

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

TITLE: Effectiveness of Equity in the Secondary Classroom

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DATE OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE: 08/02/2018

THE THESIS HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

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Equity in the Secondary Classroom

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Every school wants to be successful. They want rigorous courses that prepare students for college. Schools also want to provide career ready classes that will allow students skill-based training. It seems every school state in its mission and vision they want to create critical thinkers who are able to problem solve while possessing strong moral character. The ultimate goal is to engage students with their education in order to meet high expectations for academic, as well as, social development. The goals are admirable, but ultimately ignore small sections of the student body who are marginalized for to various reasons. These groups face adversity from existing educational practices that ask them to assimilate into mainstream culture while losing some parts of their identity and self-worth. Students who are already disengaged from the education process will be pushed aside as their skills suffer and the subject matter is more difficult to comprehend. The achievement gap represents the number of students who do not receive access to the equitable education, which is the original intent of schools.

There are many stories and studies which illustrate the inequality of current education systems. The multi-cultural classroom is a fact of life for urban schools while suburban schools experience a segregated population due to circumstances out of their control. By ignoring the needs of each individual school, the system is also ignoring the needs of individual students. Griner and Stewart succinctly address this in their work, *Addressing the achievement gap*. “The inequitable distribution of resources, the underachievement of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RCLED) students, and further, the disproportionate representation of RCELD students in programs serving students with special needs, provides evidence of how far

we have to realize a more just and equitable education for all of our students.” (Griner and Stewart 587) By not recognizing their failings, schools are unable to create practices which will move the institution away from the repetitive cycle which contributes to the achievement gap.

The perpetuated educational disservice needs to be addressed. However, before it can be solved, it needs to be better understood. Hazel Markus asks the simple question, “What kind of person will not just survive but thrive in the twenty-first century?” (*Clash! 8 cultural conflicts that make us who we are*) Schools begin this process by creating a mission and vision statement. Each school needs to generate a mission that best fits the needs of its students. All too often schools focus on the standard of critical thinkers and communicators while ignoring their own student populations. What about the needs of the RCELD students at a school? Yes, they need to be able to create original thoughts. However, there is also a need to address their more specific needs, individualized needs of language acquisition or cultural acceptance.

Administrators and educators need to create ways to create a school environment that is academically engaging while also being culturally relevant. They need to increase connection to the curriculum and also be meeting the needs of each individual student. Equitable solutions will appear when the focus of the staff is to meet the needs of all students, not simply those students who are already on track to succeed. They will remove the predictability of success or failure that is currently associated with any social or cultural factor and create a true educational experience that can benefit each student.

Purpose

Schools and their leaders must address the fact their schools are more than white and middle-class in population and learning styles. The different groups deserve the opportunity for a well-rounded and purposely created rigorous education. The purpose of this study revolves

around two basic concepts. The first is what equitable education looks like, what it involves, and what it needs to succeed. One can examine what has been implemented in classrooms, through an equitable lens, in order to close the achievement gap. There are successful programs and frameworks in which to emulate and expand depending on the needs of the school. There are all sorts of additional inputs that need to be calculated along the way, including teachers understanding the needs of their students and creating a strong connection. According to Griner and Stewart, “the lack of student-teacher connections, led by the culture divide between many schools and the communities in which they are situated, continues to overwhelm the educational community.” (Griner and Stewart 588) Those teacher-student connections will form the strong foundation with which schools can build upon in order to close the achievement gap.

The second is to examine how equitable practices can be placed in the classroom and create a more personalized learning experience for each student. Linda Darling-Hammond discusses the solutions in her article, *What matter most*. Her work focuses on practices which focus on improving teacher training and quality. “Clearly, if students are to achieve high standards, we can expect no less from their teachers and from other educators.” (Darling-Hammond 173) With an emphasis on teacher training in personalized learning and equitable practices, schools are investing in infrastructure to allow current and future students the unattainable success currently experienced by RCLED students. The work already being completed in this area must be examined in order to learn best practices, as well as ignore those suggestions that are not as beneficial.

