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Leadership Development Lab II

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Policy Memo

Research Question

- What are observed trends, advantages, and shortcomings of current diversity

curricula in K-12 education?

Executive Summary

- Currently, California (the intended state in which school communities will be more

  closely observed for the project) is planning to create a general set of guidelines related to

  an Ethnic Studies curriculum, although it does not specifically outline curriculum content

  as that is left to school communities to individually work on (California Department of

  Education). The research identifies key concerns with allowing school communities to

  handle curriculum content on their own, such as community backlash. However, there are

  also advantages with specific community-based curriculums, where it is easier to identify

  ways of community mobilization through the curriculum (Sobredo et. al, 2008, 87) and

  specifically link content with the community needs (Jocson, 2008). There are digital

  resources available for teachers related to multicultural education (Bhouraskar), but not

  necessarily geared towards students directly. This project will use a digital platform to

  counter community concerns while still maintaining the original goals for implementation

  of multicultural curriculums in schools.

Background

- Although there are initiatives being made in smaller communities to increase multicultural education in the classroom, there still is no comprehensive resource for both students and teachers to access related to this material for classroom instruction. As the need for global cultural awareness grows over time, it becomes increasingly important for students to be educated regarding other cultures to not only be more informed, but in general, also gain greater understanding when it comes to matters related to cultural, ethic, and racial studies and interactions in their daily lives. The conversation around the importance of multicultural studies and integrating them in classrooms when students are at a younger age have remained relevant in the field of education for multiple years. However, there are multiple concerns that must be addressed before moving forward with cultural content in classrooms. Curriculums can be difficult to fact check and could easily spread misinterpreted concepts and facts, especially if related to historical information, which in turn, could hurt minority students more (Loewen). It is also difficult to have a standardized curriculum related to multicultural education be successfully implemented unless the teacher is invested in the topic without bias (Alismail, 2016, 142), and the teacher is able to adapt and shape the curriculum around the specific classroom and students (Milner, 2005, 397). Lastly, diversity-based curriculums can be seen as a way of fostering ethnic solidarity, which by some, can be seen as a conflict with prioritizing individuality, as demonstrated by the backlash in Arizona when certain diversity-related content was restricted (Wanberg, 2013, 15).

Key Stakeholders

- Government
    - State administration in charge of education as well as district and school staff who work on curriculum for the communities are responsible for directly impacting work related to this matter (California Department of Education). When it comes to implementation and oversight over larger topics related to multicultural curriculums, the government has an influential role.
- Students
    - Students in schools will be the ones who these curriculum measures will most directly affect as it shapes their education and global views. Since school communities vary from district to district, the focus of these curriculums from the perspective of students will also differ.
- Academic
    - Researchers who are actively involved or have contributed to community-based diversity-related curriculum implementation in schools would be interested in further developments for this topic.
    - One of the individuals I had the opportunity to interview was Professor Tabitha Kidwell, the Associate Chair in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at American University. In our conversation, I was able to find out more about the resources and studies on this topic that have been done by scholars, but which may lack the accessibility to audiences in schools who could benefit from knowledge of different cultural backgrounds and related studies.

Appraisal of Past Solutions

- Government Policies

    - One of the more recent and relevant government policies relates to the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum being implemented in schools across California (California Department of Education). While multiple researchers have done studies in communities and individual schools have initiated curriculum around cultural topics, this is one of the first and newer policies that has been adminstered by the state government education policies.

- Culture-Specific Content

    - One way of approaching personalized curriculums related to multicultural studies is to tailor it to the student audience. One such related solution comes from a Filipino Heritage Studies in a California high school, where the goal was to create a greater understanding of Filipino American history by looking at personal stories, also known as kuwentos, in order to gain more historical and personal perspectives (Jocson, 2008).

- Community-Based Models

    - Multiple researchers have led different projects and initiatives to work directly with school communities to understand the impact of implementing a multicultural curriculum in schools. One such model was led in 2001 at California State University and Hiram Johnson High School. The school and university

researchers worked together to introduce an Ethnic Studies curriculum at the

school in order to meet goals that include better academic results and greater

understanding of ethnic studies (Sobredo, Kim-Ju, Figueroa, Mark, Fabionar,

2008, 82). The results found that such curriculum integration greatly added to

community mobilization and impact, (Sobredo et. al, 2008, 87) by giving power

and voice back to the people through the content.

- Digital Resources
    - In contrast to personalized curriculums, there are very general digital resources

        available for teachers to easily access (Bhouraskar). Such websites include key

        activities and questions that teachers can use to better customize lessons based on

        their own classrooms.

Project Plan

- To provide school communities with flexibility but to still retain the important

    information in multicultural studies, this project will entail a digital resource. This digital

    resource, in the form of a website, will use academic and general information regarding a

    number of cultures in an easily comprehensible and accessible format. Costs, if any,

    might include domain fee for website & potential promotional material costs (i.e.

    informational brochures, etc).

- A digital website resource allows for there to be an unbiased information base related to

    multicultural education, and can be accessed and used by teachers as needed for their

    classrooms. However, since there is more emphasis on information versus resources on

how to structure the concepts in a classroom, it allows for more integration within the actual curriculum content itself to further enhance the quality of the curriculum and make it personalized for each school community, while also being open for use by anyone who finds it useful on the internet.

Conclusion

- Multicultural curriculums are often best formatted towards individual communities, but this can pose certain challenges as it becomes highly dependent on the teacher and can become more difficult to actively implement with potential complaints from communities regarding the content. Currently, there are digital resources to aid teachers who want to implement such a curriculum in their classrooms, but it is difficult to find easily accessible multicultural resources for students. If such resources are available for students as a supplemental out-of-classroom resource for them to interact with and that teachers do not have to directly handle, it can help increase multicultural awareness among students while minimizing the potential concerns. Keeping this in mind, a digital website would most effectively address the disadvantages of personalized community multicultural curriculums while still providing a necessary platform that can be tailored to the needs of different communities based on the information available and simultaneously maintain the advantages of integrating a multicultural curriculum in schools.

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