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Culturally Responsive Reading Materials in the Middle School Foreign Language Classroom

by
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Abstract

A disconnect exists between minority students and their development in linguistics, sociocultural understanding, and achievement on assessments in the middle school foreign language curricula. Therefore, a culturally responsive approach to foreign language reading materials is crucial to ensure academic success for all middle school students. Culturally responsive reading materials have a positive impact on minority students' linguistic development, sociocultural understanding, and achievement on assessment. My research proposes a professional development to guide educators in developing a culturally responsive mindset, evaluating reading materials, implementing reading materials, and eliciting student feedback. My research recommends that middle school foreign language educators implement culturally responsive reading materials to mitigate the challenges that minority students face in linguistic development, sociocultural understanding and achievement on assessments. Further research is needed on the impact of technology, low-income schools, and access to culturally responsive reading materials.

Keywords: culturally responsive, foreign language, reading materials, linguistic development, sociocultural understanding, assessment

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The demographics of the student population in the United States of America are changing rapidly. According to Huber-Warring and Warring (2005), an increase is occurring in Latin American, Asian American, and African American children. These authors explain that nation will no longer be comprised of a majority of white European descent. Thus, educators must consider how to adapt to serve this diverse group's needs.

As a middle school foreign language educator, I have personally experienced the growing need for a culturally responsive curriculum. Recently, my building has implemented an English as a New Language (ENL) program to meet the demands of a growing diverse population. Minority, non-English speaking students are entering a building comprised of a majority of white teachers and students. Additionally, there is a growing population of African American and Latin American children in my building. Due to the demographic changes in my classroom, the need for a culturally responsive foreign language education is imperative to promote success for all learners. Culturally responsive curricula incorporates "the contributions of people from diverse cultures and races to add to the scientific, artistic, mathematical, and philosophical thought" (Cunningham, 2001, p. 86). Cunningham further explains that culturally responsive education "includes the plural voices of diversity" (p. 86). A culturally responsive curriculum allows students to engage with content in a way that affirms their identities. Utilizing culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language classroom exposes students to multiple perspectives and positions them to envision themselves in a place of success in the classroom.

Significance

I have first-hand experienced minority students struggling to create meaning in the target language when the content does not relate to them. Moreover, minority students struggle to find

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translations for words if it does not fit into their existing schema, which is largely influenced by culture. These students are expected to take a Checkpoint A exam at the completion of foreign language in 8th grade. This exam is one of many students must take and pass if they aspire to qualify for a 3 year sequence that leads to an advanced designation diploma and college readiness. Students that are unable to connect with the curriculum face the danger of being unable to pass the exam due to cultural and linguistic challenges. This is particularly true for students that do not belong to the dominant culture. It is imperative to find a method to encourage success for minority students in the foreign language classroom.

Culturally responsive foreign language reading materials can bridge the gap between what exists and what is lacking in the current curriculum. For the purpose of this paper, reading materials will refer to anything in the content area that children must read to gain or create meaning. The current materials utilized in my building are handed down from the school or created by the teachers themselves. This existing database of resources is limited in its perspectives. Providing students with culturally responsive reading materials is the beginning of a necessary change in my building.

Culturally responsive education is no easy task and one that takes a career to develop and implement consistently and correctly. It is imperative to note that culturally responsive education cannot be simplified down to materials; rather, this culturally responsive education is a mindset, a practice, and is weaved into student materials and assessment. However, this paper will seek to address the current need for teachers in my department to find culturally responsive reading materials. Culturally responsive reading materials will not only promote greater success for students on the Checkpoint A assessment, but also promote belonging within the classroom. Culturally responsive foreign language education encourages equitable access to the curriculum,

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regardless of student background (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). These authors affirm my belief that students from different backgrounds can make better sense of the target language and target language culture if they are exposed to it in ways that they can understand. If students cannot grasp the words or cultural components they are being taught, they are missing the essence of language learning. Culturally responsive foreign language education addresses the linguistic, socio-cultural, and assessment challenges that my department faces as the student demographic continues to change.

Purpose

Due to the rapid demographic changes occurring in classrooms, the foreign language teachers in my department have voiced the need for more professional development in culturally responsive foreign language education. Particularly, there is a need for culturally responsive reading materials to better connect with a growing diverse population. This population not only includes minority students, but students that speak a home language other than English as well. Middle school (grades 6-8) foreign language educators are asking for ways to help these students make sense of content, particularly when the perspectives implied in the content are different from students' home culture and/or perspectives. They are longing to bridge the gap in student understanding of curriculum.

Teaching a foreign language is challenging enough; however, it can become immensely challenging when trying to find ways to connect students with world cultures and the target language culture, especially if the educator is not familiar with students' home cultures. Culturally responsive foreign language reading materials can bridge the gap to include students from many cultures into the curriculum in a way that promotes meaningful connection with the target language culture. I am tasked with creating a professional development that will address

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foreign language teachers' need for culturally responsive reading materials. This professional development will aim to train teachers on delivery of content and choosing reading materials that are culturally responsive. The goal of this training is for middle school foreign language educators to be equipped with ways to evaluate current and new materials to determine if they are culturally responsive. These educators teach Spanish, German, and French. I aim to provide the teachers in my department with the tools and confidence needed to address our current curricular challenges, regardless of target language.

The following chapter will review literature related to current perspectives on culturally responsive foreign language education. Additionally, it will examine possible challenges that educators may face when attempting to implement culturally responsive reading materials. Moreover, Chapter 3 will utilize current research to inform a professional development proposal to address the current need of culturally responsive reading materials. Upon the review of literature and suggested professional development, I will reflect on the current research and practices to determine how it has informed teaching. Moreover, the reflection will discuss how this research can encourage further research and reflection to continue the exploration and implementation of culturally responsive reading materials.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Existing research supports the need for implementing culturally responsive reading materials. Prior to discussing culturally responsive reading materials, it is imperative to note that a culturally responsive approach takes a career to build. This approach is a mindset and pedagogy. This style of thinking and teaching then transcends into selection and implementation

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of reading materials. The following paragraphs will briefly define culturally responsive teaching and steps that must occur prior to implementation of culturally responsive reading materials.