The disparities in education are vast and complex. One study by Pedro Noguera examines the differences between immigrant students of color and minority students already living in the United States in his work, *Excellence and equity in education*. Surprisingly, recent

immigrants performed better than other minorities on standardized tests, demonstrating a level of learning which surpasses students who have been enrolled in American schools for their entire lives. “Having not been socialized to see themselves as inferior, immigrant students are less likely to resist aspects of schooling that require conformity and assimilation.” (Noguera 26) The attitude towards education by immigrants is not yet corrupted by the current education system while minority students enter American schools believing in themselves. Clearly something is wrong if the student’s schools are trying to serve do not believe they can succeed. Equitable solutions need to be incorporated if schools are going to meet the needs of all students.

As schools, districts, states, and even the country discuss ways to close the achievement gap, the marginalized groups they are hoping to address are still falling behind in most standardized tests. In the article, *Teach it, don’t preach it*, Canning and Harakiewicz address the gap by discussing utility value education. The theory behind their work is to create meaning in the content and then find ways for the students to attribute a value to the content. One of their studies involved having students write journal entries about what a future career in the field would look like and how they see themselves in that role. It’s a novel approach, and probably not practical for many subject areas. However, it does create a meaningful interaction between the student and subject matter they are learning. By creating these types of reflections, educators are connecting students to the subject matter which begins the process of personalized learning. Self-reflection about what they already know and what they will need assistance in learning allows students to take a leadership role in their education.

It is this type of buy-in students need in order to close the gap. Teachers need to be trained in ways to allow students to reflect on their growth and also the skills necessary to reach their goals. It is not a task that can be handled alone. Teachers need to collaborate and discuss

best practices, administrators need to be trained in order to support their staff, and professional development needs to be a focus if the school is going to find ways to reach all students.

Preview of literature

Educational research is plentiful. There are constantly studies being published analyzing and summarizing various methods of improving education. Many of these focus areas are on content and instruction but fail to address the main goal of education, student learning. In order to best serve the needs of students, a review of literature was conducted to gather more information about personalized learning, differentiated instruction, and equitable education. By examining traditional and innovative programs created for motivating students to be more connected with their curriculum, it is possible to design equitable instruction in the classroom.

One factor yet to be mentioned is the disparity in funding schools. Since most schools with the largest achievement gaps also experience the least amount of funding, throwing money at the problem is not a viable solution. The available funds need to be allocated with intent. Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Stanford University, has written extensively about education reform. The problem of funding in education is not unsolvable when there are, “job-embedded approaches that allow teachers to work with experts and peers on curriculum and teaching strategies they develop and refine over time. It also includes strategies for principals to learn how to create collegial workplaces that support teachers’ abilities to better understand their students’ learning needs and adjust their teaching.” It is the job of administration to train teachers about equitable education, encourage and support Professional Learning Communities (PLC), and devote funds for teachers to attend conferences and workshops to learn the necessary skills.

Another area which leads to the achievement gap are cultural differences. Children learn in many different ways. There are auditory learners, visual observers, tactile experimenters, and

physically active students. Most qualified teachers are aware of these differences and incorporate each of these strategies in their lessons on a daily basis. Understanding cultural differences is necessary in today's diverse classroom. Schools are characterized by having students from around the world, speaking different languages, and having different cultural experiences. All teachers hear about the work of Lev Vygotsky and his theories on sociocultural development and scaffolding. The areas blend together in the classroom and teachers rely on scaffolding in order to create the desired development of the child. "Vygotsky states that the child acquires knowledge through contacts and interactions with people as the first step, then later assimilates and internalises this knowledge adding his personal value to it." (Turuk) If that child is unable to understand the teacher and cannot internalise the knowledge, learning will not happen. Teachers need to be aware of the cultural influences of each child in order to make authentic connections and allow the students to create their own understanding of the material.

By individually connecting with their students, teachers are able to assimilate the information into individualized mini-lessons that allow learning to take place for the student. Equitable instruction, or giving a student the information they need, rather than teaching to the entire class, will provide the necessary material and interaction for each student. This classroom, personalized to each student's needs, will allow for growth and a closing of the achievement gap. In the work, *Observations of Effective Teacher-Student Interactions in Secondary School Classrooms*, the authors research addresses this topic. "Classrooms characterized by a positive emotional climate, with sensitivity to adolescent needs and perspectives, use of diverse and engaging instructional learning formats, and a focus on analysis and problem solving were associated with higher levels of student achievement." (Allen, Mikami, et al) The positive

climate created by providing culturally relevant instruction will allow for students to personally engage with the content.

