

## **Theory of Change**

### *Questioning Our World Through Media*

Moving forward, I am interested in assisting youth with fostering and strengthening their reading and critical thinking skills. My gravitation towards these tools stems from an experience I had in first grade. Prior to entering elementary school, I was significantly behind my peers in developing my ability to read. When transitioning from kindergarten to first grade, my kindergarten teacher assured my parents that I could read. However, within the first week of first grade my teacher learned that this was false. Through a reading exam she had assigned, it was apparent that I lacked the necessary skills to succeed in her classroom. As a result, I was required to attend a specialized reading class while the other children had time to read freely. Every other day I would work with my school's literacy specialist, who I will refer to as Ms. Smith. Through receiving additional support, my reading, writing, and comprehension skills significantly improved by the second half of the year. Moreover, with the help of Ms. Smith I began to love books and formed a passion for writing. However, many schools do not provide this resource and rely on the general teacher to ensure each student can read and write to the ability that is expected of them.

This issue became more apparent to me when I volunteered in a third-grade classroom at Woodland Academy. At the time, I was enrolled in a gateway course for my major, Community, Youth, and Education Studies, and to pass the course, I was required to complete two hours of observation a week. During this time, the teacher I was assigned to would have me walk around the class and help answer questions. Occasionally, she asked me to sit with a student and go through an assignment one on one. During my fourth week of observation, I arrived as the students were about to begin a practice standardized exam. Each student had forty minutes to

read a short passage and write a paragraph in response to the prompt given at the top of the page. After ten minutes had passed, Mrs. Smith asked if I could work with one student named Josie who was struggling to read the passage. I sat down and began going through each sentence with her, making sure that she was not just reading the passage but also understanding it as well. However, by the time she had finished the passage and had the chance to write her response, she only had five minutes to write and submit the paper to Mrs. Smith. If this exam was not practice, Josie would have failed because she could not read the exam without assistance. Later, at the end of the day, I was speaking to Josie and listening to her talk about what she likes to do for fun and who she usually spends time with at home. During this conversation I asked Josie if she had time to practice reading at home. She responded by looking down as she described how her mom did not have time to help her because she had to work two jobs to pay for their home. In addition, the school did not have the resources to provide a literacy specialist like Ms. Smith.

Growing up, I was incredibly fortunate to receive the necessary support I needed at the time, and without it, I might not have ended up where I am today. I believe that reading helped shaped my life. Each time I read a new book, I felt as if I had walked away with a new lesson and a piece of each character. Reading allowed me to learn more about myself, while simultaneously broadening my world. Filling it with new perspectives, people, and adventures I would have never dreamt were even possible. However, when students struggle to read, this not only puts them at a disadvantage within the classroom, but also closes them off to various mediums of obtaining new information such as books, news, magazines, etc. which could potentially expose them to new ideas and perspectives about the world. Thus, I believe that the act of reading can act as one of many channels to open individuals to new ideas they may not

have thought of prior. While reading is only one way to expose young learners to new perspectives, it is a method that is deeply ingrained into our society.

Looking back on Josie's dilemma it is apparent that she was unable to receive the support she needed at the time and there were many factors that could have contributed to her difficulty with reading. We could blame Josie for her struggles, her home life, or any of the systems that may have led her to this position. However, in my piece, *Learning to Critically Read Our World*, I write that "it is important to note that often these issues cannot be individualized due to the fact that they compound on one another, which in turn makes identifying the "sole" reasoning as to why young students struggle nearly impossible. To move forward I believe that we must accept that there is no "one explanation" for our society's problems but we must work through these issues with a multifaceted, holistic lens to find solutions and move towards action. However, in order to do so we must begin by asking ourselves questions such as "what is going on here?" Or "what are the different factors at play?" While the questions I have posed are only a few examples, they act as a catalyst to further our understanding of the situation and instigate deeper thinking about what exactly is going on" (Turetsky). Moreover, to enact change, I believe that we must approach all social problems with a multifaceted holistic lens and equip students with the ability to ask questions about the world. However, we must begin by exposing young children to new and different perspectives. For example, reading can open students to various mediums of obtaining new information through sources such as books, news, magazines, etc., and could act as one of many channels to open individuals to new ideas they may not have thought of prior. When we read, we are not just reading books, but we are also exposed to ads, articles, social media posts, etc. that can influence our views on the world (Turetsky). Today we are surrounded by media. When I utilize the term media, I interpret this to mean that media can be any method

of relaying information to others through a secondary source. This includes books, tv, news, magazines, social media, etc. Over the past year, due to covid-19 there has been a large surge of information that is shared digitally. Teachers who were pushed to online school now rely on digital mediums to help their students learn, while their students also look to technology to occupy their minds during their free time. As a result, students must sift through more information than ever.

Moving Forward, I intend to implement a media literacy curriculum that is grounded in fostering students' curiosity through encouraging them to ask questions about their classroom material into a second-grade classroom. Upon entering my praxis site, I will be conducting activities with the students through providing images and materials that we can have an open discussion about, having them bring in a piece of media from their own life (could be something they have read or an object that has been given meaning or has a story behind it) and having open discussions about the different ways in which we all may have interpreted a form of new information similar or differently. Through conducting these activities and discussions, I am hoping that students will walk away from this curriculum with a stronger ability to question new information in which they may not have thought twice about prior.

When constructing this curriculum, I took inspiration from Vivian Vasquez. In her novel *Negotiating Critical Literacy Theories*, Vasquez walks readers through her curriculum she implemented into her Kindergarten classroom. In doing so, Vasquez continuously emphasizes the importance of equipping children with what she refers to as "different literacies" or in other words different ways of understanding our world (Vasquez). Thus, Vasquez's curriculum centers around a cycle she followed with her students throughout the year. This cycle would begin by asking a question, identifying a problem, conducting research on the topic at hand, taking action,

and then reflecting on their findings (Turetsky). While Vasquez and her students continuously moved through this cycle throughout the year, for my curriculum I will be focusing on the first step which involved her kindergarten students asking questions.

Thus, I believe that this process of asking questions acts as the first step towards invoking change. In her piece, *Theory as a Liberatory Practice*, Bell Hooks writes that “Children make the best theorists,” and I believe this rings true. Thus, I believe that children have a greater capacity to reimagine and rethink the current societal structures that are still in place because they have not fully internalized these systems. Furthermore, if we equip students with the skillset to ask questions about the information they are taking in, this theoretically could help them combat the internalization of these structures in the future.

#### Works Cited:

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