From a culturally responsive standpoint, educators' choices of pedagogy provides students with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, related directly to their cultures (Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018). Cunningham (2001) emphasizes that culturally responsive pedagogy aims to connect with students' "cultures, values, languages, and traditions" (p. 85). Cunningham further explains that the definition of culturally responsive teaching is incorporating "the contributions of people from diverse cultures and races to add to the scientific, artistic, mathematical, and philosophical thought" (p. 86). He states that culturally responsive education "includes the plural voices of diversity" (p. 86). In other words, culturally responsive teaching incorporates multiple perspectives and provides students with the opportunity to interact with the curriculum in a way that affirms their identity.

A culturally responsive approach to teaching includes student voice and diversity in classroom discussion and materials. This is crucial for the district I work in, as the main problem is that middle school foreign language educators are asking for ways to connect with students through reading materials in the classroom. Incorporating culturally responsive reading materials in the middle school foreign language classroom can help bridge the gap that currently exists between the reading materials utilized and the lack of connection they have with students' identities.

A culturally responsive education is exactly what foreign language education needs. This is especially true if foreign language educators aim to prepare students for the globalized community in which they will face upon completion of their secondary education (Grosse, 2004). Culturally responsive foreign language materials can assist students in everyday

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classroom success. This success translates into improved overall linguistic and assessment achievement, in addition to greater socio-cultural understanding and belonging. This is immensely important to consider when discussing the students in my district because they take a Checkpoint A exam, which sets them on the path for college and career readiness. Passing this exam is crucial for minority students to have a chance at a better quality life, something that the educational system puts them at a disadvantage of upon entering. Culturally responsive reading materials can help minority students' chance at greater success in the classroom and on assessments; therefore, leading to a greater chance at a college-bound or career-ready diploma upon graduation. Culturally responsive approaches in foreign language education can help middle school educators bridge the gap that currently exists between minority and ENL students and the curriculum.

Understanding the essence of culturally responsive pedagogy is half of the battle when implementing culturally responsive foreign language reading materials. Prior to implementing these materials, educators must consider their preconceptions on students (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). The authors further explain that educators should examine how preconceptions affect their educational philosophy and current classroom practice. Moreover, Lucas and Villegas suggest that educators should examine their current advocacy practices and determine their effectiveness for students. In other words, educators should ask themselves if they are truly helping all students to succeed, or if they excluded some students from the equation. Huber-Warring and Warring (2005) discuss the importance of introspection; they urge that educators must first understand their culture to understand others. They assert, "Understanding self, the teacher is more effectively positioned to understand the individual learners' selves. Focused reflection empowers culturally responsible pedagogics to become aware of what they had

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previously been unable to see” (p. 72). It is crucial to understand the amount of self-reflection that must occur prior to implementing culturally responsive materials. Self-reflection begins to pave the path for a culturally responsive education because it begins to shed light on how the teacher can incorporate multiple perspectives into classroom discourse.

In addition to self-reflection, educators must understand the complexity of culture in order to implement culturally responsive approach. Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke (2003) indicate that the educator should be well versed in cultural norms that motivate student behavior; educator knowledge prevents alienation of students that may be unfamiliar with certain behaviors or types of praise. Moreover, Weinstein et al. further assert that culturally responsive education affirms students’ cultures and understands that behavior is culturally influenced. Thus, a student that “misbehaves” according to the teacher may not necessarily be misbehaving, but there could exist a misunderstanding of appropriate classroom behavior according to cultures. Thus, Weinstein et al. conclude that a culturally responsive approach mitigates student misbehavior because student identities are taken into account. This assists the teacher in promoting academic success for all students because it mitigates behavior issues, leading to greater participation in everyday classroom activities. Thus, students will experience more success due to less misunderstandings and time spent being disciplined and greater participation in daily activities.

A mutual understanding between students and educators is imperative in my district if our foreign language educators aim to connect to all students. Foreign language educators have a unique advantage in that they already study culture and linguistics for a living. Thus, it is imperative to expand their expertise to get to know their students’ culture to begin to consider how to implement it within classroom reading materials. Reading materials that reflect the

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student population and peak their interest will ensure greater classroom behavior, academic achievement, and assessment success.

Overall, the research indicates that culturally responsive teaching is a career-long endeavor that requires a specific mindset. This mindset is adopted through careful self-reflection, pedagogical moves, and selection of classroom materials. Due to the specific, focused need of culturally responsive reading materials, the following paragraphs will discuss these materials. There will be a focused discussion on the materials' impact on students' linguistic development, socio-cultural understanding and belonging, and achievement on assessments.

Culturally Responsive Reading Materials & Linguistic Acquisition

Culturally responsive reading materials promote linguistic success in the foreign language classroom. These reading materials have a diverse group of authors in gender and race. Moreover, culturally responsive foreign language reading materials have multiple perspectives and diverse characters. In other words, students need to be able to envision themselves in the materials they read. In the foreign language classroom, educators implement this practice through the inclusion of diverse characters in literature in the target language. The characters may not necessarily come from the target language culture, but they may speak the target language. This allows a diverse group of students to see themselves from the perspective of being able to speak the target language, even if they are not part of the target language culture (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). In considering the need for greater inclusion of minority students in the foreign language curriculum, this perspective is important to consider. Students that may initially feel alienated from the target language culture can begin to experience ease in the curriculum in their understanding that they are capable of success in the target language. This

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pedagogical move influences the student mindset due to careful selection of culturally responsive reading materials.

As students grow in their knowledge of target language vocabulary, it is equally as important for them to grow in their understanding of how words communicate feelings, thoughts, and ideas. This growth in understanding can be especially challenging if a minority student does not connect with the target language in a way that allows them to make sense of target language idioms and how they express certain sentiments. Currently, the nation's student population is more diverse than the teacher population (Huber-Warring & Warring, 2005). Additionally, this is true for my department. The entire middle school foreign language department is female, mostly white, and middle to upper class. The student population we serve is growing increasingly diverse in race, ethnicity, and languages spoken at home. My middle school foreign language department is eager to explore ways on how to connect with students that are different from them.

Due to disconnect between teacher and student cultures, gaps between student-teacher linguistic knowledge, such as idioms, are likely to exist. If a teacher is unable to connect with students to create meaning of the target language with them, there are sentiments that become lost in translation. This puts students at risk of an authentic experience in the target language, thus putting them at greater risk of lower assessment scores due to lack of understanding of content. This is especially true for ENL students in my district that do not share the same culture as their foreign language teacher. Our middle school foreign language educators are tasked with finding ways to connect to their students' existing cultural schema. Culturally responsive reading materials can begin to mitigate this issue.

