be vulnerable and honest. The intention is to normalize implicit thoughts that may not represent explicit egalitarian goals and provide practices to deconstruct those preconceived notions, so our subconscious thoughts match our intentional actions. In this way, participants may recognize in themselves and in others that bias is everywhere, and a normal human experience. Utilizing "implicit-bias-informed curricula is a proactive shift away from guilt and toward responsibility" (Sukhera and Watling 2).

Once all group members have had a chance to share their opinions, experiences and/or thoughts the first round of the simulation will commence. As mentioned earlier, each member will rotate throughout the simulation until everyone has had a chance to represent each role. Once this has been completed, the group will move on to the next phase of the cycle.

Reflect

The Reflect phase will take place immediately after the Identify phase in the simulation. At the completion of the first round of the simulation, the facilitator will instruct the participants to find a quite space to reflect on their experience during the practice. A reflection handout will be provided to generate some initial thoughts (see Appendix C), but any type of reflection will be satisfactory and encouraged as it is intended to explore thoughts in connection with the exercise.

Reflection has long served as an important part of academic, educational or experiential retention and has been defined as the activity that "mak[es] meaning of experience" (Bringle and Hatcher, 179). This activity will allow the partakers to explore their perspectives throughout the exercise, what surprised them, how they felt, and what they learned. This time will be individual

and allows for a deeper and more personal opportunity for growth as they reconsider their initial positions, how they responded to the prompts and whether they believe their actions and words reflected their explicit intentions and the lesson of the day.

For the purpose of future reflection and for indication of growth, the facilitator will request that participants write down their main points of reflection and key takeaways. This section is included to support the learning process by internalizing the information presented in the educational portion of the workshop and memorializing its philosophy into practice.

At the conclusion of the time allotted for personal reflection, the breakout group will reconvene to discuss their thoughts. The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning published a study that was conducted to determine the effectiveness of reflection in shaping professional identities. The research indicated that participants found discussion with an advisor and informal dialogue with peers and colleagues to be the most helpful forms of reflection (Mitchell, et al. 54). Using this as a guide, participants will reconvene to discuss their takeaways from their simulation experience. The discussion will take place in an open dialogue where participants can speak freely and bounce their ideas and experiences off one another. The tone of the discussion should be informal and light so as to not to dwell too heavily on perceived mistakes. This open dialogue also presents an opportunity for students to disagree with one another and learn to navigate through that conflict in an appropriate and respectful way with guidance from the facilitator as necessary.

Adapt

Following the Reflect phase will be the Adapt section. This part will consist of more structured feedback for each individual. As the group was just able to participate in open discussion this will serve as an opportunity to formulate and verbalize their takeaways from the

simulation, personal reflection and group discussion. Each individual in the group will take a turn to express how they believe they performed during the simulation, what they thought they executed well, and where they faced challenges. Following their assessment, the facilitator will offer instruction moving forward on areas of success and areas for improvement for the educator.

Members will be encouraged to give feedback to one another. Feedback will be introduced with a positive comment first, followed by one of constructive criticism. Though receiving feedback from a facilitator or peer in front of the group may be embarrassing at first, one of the main outcomes is to destigmatize conversation about bias and racism. Getting used to having these types of conversations will prepare educators to be more comfortable in unexpected situations that may arise regarding controversial topics. It is also more likely colleagues will build a stronger support system together if they feel some vulnerability. Once the facilitator has given suggestions, all group members may brainstorm ways that they themselves, or their colleagues may execute these strategies.

Implement

The final phase of the method will be Implement. In this portion of the simulation practice, participants will run through the simulation for a second time. This phase is intended to give the educators the opportunity to implement the feedback they received throughout the first three phases. This second run-through will be in the same format as the first, with every participant rotating through the specified roles with one individual acting as the educator who is responding to some type of cultural challenge or conflict.

This phase will allow participants to explore what they have learned so far and gives them the chance to improve upon the challenges they faced in the first round of the simulation.

The implement phase will build confidence among educators so they will feel prepared to engage in this situation and moderate them in real-time in their classrooms or other settings.

At the conclusion of the four stages the group will reconvene as a whole for a closing activity and feedback on the workshop experience.

Program Implementation Procedures and Guidelines for District

It is recommended that the workshop be held as often as the budget allows; ideally quarterly and will be at least a two-hour training session. Studies have shown that efforts to increase implicit bias recognition and develop culturally relevant curriculum often fail due to "brief intervention" and "poor integration" (Sukera, Javeed & Watling, Chris 2). Holding the workshop on a consistent basis will allow participants to continue and sustain their development and will also build a stronger community culture and support system as the district faculty, administration and staff learn together.