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Selecting culturally responsive reading materials creates an understanding between teachers, students, and the target language culture in a way that bridges the gap between student-teacher cultures (Huber-Warring & Warring, 2019). The reading materials are diverse enough to promote multiple perspectives and multiple ways of understanding the linguistic idioms that come with learning the target language. Culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language promote greater linguistic success for minority students because they provide equitable access to the foreign language curriculum.

Equitable access to the middle school foreign language curriculum in my district is a huge step that will begin to help foreign language educators solve the current problem. Minority students and ENL students are at risk of struggling in foreign language due to the lack of culturally responsive reading materials. Providing students with these materials is crucial for them to experience greater linguistic success, leading to greater academic success in foreign language. Linguistic success in our foreign language classrooms can assist our minority and ENL students in a greater socio-cultural understanding and assessment success, putting them on track to be college-bound and career ready.

Culturally Responsive Reading Materials & Socio-Cultural Impact

Culturally responsive reading materials allows minority students to envision themselves in a place of academic success and leaves a lasting socio-cultural impact. The use of culturally responsive reading materials improves socio-cultural understanding because it exposes students to multiple perspectives. Exposing students to multiple perspectives prepares them for the globalized community they will face upon graduation and allows them to understand that one perspective does not dominate.

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Although an immense difference exists between student-teacher demographics in my district, culturally responsive materials help bridge the gap in cultural understanding. The use of culturally responsive materials can fight the fire created by assumption. When educators expose students to a single story or perspective, that story becomes the dominant one that shapes student thinking (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). This is immensely dangerous because if that dominant narrative does not include multiple perspectives, the students believe that they are outliers if they do not identify with the dominant culture. Thus, rather than bridging gaps between the diverse student population and the curriculum, they are inadvertently created.

Utilizing classroom reading materials that shed light on other perspectives promotes a student understanding that humans have more in common than different. The idea of a culturally responsive curriculum is to invite students to learn that all people share a common humanity, while also recognizing what makes humans unique (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). This socio-cultural understanding is paramount for my district's ENL and minority students because they initially enter our classrooms feeling alienated enough because they do not look like their peers, speak the same home language as their peers, or may do things differently than their peers. Allowing for greater understanding among all students promotes student socio-cultural understanding and belonging because students learn through context that there are various styles of appearance, ways of saying things, and doing things. If educators aim to fix the current alienation problem that minority and ENL students face, it is crucial to select culturally responsive reading materials.

Culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language leave a lasting impact on minority and ENL students. The foreign language classroom is a great place to start when attempting to bridge the gap that exists between these students and their peers, as well as

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students and their teachers. Utilizing culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language provides students with the understanding that there are multiple perspectives that are unique and valuable. In addition, it begins to relieve the alienation that minority students feel upon entering our classrooms. Promoting multiple perspectives and relieving alienation allow for greater socio-cultural understanding and affirmation that these students belong, have something to offer, and are worthy of success.

Successful completion of my district's foreign language curriculum puts students on a path to college and career readiness. Culturally responsive reading materials promote student linguistic success and socio-cultural understanding. The exposure to multiple perspectives prepares students to face their globalized community. This exposure is crucial for all students, but especially my district's minority and ENL students, because they have a greater understanding of self and others. This understanding is immensely powerful because it gives marginalized students an opportunity to embrace their identity and understand they have something to offer their community. This reduces their sense of alienation and increases their sense of belonging. A greater socio-cultural understanding not only promotes greater socio-cultural understanding in the classroom, but also prepares them to continue their foreign language studies from the lens that everyone has something valuable to offer. Culturally responsive reading materials are a great aid in student socio-cultural development.

Culturally Responsive Reading Materials & Assessment

Assessment is a part of students' everyday educational experiences and a large predictor of academic success in today's educational system. If my district's students aspire to be college-bound, assessment is one of the hoops they must jump through in order to achieve that goal. If minority students experience alienation in the foreign language curriculum, they are at risk of

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doing poorly on assessments due to lack of understanding. This is already occurring in my district among minority and ENL students. This problem is one that requires remediation if my foreign language department aims to change the current climate that our minority and ENL students are facing.

It is imperative that minority and ENL students experience success on foreign language assessments if they aim to be college-bound in New York State. As previously mentioned in the Introduction, students take a Checkpoint A exam upon completion of their first level of study in a foreign language. In order to receive their Advanced Regents Diploma (a college-bound diploma), students must pass the Checkpoint A exam. The exam requires students to demonstrate knowledge of the target language and the target language culture on various levels. If my district wants our minority students to experience success on this, and all other foreign language assessments, one method to prepare is to utilize culturally responsive foreign language reading materials. These reading materials promote student understanding of the target language because they provide multiple perspectives, or multiple ways of understanding the target language and its culture. Moreover, educators are more responsive to student needs because they understand their students and carefully select materials that promote student understanding, rather than alienation.

Minority and ENL students experience many challenges when attempting to reach success in the current educational system. These students are overrepresented in suspension rates and underrepresented in rates of academic success such as high grade point averages, academic awards, and other noteworthy achievements in their school community (Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, & Day-Vines, 2018). This problem is heightening in my district at this moment. Assessments are one indicator of success in high grade point averages, academic awards, and other academic achievements. As previously mentioned, the implementation of culturally

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responsive reading materials can aid student success because it promotes greater understanding of the target language culture. This understanding translates into a greater chance at success on assessments. Success on assessments is necessary for students that aim to be college-bound. If middle school foreign language educators aim to change the current statistic on high suspension rates and low academic success rates, the implementation of culturally responsive reading materials can aid educators in helping students achieve higher assessment scores. Thus, providing them with a greater chance to be college-bound.

Challenges of Implementing Culturally Responsive Reading Materials

In discussions of culturally responsive reading materials, one controversial issue is a mismatch between students and teachers. In other words, there is a growing minority student population, but the teacher population is not changing as rapidly (Huber-Warring & Warring, 2005). Hayes and Juarez (2001) agree in stating the current educator population is comprised of mainly white, female, monolinguals, whereas the student population is becoming increasingly diverse. Although it is undeniable that there exists a mismatch between the student-teacher demographics, it is not impossible for educators to adopt a culturally responsive approach. This fact simply means that educators must take additional time exposing themselves to other cultures and culturally responsive professional development prior to implementing culturally responsive reading materials. As previously mentioned in the beginning of this literature review, a culturally responsive approach is one that takes an entire career to develop completely, everyone will have different starting points. Although it may take more work for some, the literature clearly proves the immense student benefits from utilizing culturally responsive reading materials.

Skeptics of culturally responsive reading materials argue that there is a lack of available materials on some cultures. This lack of material creates a challenge when attempting to

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implement culturally responsive reading materials. Nieto (2013) asserts that culturally responsive teaching validates students' identities by referring to their home language and to incorporating their linguistic and cultural practices into the curriculum. However, this can be impossible for educators if they do not have access to materials that reference students' identities and home cultures. If students are unable to see themselves in the classroom reading materials, they are not educated from a culturally responsive standpoint. Lack of materials on certain cultures is an immense challenge for educators. Thus, this challenge creates more work for educators to think outside of the box.

If a lack of resources exists on a certain students' culture, the educator must reach out to the family. Utilizing families in the classroom can manifest itself in encouraging students to interview families about classroom topics (Cunningham, 2001). When students interview their families, they are not only learning multiple perspectives on a topic. The incorporation of families also represents and values students' cultures (Boyd, Causey & Galda, 2015). Attempting to include families in the educational journey can be especially challenging if there exist linguistic differences where words become lost in translation. However, it is a start at attempting to open dialogue between the educational system and home culture. Although this is no easy task, when educators invite students and their families into the learning process, they create meaningful learning that promotes inclusion.

An especially obvious criticism of attempting to implement culturally responsive reading materials in the classroom is lack of access to technology. Technology is one of the greatest means of obtaining and providing information, especially in today's society. In fact, the current workforce calls for students that are tech-savvy (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Thus, if middle school foreign language educators aim to bridge the current gap that exists between

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minority and ENL students regarding educational attainment and achievement, lack of access to technology poses an immense obstacle. At the core of culturally responsive teaching is providing equitable access to the curriculum. Without access to technology, it is difficult to meet the goal of equitable access. Warschauer and Matuchniak acknowledge that family income, immigrant status, and other factors, such as home language, educational attainment by parents, and number of children in the household, play a role in access to technology. Considering the diverse, minority student population in my district, they would fall under these categories. Middle school foreign language educators are tasked with attempting to bridge the gap in the classroom because they cannot send students home with work that requires access to technology. Moreover, foreign language educators that serve in low-income communities have a lack of access to resources in the classroom. This issue makes searching for resources, especially on cultures the educator is unfamiliar with, immensely challenging. Overall, the task of approaching reading materials from a culturally responsive standpoint combined with the lack of access to technology is especially daunting.

Followers and critics of culturally responsive teaching and implementation of culturally responsive reading materials will agree that this is no easy task and one that takes a career to build and feel confident implementing. However, the work done on educators' behalf is not useless. Current research on culturally responsive reading materials clearly indicates there are immense linguistic, socio-cultural, and assessment benefits for students that are currently underserved by the educational system. Although this requires an entire career to implement comfortably, the benefits are numerous for students. Thus, skeptics should not ignore this approach to pedagogy. Rather, school districts should implement additional professional

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development for educators to become increasingly familiar with culturally responsive reading materials.

The following chapter will propose a professional development to address the need for middle school foreign language educator training on culturally responsive reading materials. The proposal will provide these educators with ways to select and evaluate their current reading materials, as well as sources to consider for implementing additional materials. The goal of the professional development is for middle school foreign language educators to begin to feel comfortable in implementing culturally responsive reading materials. Moreover, in bringing these educators together, the professional development aspires to unite them with one another to create a community that feels comfortable sharing culturally responsive reading materials, making the searching process for materials less intimidating and time consuming.

Chapter 3: Professional Development

Professional development is an effective method for educators to gain useful information in order to modify their current practice. As stated previously, professional development on culturally responsive foreign language reading materials is of high demand in my district. As a brief reminder, for the purpose of this paper, reading materials refer to anything in the content area that children must read to gain or create meaning. Thus, in the foreign language classroom, reading materials that teachers utilize may include grammatical exercises, short or long paragraphs, scripts from podcasts or movies, lyrics from songs, picture books, short novels, among much more.

The professional development outlined in Appendix, Table 1 is designed for middle school foreign language educators (grades 6-8). There is a VoiceThread link in Appendix, Figure 1 with a thorough explanation of the professional development. It aims to help educators define

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culturally responsive education in their classrooms. In addition, it will provide them with ways to get to know their students and time to reflect on their current reading materials. Moreover, the meeting will provide access to new culturally responsive reading materials to enhance their current teaching practices and provide an example of how to utilize a reading material in the classroom, regardless of the target language being taught. Lastly, the professional development will expose middle school foreign language educators to methods to gauge student progress and feedback from a culturally responsive standpoint. The professional development will aim to remedy the current need in my district for culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language classroom. The implementation of culturally responsive reading materials will aim to remedy the need for foreign language educators to reach a group of students that is growing increasingly diverse.

Part I: Developing a Culturally Responsive Mindset

One of the most important concepts that the professional development will aim to equip foreign language educators with is the fact that culturally responsive teaching is a mindset. Developing this mindset and sticking to it is no easy task and one that requires an entire career to refine and maintain. It is imperative to start the professional development on this note because foreign language educators should not oversimplify culturally responsive teaching. To highlight this point, the professional development will provide time with educators to discuss their definition of culturally responsive teaching, prior to diving into culturally responsive foreign language reading materials. Ultimately, with the help of some examples of definitions from research on culturally responsive teaching, the educators will refine their definitions.

Definitions highlighted in the professional development are grounded in research. The definitions I will present to the professional development participants come from the literature

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review and support the need for culturally responsive reading materials. Primarily, it is imperative for educators to consider that culturally responsive teaching is incorporating “the contributions of people from diverse cultures and races to add to the scientific, artistic, mathematical, and philosophical thought” (Cunningham, p. 86). In addition, Cunningham’s research will further be highlighted to include his point that culturally responsive education “includes the plural voices of diversity” (p, 86). These points regarding culturally responsive education are immensely useful for middle school foreign language educators to consider because it highlights the need for diverse perspectives and voices in reading materials. It is crucial for foreign language educators to understand that the perspectives of the reading materials should be ones that aim to connect to students in a way that promotes greater understanding of the target language and its culture. In addition, culturally responsive reading materials promote belonging for all students in the foreign language classroom. The more diverse the perspectives are in the reading materials, the more likely the reading materials are able to connect with students’ identities and cultures. This sense of belonging for students will lead to greater linguistic and sociocultural understanding. This linguistic development and sociocultural understanding will ultimately lead to greater achievement on assessments. Overall, students achieve more when they are exposed to culturally responsive reading materials.