Establishing a Judge-Free Zone

This project is one that is personal and encourages vulnerability and opening up a safe environment for honest sharing could accelerate learning at a deeper level. Reconciliation expert John Paul Lederach states, "Prayerful vulnerability means that we dare to look within ourselves, at the sources of our fears and anxieties (99). The topic of diversity and inclusion is so important that it is inherently sensitive as well, as there is so much at stake here and we are dealing with centuries of injustice. Therefore, dismissive or condescending attitudes must be replaced with encouragement and honestly for those who are beginning their journey. Authors of Creative Confidence Kelley and Kelley state "Exchanging ideas within a group of people who trust one another- without fear of judgment or failure- can feel electric" (Kelley and Kelley 185). Support

systems are crucial here, and open honest conversations let each other know that we are not

alone, and that not knowing how you feel or the correct way to handle a situation is okay.

It is important to have the support of a sustainable community that will encourage one

another on this journey. Especially considering that a shift in value may cause distance or strife

in one's personal relationships with friends and family. As the values of the teachers change;

they may develop a stronger bond. Communities function best when they are helping its

members serve a purpose based on their values (Vogl 5).

Assessment and Feedback

Feedback from the participants and facilitators will be highly encouraged throughout the

workshop as the workshop will be designed through a "searcher" mindset (Easterly 6). This

bottom-up approach will ensure all stakeholders have agency in this program and that all needs

are met. The final ten minutes of the two-hour session will be dedicated to hearing feedback

from the participants. They will be asked to give input on a range of topics such as the timing of

each section, relevancy of the concepts, usefulness of the vocabulary and strategies for the

future. This will ensure the educators feel that they have agency in their experience and, that the

following workshop will be able to improve in certain areas and introduce material that is

relevant, engaging and useful.

Project Evaluation & Surveys

The effectiveness of the workshop will primarily be measured by initial and final surveys

(see appendix C). These surveys will measure the helpfulness of the workshop, the level of

confidence in the educators at entry and exit as well at the relevancy of the material presented.

The survey will also address perceived bias in each student. Prior to starting the workshop, each

participant will be asked to take the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT is an online test

that requires the candidate to sort words and images quickly to determine the strength of associations between concepts and evaluations (Project Implicit). The test will serve as more of a conversation starter as opposed to a genuine measure of bias. Although, the reliability of the results of the IAT have been controversial it can still be used as a useful tool to have participants assess and reflect on their potential implicit associations.

A Future of Social Justice

It is important to consider what implications implementing culturally responsive teaching could have for the future. Learning and teaching to love and understand one another extends much further than the classroom walls. Empathy is instrumental in many other areas of social justice including environmentalism. Transcending ethnocentric beliefs opens the potential for a deeper understanding of one's relativity to the world and the inevitable impact one has on their neighbors. Social justice is recognizing that our consumption habits and other actions in the United States result in exploitation and deforestation in other part of the world. Genuine "neighbor-love" (Moe-Lobeda 246) is recognizing these inevitable impacts and making intentional changes in our behaviors to decrease those harmful effects. Increasing cultural awareness in teachers and students also increases the likelihood of a shift towards neighbor-love.

Conclusion

It is tough to say that navigating our world with cultural competency is more important now than ever, this I would say is untrue. It has always been just as important, perhaps just not always perceived as such. However, we are fortunate to find ourselves in a transition of sorts as cultural awareness gains traction and is more often than not front-page news. This movement can go one of two ways, as is painfully apparent in our current political and social climate. Society can either bunker down, surround themselves with sameness and allow the fear of the unknown

to drive them to fall victim to cognitive dissonance. On the other hand, we may embrace this transition, celebrate differences and allow ourselves to explore one another's traditions

The latter, though seemingly more appealing, will not come easily. It will require action and genuine work to deconstruct the mindsets that have seeped so deep into the foundations of our countries. The systemic injustices perpetuate through continued racism, bias and prejudice and it will require reflection, practice and action to reconcile with marginalized communities and find a new way forward. Workshops such as teaching together offer a starting point for those who would like to make a change, but don't know how. It is through raising awareness, and consistent practice and support that we being to change mindsets.

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TEACHING TOGETHER

A proposal for a simulation-Based teacher education program

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Teaching Together is a teacher education workshop will partner with school districts and leaders in any educational setting and utilize simulation-based training to propel educators towards more cultural inclusive praxis.

Designed to improve culturally responsive teaching and promote inclusion facilitators will work with participants to deconstruct implicit bias and improve their confidence in cross-cultural engagement.

Project Goals:

- **Deconstruct -** The program will work to deconstruct implicit bias. By educating participants on the neuroscience behind implicit bias, facilitators will normalize its existence. The workshop will establish on environment where educators can explore those biases in a judge-free zone and work through them with professional guidance and support from their colleagues.