The goal is for these foreign language educators to internalize the concept that culturally responsive teaching is immensely complex and challenging. This is imperative to incorporate in the professional development because the foreign language department in my building has asked for clarification on and additional time for discussing culturally responsive teaching. However, the professional development will aim to assure them that although it requires careful reflection

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and consideration, implementation of culturally responsive reading materials will yield immense benefits for my district's growing population of a diverse group of students.

Part II: Getting to Know the Student Population

Middle school foreign language educators that start with the mindset that culturally responsive teaching is complex are in a place to implement culturally responsive reading materials. These educators are equipped with the mindset to examine current and future materials in a way that ensures the materials do not perpetuate stereotypes and are reflective of the student population. Naturally, selecting materials reflective of the student population means that the educator must do the work to get to know the diverse student population they serve. Foreign language educators should have discussions with students or assign them a survey that allows them to provide information on who they are, what languages are spoken at home, whom they live with, what their interests are, and more. The professional development will provide educators will sample questions that foreign language educators can incorporate into already existing plans for surveys or classroom discussions.

In Appendix, Figure 2 exemplifies questions that can be incorporated into an existing student survey or classroom discussion to get to know students on the first days in foreign language class. This is immensely important, especially for the foreign language classrooms in my district. Our student population is becoming increasingly diverse and it is imperative that our foreign language educators have a complete understanding of students' backgrounds prior to implementing reading materials. In order to reach students, foreign language educators must understand their students' backgrounds and mirror their cultures and experiences in reading materials. It is important to phrase the questions in a way that are inclusive of a diverse population. If the questions resemble a dominant point of view or are assumptive in nature, the

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diverse group of students will disengage and not feel comfortable sharing personal information. Thus, the questions are open-ended. Moreover, the questions not only ask about students' demographics, but their learning preferences and goals as well. Culturally responsive foreign language education knows students' home culture, but their individual identities as well. These questions can begin to open the door for foreign language educators to begin to consider how to implement reading materials and what kind of reading materials to select.

Understanding students' interests and preferences can increase foreign language educators' awareness of students and allow them to begin to tailor the foreign language experience to include their interests. Including their interest translates into greater classroom achievement due to greater student interest. Therefore, minority students will experience improvements in their linguistic abilities, sociocultural understanding, and assessment scores. Ultimately, getting to know students in a way that comes from genuine curiosity, rather than assumptions, is a crucial first step in implementing culturally responsive foreign language reading materials.

On the journey of implementing culturally responsive reading materials, gaining information about students is one of the beginning steps, albeit an important one. In order to consider foreign language reading materials culturally responsive, the literature in Chapter 2 suggests that they be reflective of the student population. The reading materials should reflect the students in a way that allows students to envision themselves in a place of success in the foreign language classroom. Examples of materials reflective of the student population include characters or topics that physically resemble the students, practice the same religion, speak the same first language, have similar family structures, or share the same interests and hobbies. Such materials engage the students because these students see themselves in the classroom materials

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and feel more connected, rather than alienated, to the target language and its culture. Moreover, providing these students with ways to understand the target language that fit in their existing schema allow them to better internalize new information. By extension, better internalization of content leads to better overall classroom achievement and greater success on assessments. Thus, connecting reading materials to our diverse group of students and their interests will lead them on a path to a greater chance at success on the Checkpoint A exam. This exam is the first step in the journey to a college ready diploma. Our foreign language department aims to extend success to our growing diverse student population. Utilizing culturally responsive foreign language reading materials that are reflective of the student population is one way to encourage greater student success.

Part III: Evaluating Reading Materials

Incorporating a culturally responsive approach into foreign language reading materials does not mean that the educator must scrap all current materials and create or find new ones. However, a culturally responsive approach to reading materials means that educators should evaluate their current materials and adjust as needed in order to encourage greater student success. The professional development will provide time for foreign language educators to evaluate a few reading materials that they already utilize in their classroom. Educators will utilize a research-based rubric to score their reading materials from a culturally responsive lens.

The rationale behind having educators evaluate their reading materials is to aid them in modifying their current practice without having to create new materials if it is not necessary. Moreover, the rubric will lay the groundwork for educators to begin thinking of how to evaluate current and future materials to determine if they are culturally responsive. In Appendix, Table 2 is composed of 10 statements that relate to culturally responsive reading materials. Educators

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will read each statement and evaluate their sentiments regarding the validity of their reading material in comparison to the statement. If educators feel confident that the reading material reflects the information in the statement, educators will rate it higher than if they felt the reading material did not reflect the statement. Once educators complete the evaluation, they will total their score and view the scoring guidelines in Appendix, Table 3.

The score guidelines group the scores from a range of culturally destructive to culturally responsive. Regardless of the score of the reading material, the rationale behind having educators score their materials is to help them begin to identify materials that are and are not culturally responsive. Providing time for educators to evaluate their current practice begins to pave the way for them to adopt a culturally responsive mindset. Moreover, the literature in Chapter 2 suggests that culturally responsive reading materials encourage greater student success, leading to improved linguistic development, socio-cultural connections, and assessment results. Once foreign language teachers have evaluated their current materials, the professional development will provide an opportunity for them to explore additional culturally responsive reading materials for foreign language.

Part IV: Examples of Culturally Responsive Reading Materials

One of the biggest hindrances in teaching is the fact that educators never seem to have enough time. In order to save time for educators that aspire to implement culturally responsive reading materials, the professional development will provide structured time for educators to explore reading materials that are already evaluated as culturally responsive, according to the American Library Association. In Appendix, Table 4 highlights various awards from the American Library Association. Overall, they are high quality, culturally responsive reading materials that incorporate a myriad of different perspectives and cultures. The awards were

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specifically chosen to mirror the student demographics in my district. Each award represents the experiences and perspectives of a different demographic. Although it is not an exhaustive list, it provides a place for educators to start to ground their work in selecting culturally responsive reading materials. Although this list only applies to picture books, poems, and novels, it is an excellent resource for educators to have in their repertoire for culturally responsive reading materials. Middle school foreign language educators can use the picture books and novels in class or use the materials to anchor their work when creating their own culturally responsive reading materials.

The professional development will provide time for educators to explore the examples of reading materials that have won these awards. The goal is for educators to walk away with new materials to implement in their classrooms without having to search for them on their own. Moreover, foreign language educators will walk away with additional examples of culturally responsive reading materials that they can use as examples when selecting or creating materials in the future.

Part V: Culturally Responsive Reading Materials in the Foreign Language Classroom

Although the proposed titles may not be in every target language offered in my district, teaching can be adapted to incorporate the target language with the reading materials. In Appendix, Table 5 is a proposed lesson plan for any target language. The lesson plan utilizes a book from the list of culturally responsive reading materials and exemplifies its usefulness for educators although the book is written in English. The lesson plan builds students' linguistic and sociocultural understanding. Allowing educators to examine how an English book can be useful in the target language is imperative. Educators can rest assured that they can tailor almost anything to the target language. This makes it easier to access culturally responsive reading

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materials, even if the educator teaches a language that is not as common as others are. It is imperative for educators to feel confident when attempting to incorporate culturally responsive reading materials.

Although it is a career-long endeavor, a simpler process to access materials makes educators more likely to adapt the culturally responsive approach. In addition, providing examples of how to utilize diverse titles, regardless if they are in the target language or not, opens educators up to a plethora of materials that they may not have considered before. This diverse selection of reading materials is at the heart of culturally responsive foreign language education. The more diverse the curriculum is, the more equitable it is for students. Thus, promoting greater student access to and success in the target language classroom.

Part VI: Student Feedback

Part of a culturally responsive approach in the foreign language classroom includes providing students with the opportunity to have a voice in their learning and being able to envision themselves in a place of success. Opening dialogue up to students shows them that they are valued members of the academic environment. Moreover, it affirms their identities and promotes belonging in the classroom. When student identities are affirmed and they feel that they belong, they are more likely to participate in daily classroom activities. Their daily participation then transcends into greater linguistic achievement, sociocultural understanding, and greater performance on assessment.

In Appendix, Figure 4 includes sample questions that foreign language educators can use to gauge students' understanding of and feedback on the reading material. Students may complete the sample questions after reading a single passage. Additionally, foreign language educators may modify the questions to evaluate a larger theme consisting of multiple passages.

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The goal of student feedback is to determine their progress and engagement in their reading materials. If there is a lack of student progress or engagement, it puts their linguistic development and sociocultural understanding at risk, thus leading to concerns about achievement on assessments.

Culturally responsive foreign language educators should be prepared to gauge student interest in their reading materials. In addition to getting to know students, they should have students evaluate the materials to help gauge effectiveness. The culturally responsive foreign language educator must be prepared to tailor instruction to meet student interests and needs. One way to accomplish this goal is to have open dialogue with students to show them that their teacher invests in their progress. In addition to greater student academic success, this leads to greater teacher-student understanding. Thus, building community and student progress, paving the path for greater success.

Impact of Professional Development

As stated previously, professional development is an important step in effecting change. The proposed professional development outlined in this chapter will begin to alleviate the district need in middle school foreign language classrooms. The contents of the professional development provide foreign language educators with effective ways to connect with students and implement culturally responsive foreign language reading materials. The teacher-student connection and shift in pedagogy proves for greater linguistic development and sociocultural understanding for ENL and minority students. Currently, there exists a void for these students to experience success in the curriculum. Moreover, teachers do not feel prepared well enough to meet student needs in order to help them navigate the pathway to success. This professional development targets that district need. The following chapter will emphasize the importance of

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this research and proposed professional development. Moreover, it will highlight the implications for student learning and suggest further research to conduct.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Importance of Research on Culturally Responsive Reading Materials

The completed research on culturally responsive reading materials begins to remedy the current need in my district for training on and access to culturally responsive reading materials in the middle school foreign language classroom. The research clearly indicates that implementation of a culturally responsive approach to reading materials will have an impact on minority students. Currently, the student population in my district is growing increasingly diverse, whereas the foreign language teacher population remains generally the same (mainly white, female, middle to upper class). In order to bridge the gap between teachers and students, a culturally responsive approach to reading materials clearly illustrates a positive impact on student linguistic development, sociocultural understanding and assessment scores. This approach to reading materials expands access for students to the curriculum and allows them to better integrate information learned into their schema.

Providing equitable access for minority students to the foreign language curriculum is crucial if our middle school foreign language department aims to remedy the current issue. Greater linguistic development, sociocultural understanding, and achievement on assessment scores are important components of minority student success in our district. Culturally responsive reading materials provide a pathway for student success in a way that affirms their identities, allows them to connect better with the material, and increases their achievement on assessment because of being able to understand content better. Minority students that are taught with culturally responsive reading materials have a better opportunity of higher performance on

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the Checkpoint A exam. Higher achievement on the Checkpoint A exam ultimately lends itself to a pathway for college and career readiness. The ultimate goal is to provide minority students with access to the foreign language curriculum that supports their future success.

Considering the positive impact that culturally responsive reading materials can have with regard to my district's issue, it is imperative to examine implications for educators and students further, as well as additional research needed to support this research.

Implications for Educators

This paper clearly outlines that culturally responsive teaching does not begin and end with culturally responsive reading materials. A culturally responsive approach to pedagogy requires a committed mindset, a shift in interaction with students and families, and evaluation of current and future materials. Although culturally responsive reading materials do not represent the entire scope of culturally responsive teaching, they indicate a starting point that helps mitigate the current issue in my district.

The utilization of culturally responsive reading materials requires middle school foreign language educators to evaluate their current materials and implement methods to ensure future materials are culturally responsive. Despite the amount of work that it requires, adapting culturally responsive reading materials is immensely useful in engaging a student population that currently lacks equitable access to the foreign language curriculum. It is immensely important that educators use each other as resources in evaluating and sharing materials. The proposed professional development in Chapter 3 begins to solve the current issue in my district. Middle school foreign language educators have advocated for time allocated for exploration of and collaboration on culturally responsive reading materials.

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All educators, regardless of their content area, should be collaborative in their work. In other words, educators should collaborate in their knowledge of students and families. Non-ENL teachers should seek out ENL teachers when attempting to get to know students and their interests. ENL teachers typically have already done the work in getting to know home languages, previous educational experiences, family values, and more. In addition, ENL teachers can assist non-ENL teachers in evaluation of culturally responsive materials if the ENL teacher is familiar with the students' identities and cultures. This collaboration benefits all teachers because they are sharing information and best practices. This collaboration is paramount to student success if my district aims to remedy the current issue of inequitable access to the curriculum. The professional development introduces the idea to foreign language educators that although it provides some culturally responsive examples of reading materials, ENL teachers are an additional resource. The notes in the appendix section highlight the importance of modifications for ENL student success. The foreign language educators in my district have been searching for ways to collaborate with ENL teachers since the program has been newly implemented. The professional development provides a starting point for foreign language educators to consider.