- **Redefine-** The program will help to encourage participants to consider cultural competency as a professional responsibility rather than a personal preference. Facilitators will demonstrate the importance of cultural competence throughout the simulations and prepare participants to emulate the praxis in their teaching environments.

- **Collaborate-** The workshop will serve to highlight diversity as a strength. District, community and educational leaders will collaborate with facilitators to build relevant curriculum. The workshop will encourage ample feedback from participants as well as give them agency in the continued development of the workshop moving forward

MOTIVATION

"Too many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach ethnically diverse students"

- Geneva Gay

The motivation behind this project derived from personal, academic and professional experiences that highlighted a clear lack of preparation in educators to navigate cultural diversity in their classrooms. I grew up in a small town called Sayville, an affluent, primarily Caucasian, community on the south shore of Long Island New York.

The student body at Sayville High School is predominantly white and in 2017 minority students represented only 8% of the total class (2017). More important than the lack of diversity, something not entirely within the districts control, was the lack of attention paid to cultural diversity and inclusion. Sayville High School did not prepare me to be a global citizen, and since my graduation I have often felt fear, hesitation and awkwardness in cross-cultural interactions now outside of the confines of my homogenous little hometown.

"I wish I could do more. I wish I could connect with the students more...but I just like don't know how or I don't want to overstep or make them uncomfortable."

- Erin Murphy, Coppaigue Middle School

In my experience as an educator and youth development practitioner I've spent years studying and researching appropriate ways to celebrate cultural diversity and identity. This workshop will serve as a centralized and holistic approach to culturally responsive preparation. It serves to prepare educators to not only feel confident when confronted with "controversial" topics, but to utilize them as learning and growing experiences for themselves and their students. Diversity should be considered an asset and conflict utilized as an opportunity. This shift strengthens our classroom environment as perspectives are challenged and global citizens are born.

FOUR STEP MODEL
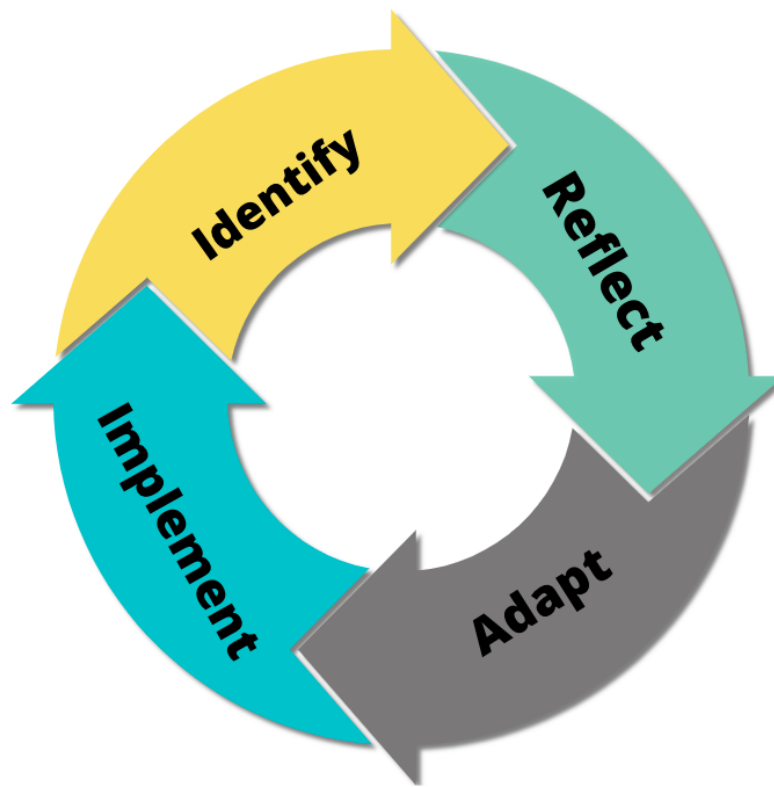
Teaching Together is a two-part teacher education workshop that will utilize strategies from simulation-based training to identify implicit bias in educators and staff, work to deconstruct it, and implement a more culturally responsive curriculum.

The workshop will be divided into two major sections, the didactic portion and the simulation portion. In the didactic part, the main goals of the class will be discussed, and relevant vocabulary for the day's objective will be introduced. The second part will be the simulation. This section will be dedicated to practicing the skills introduced in the earlier section to execute the day's aims

PROJECT DETAILS

Identify - As the first step in the model, the identify phase will occur during the simulation portion of the workshop. It is dedicated to illustrating internal bias. A main goal of the identify phase is to normalize the acknowledgment of implicit bias and de-stigmatize conversation around it. Reducing its negative connotation increases the likelihood for honest conversation and confession. In this way we may establish support systems built on vulnerability, honestly and empathy.