In addition to educator collaboration, it is crucial for educators to have an open mind when attempting to implement culturally responsive foreign language reading materials. Middle school foreign language educators must be ready to examine their current practice, and materials. Furthermore, they must be prepared to shift toward a new perspective and practice. If middle school foreign language educators aim to implement culturally responsive reading materials, they must be willing to admit to themselves that they do not know it all when it comes to student identities and cultures. This sense of humility in practice lends teachers to be open to student input and feedback, thus promoting community and a culturally responsive approach to reading

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materials. The professional development provides educators with ways to consider shifting their current mindset and practice to a culturally responsive one. Although the professional development does not encompass the entire scope of what it means to be truly culturally responsive, it is an inviting starting point for beginners. Once educators are honest with themselves and ready to be open to new ideas and perspectives, they can begin to examine culturally responsive reading materials carefully. Their efforts in the classroom have a profound impact on student learning.

Implications for Student Learning

It is evident that culturally responsive foreign language reading materials provide a pathway to success for students that typically do not have equitable access to the curriculum. These reading materials promote linguistic development and sociocultural understanding. Culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language classroom affirm student identities and allow students to access content better because it connects to their existing schema. Moreover, teacher-student relationships are improved because foreign language educators that aim to implement culturally responsive reading materials take time to get to know their students. In getting to know their students, educators are better equipped to implement materials that connect to students' identities and interests. The implementation of materials that speak to students' identities and interests stimulates increased student engagement.

Due to greater engagement and increased understanding of content, minority students have a greater chance at success on assessment. Increased achievement on assessments puts these students in a position to be college and career ready. Culturally responsive reading materials encourage the development of minority students in a way that encourages their success and views them as assets, rather than problems to solve. This is paramount for my district because the

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minority students are alienated from their peers and underrepresented in academic success rates. These rates include high honor roll, academic achievement awards, graduation honors, and more. The implementation of culturally responsive reading materials encourages minority students to feel valued and experience academic success in ways they were unable to before. Culturally responsive reading materials can assist in mitigating the problem that exists for minority students in my district.

Further Research Required

Further research is required when attempting to solve the problem related to culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language classroom. This approach to implementation of reading materials in the middle school classroom is one that takes an entire career to develop. Research that can strengthen the argument for the importance of implementation of culturally responsive reading materials is crucial to the advancement of this approach.

Additional research that can strengthen the argument for implementation of culturally responsive materials in the foreign language classroom should focus on the issue related to access to technology. Often, those without access to technology are minority students in low-income schools and communities (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). In knowing that culturally responsive reading materials have positive impacts on student development and achievement, more research should be done on how to access and implement these materials without technology. Suggestions for additional research include exploring community liaisons, public library offerings, community guest speakers, and writing grants to obtain materials. Instances have occurred in my district where minority students do not have Wi-Fi at home and cannot complete class assignments online due to not having access. Thus, they either require a hard copy of the assignment or must stay after school to complete the assignment. This is an issue

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because these students then become more alienated from their peers, rather than integrated. Discovering an approach to culturally responsive foreign language reading materials that is inclusive of all students will strengthen belonging and allow students to reap the full benefits from this methodology.

The research throughout this paper indicates that a culturally responsive approach promotes student linguistic development, sociocultural understanding, and better achievement on assessments. Due to the need in my district to increase equitable access to the middle school foreign language curriculum, a culturally responsive approach to reading materials is crucial. Culturally responsive reading materials in the foreign language classroom begin to bridge the gap that exists between minority students and success in the foreign language classroom. In order to ensure a better outlook for these students, the implementation of culturally responsive reading materials can increase their achievement and put them on a path of college and career readiness.

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Appendix

Table 1 *Professional Development Meeting Agenda*

Part	Topic	Description
I	What is culturally responsive teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will use prior knowledge to create a definition of culturally responsive education. With the help of research-backed definitions, teachers will refine their definition of culturally responsive education, if needed.
II	How do I get to know my students in order to tailor my reading materials to them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will review sample questions to ask students to get to know them from a culturally responsive standpoint.
III	Are my reading materials culturally responsive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will select a reading material they already use, or would like to use, in their classroom. Teachers will use a rubric to evaluate if the reading material is culturally responsive.
IV	Where can I find culturally responsive reading materials?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will review an accredited list of culturally responsive reading materials.
V	What does a lesson with culturally responsive reading materials look like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will review a sample lesson plan using a culturally responsive reading material from the afore mentioned list.
VI	How do I gauge how my students are responding to my culturally responsive reading materials?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers will review sample questions designed to get feedback from students regarding culturally responsive reading materials.

Figure 1 *Professional Development Voicethread*

This link is for a PowerPoint presentation with a voiceover explanation of the proposed professional development.

<https://voicethread.com/share/12801149/>

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Figure 2 *Sample Student Survey Questions*

1. What is your name? What do you prefer to be called?
2. Who do you live with?
3. What languages are spoken at home?
4. What helps you do your best in school?
5. What gets in the way of you doing your best in school?
6. What do you enjoy reading about?
7. What is one goal you have for this school year?

Note. These questions should be modified for the student population. For example, for ENL students, the teacher should seek appropriate modifications for students to be able to answer the questions (responding verbally, asking and responding using pictures, etc.).

Figure 3 *Scoring Guidelines*

The following criteria represent guidelines used to evaluate culturally responsive foreign language reading materials in Table 2.

Not exemplary: The reading material includes little to no evidence to support the claim of the statement. The reading material receives a score of negative two.

Unclear: It is not clear if the reading material includes evidence to support the claim of the statement. The reading material receives a score of negative one.

Exemplary: There is some evidence from the reading material to support the claim of the statement. Whether or not the reading material was designed to be culturally responsive, it still may be if it supports the statement's claim. The reading material receives a score of one.

Very Exemplary: There is an abundance of evidence from the reading material to support the claim of the statement. It is evident that the reading material was designed with a culturally responsive approach in mind. The reading material receives a score of two.

Note. The reading material can only receive one score for each statement.

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Table 2 *Culturally Responsive Rubric for Foreign Language Reading Materials*

Statement	Not Exemplary -2	Unclear -1	Exemplary +1	Very Exemplary +2
The author, main characters, and/or perspective of the reading material include people of diverse identities (race/ethnicity, gender, religion, and others if possible).				
The reading material depicts diverse ethnicities and nationalities are through the author, perspective, or the characters in the reading material. Not all Asian families are Chinese, not all Spanish-speaking families are from Mexico, not all African Americans are from Africa, etc.				
The reading material reflects different dialects – i.e. it does not primarily utilize the Castilian dialect of Spanish, but also reflects other dialects that speak the target language.				
The perspective of the reading material portrays people of diverse identities as assets rather than challenges or difficulties to be solved.				
The reading material does not convey negativity or animosity toward people of marginalized backgrounds through explicit or implicit stereotypes or insults.				
The reading material creates opportunities for students to utilize their prior knowledge and experience with a topic, not just react to the reading material.				
The reading material is either chosen, or supplemented with other materials, to reflect the cultures, traditions, backgrounds and interests of the students.				
Responses to the reading material include a range that could all be valid, given the diverse scope of student perspectives.				

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Table 3 *Score Interpretation*

Culturally Destructive	Culturally Insufficient	Emerging Awareness	Culturally Aware	Culturally Responsive
-10 to -6	-5 to -2	-1 to 3	4-7	8-10
The reading material likely reinforces stereotypes and portrays minority students in inferior or destructive ways. There is little to no diversity in authors, perspectives, dialects, and/or characters.	The reading material has culturally and racially unclear or inaccurate perspectives, dialects, and/or characters. Few perspectives, dialects, and/or characters are portrayed in a culturally and historically accurate way.	The reading material likely represents some groups in diverse and dynamic ways, but not all. Some perspectives, dialects, and/or characters are portrayed in culturally and historically accurate ways, while others are still depicted as stereotypes.	The reading material likely captures a satisfactory representation of diverse authors, perspectives, dialects, and/or characters, who are generally portrayed in accurate and dynamic ways.	The reading material likely captures a wide representation of dynamic authors, perspectives, dialects, and/or characters that are reflected in accurate and appropriate cultural and historical contexts.

Note. The scoring guidelines, rubric, and scoring interpretation charts were borrowed and modified from The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools’ Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard. This rubric was adapted and modified to fit the need of implementing culturally responsive reading materials in the middle school foreign language classroom. Adapted from J. Bryan-Gooden, M. Hester, & L. Q. Peoples (2019). *Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard*. New York: Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, New York University.

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Table 4 *Culturally Responsive Reading Materials (as awarded by the American Library Association)*

Award Title	Description of Award	Award Winning Titles and Authors	Synopsis of Award Winning Examples
Coretta Scott King	Highlights the experiences of African Americans	“Piecing Me Together” by Renée Watson	Watson pulls the reader into Jade's world by sharing Jade's love for the Spanish language and providing a different, yet necessary story of Black womanhood.
Pura Belpré	Highlights the experiences of Latinxs in the U.S.	“Return to Sender” by Julia Alvarez	After Tyler's father is injured in a tractor accident, his family is forced to hire migrant Mexican workers to help save their Vermont farm from foreclosure. Tyler is not sure what to make of these workers.
Arab American Book	Aims to preserve and advance the Arab community	“The January Children” by Safia Elhillo	Depicts displacement and longing while also questioning accepted truths about geography, history, nationhood, and home. The poems mythologize family histories until they break open, using them to explore aspects of Sudan’s history of colonial occupation, dictatorship, and diaspora. Several of the poems speak to the late Egyptian singer Abdelhalim Hafez, who addressed many of his songs to the <i>asmarani</i> – an Arabic term of endearment for a brown-skinned or dark-skinned person. Elhillo explores Arabness and Africanness and the tensions generated by a hyphenated identity in those two worlds.
Tomás Rivera Mexican Literature	Highlights the experiences of Mexican Americans	“They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems” by David Bowles	Tells the story of 12-year-old Güero, a Mexican-American starting seventh grade. He’s a reader, gamer and musician who runs with a squad of misfits like himself. Trusting in his family’s traditions, his accordion and his bookworm friends, Güero faces the school year with book smarts and a big heart.
American Indian Youth Literature	Includes writing and illustrations about American Indian youth	“The Wool of Jonesy” by Jonathan Nelson	Tells the first story of Jonesy the Sheep and his adventures out on the reservation. As Jonesy heads out to explore life after high school, he finds himself discovering and dreaming. The story gives a view of reservation life through the eyes of Jonesy.

Note. Awards and descriptions adapted from Boyd, F., Causey, L., & Galda, L. (2015). Culturally diverse literature. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(5), 378-387. Example titles and synopsis from Awards, Grants & Scholarships. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards>

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Table 5 *Sample Lesson Plan for Culturally Responsive Reading Material*

Book Title	“The January Children” by Safia Elhillo
Essential Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How do I define home? 2) How would I feel if I had to leave my home and move somewhere where the inhabitants do not speak my language?
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students will use poems to identify perspectives of refugees. 2) Students will identify target language words associated with the idea of home and refugees. 3) Students will use the target language to create a wordle highlighting important points from their poem.
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students will discuss essential questions (whole group, small group, or partners) 2) Teacher will provide brief synopsis of “The January Children” and clarify what it means to be a refugee. 3) Students will read poems from “The January Children.” Note: Students may read the same poem or the teacher may assign them different poems. 4) Students will summarize the perspective from the poem (what is the author or narrator trying to convey?). 5) Students will identify 8-12 key words from the poem that highlight the narrator or author’s perspective. 6) Using past vocabulary lists or a teacher-approved translator, students will translate the key words into the target language. 7) Students will create a creative word poster (wordle) with the target language words. Words that are most important (according to students) should be largest. Students should be prepared to explain why they chose the words they chose and why they made them big or small.
Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The teacher can use the wordles as formal assessment to determine student understanding of key points from the poem. 2) The teacher may listen to student responses to essential questions to determine prior knowledge/ comfort with the topic of refugees.
Modifications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) For students that struggle with reading comprehension, the teacher may create pre-set key words from poems for students to identify in the target language and put on their wordle. These students should be able to define why those words are important and determine how big the word should be depending upon their importance. 2) For students that struggle with reading, the teacher should read poems aloud and stop to discuss the poem with students. 3) For ENL students, the teacher should work with the ENL teacher to support the students’ linguistic development (word bank with translations, pictures for words, etc.).

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Figure 4 *Sample Questions Designed for Student Feedback*

- 1) What important points did you learn from this reading?
- 2) Did you connect with the main idea or main character? Why or why not?
- 3) What did you enjoy about this reading?
- 4) What did you *not* enjoy about this reading?
- 5) Would you like to read another story like this one? Why or why not?