Reflect- Reflection will be a fundamental aspect of the model. Intended to "make meaning of experience" (Bringle, 1999) time will be set aside for participants to internalize what they have felt, experienced and learned. Analyzing beliefs and deconstructing bias as a result of life-time values and traditions is challenges and overwhelming. Time for reflection is essential and encouraged to remember one's place in the work and stay motivated to continue.

Adapt- The Adapt phase in the model is designed for collaboration. Directly following personal reflection, participants will regroup to discuss their thoughts on their individual performance, and that of their peers. This section will be dedicated to working together and creating solutions for the challenges faced during the previous sections.

Implement- After group discussion, participant groups will have a second round of the simulation training. This phase will allow participants to explore what they have learned so far and provide the chance to improve upon the challenges they faced in the first round of the simulation. The implement phase will build confidence among educators so they will feel prepared to engage in this situation and moderate them in real-time in their classrooms or other settings.

IMPLEMENTATION

Timeline: The 2-hour workshop is adaptable to fit the needs of different schools based on budget, resources and other factors. Ideally, the workshop will be held quarterly, or at least once per semester. It is strongly encouraged the event is district-wide, so as to set a centralized standard and create a larger support network.

Facilitators: Throughout the program, each group will be working with a facilitator. These professionals can consist of many different professionals and leaders depending on availability and resources. Facilitators may include school social works; local graduate students in a relevant field of study; local community college or university professors; and qualified local community leaders. Facilitators are intended to set an example for the educators, moderate group discussions and help participants work through the program material.

Prompts: The prompts used during the simulation portion of the workshop will be designed to cover the six main areas of culturally relevant teaching as defined by Aceves & Orosco:

- **Social Justice**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **Culture, Language & Racial Identity**
- **High Expectations**
- **Multicultural Awareness**
- **Instructional Engagement**

INTO THE CLASSROOM

"We can't teach what we don't know" -Gary R. Howard

Tips for Educators to Improve Cultural Competency:

- Embrace Conflict - Reconciliation expert Brenda Salter McNeil encourages peacemakers to embrace chaos. "Distress is needed to overcome the resistance we naturally have to forming new relational patterns" (55). Many educators are taught to avoid conflict in classrooms, particularly between students. However, conflict can be healthy. Educators can model debate and disagreement in a way that is understanding and respectful. In this way students do not become dismissive of perspectives different from their own.

- Be a Student - Don't be afraid to learn alongside students. This journey is one for everyone and being open and honest about our place in the journey is important. Educators can model appropriate ways to ask questions and how to behavior around cultures one is not familiar with. Additionally, establishing an "all in this together" learning environment will likely increase student interest and engagement.

- Celebrate Differences - Utilize cultural differences as an asset in your classroom. Provide students opportunities to share their cultures and explore their identities. Activities where students learn and share about their culture promote intercultural communication and decreases ethnocentrism (Aslantas 320). Providing culturally diverse reading material and visuals for students to explore in the classroom will prompt conversations and pique cultural interests.

Appendix B:

REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. What is something that surprised you during the simulation? How? Why?

2. Reflect on an area in which you believe you succeeded. Explain why you believe you reacted adequately.

3. Reflect on an area that was challenging for you. Why do you think this is?

4. Did the simulation play out as you expected? Why or why not?

Please answer the following on a scale of 1-5:

5 = Strongly agree; 4= Mostly agree; 3 = neutral; 2= Mostly disagree; 1= Strongly disagree

1. The material introduced in the workshop was useful and relevant.   1 2 3 4 5

2. I have a better understanding of implicit bias.   1 2 3 4 5

3. The simulation activity was helpful for me to better understand stereotypes.   1 2 3 4 5

4. I have an increased sense of empathy for other cultures.   1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel confident implementing the strategies learned in the

   workshop into my teaching environment.   1 2 3 4 5

6. The material chosen for the workshop was relevant to my professional

   environment.   1 2 3 4 5

7. My facilitator was helpful in guiding the simulation.   1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel I have a better understanding of cultural competency after completing

   the workshop.   1 2 3 4 5

9. My facilitator provided helpful feedback.   1 2 3 4 5

10. The simulation helped me feel prepared to handle cultural conflicts

    in my teaching environment.   1 2 3 4 5

11. I would recommend the workshop to my colleagues.   1 2 3 4 5

Please answer the following on a scale of 1-5:

5= excellent; 4= good; 3= neutral; 2= poor; 1= very poor

1. Please describe the overall quality of the workshop   1 2 3 4 5

2. Please describe the overall quality of the workshop leaders and facilitators   1 2 3 4 5

3. Please describe the material chosen for the workshop   1 2 3 4 5

4. Please describe the overall value of the workshop   1 2 3 4 5

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