The final area of classroom intervention discovered in the literature review surrounds effective classroom strategies. Creating a classroom where the focus is student learning instead of teacher instruction is an important first step. Faubert states, “Increasingly the concern is to minimize the effects of inequity through reforms in policy and practice.” Policy is not a quick fix nor something that can be addressed on a daily basis in the classroom. Practice is adjustable, needs-sensitive, and provides for differentiated services as needed by each student. Classroom practice is the easiest way to create equity in the classroom. By bringing in culturally relevant content, using PLCs to guide instruction, attended conferences to network, and making the focus of the classroom equity, a teacher is able to provide differentiated instruction for each student.

The practices which will be changed in the classroom need to be specific. The research shows (along with common sense) that changing practices without a clear path or plan will not result in the desired outcome. The changes in practice must have intent and direction. The intended outcome of an equitable classroom is for students to receive the necessary instruction for the student to master the skills necessary for learning to take place. What are those skills? It varies for each student and thus personalized learning becomes the practice which needs to be implemented. Teachers need to know each student's level in the subject area. For example, if the course is English, knowing the student's reading level is imperative to their outcome. The classroom practice needs to get the student reading closer to grade level while not sacrificing content. “If personalized interventions can be introduced that build student resilience, then attention is moved away from the student's deficits towards building student confidence and ability. This shift in focus is associated with improved student engagement and reduced levels of

student dropout.” (Faubert) A simple solution would be find readings which are appropriate for that student’s reading ability while keeping the content the same as the other students in the class.

Preview of Methodology

Seeing as how the basis of research for this question revolves around student data, there is a quantitative presentation of the data. The research consists of tracking student learning over the course of a long-term project and comparing the data to a control group of students who will not receive the same personalized instruction as the research group. The pre and post-tests were administered and analyzed in order to track and monitor growth. Since the results of the tests were analyzed and compared empirically to other sections of classes, the driving methodology of research is analytical-empirical. The research project is an objective series of skills in which each student assesses their own personal level of mastery in the research process. Their results are broken down into smaller sections of a research process: research, citations, and writing. Each students’ results were measured and those students were placed into groups of direct instruction for the necessary research components.

This research method, like most empirical-analytical approaches, focused on results. Where the students began is important for the personalized instruction each student received. Remember the research question is how equitable instruction improves student performance in the secondary classroom. The result of equitable instruction were analyzed carefully and completely. Each students’ growth was measured according to the tests. The results of the post-test demonstrate how learning occurred for each student in the research group. Comparing the research group to the control groups demonstrates the techniques being researched are successful in closing the gap. Completing a research project will teach students the skills necessary to write

a research paper, that is one of the goals of completing a project of this magnitude and breadth. However, if proper attention is not applied to those students who do not fully understand each aspect of the paper, the gap will not close, it will remain static. Applying equitable instruction to those students who need assistance in the process will allow growth to occur and the gap to be closed.

There is also a qualitative aspect to the research. The research will be conducted over an eight-week project and there are ample opportunities to adjust instruction for what is needed. Personalized learning is not a one-time procedure. There need to be constant communication between teacher and student. These discussions will allow the teacher to ascertain if the student is moving forward. Conversations with each student will allow for more instruction where necessary.

The project also allows for formative assessments to also be used to provide instruction. The students turned in a working thesis and this provided an opportunity to assist students in writing a thesis statement. Students also needed to perform their own research and locate evidence to use in their papers. When students struggled with finding quotes or data, the instructor was able to assist in finding sources to use, or even best practices in finding sources. The writing process itself provided individualized opportunities to improve writing. The students turned in an outline in which they roughly used evidence to prove their working thesis. The teacher was able to help students understand how their evidence supported, or not, their thesis. This interpretive analysis is a qualitative way to work with students individually along the learning process, instead of simply measuring growth at the end of the research.

Significance of Study

This study attempts to analyze equity instruction and its effects on student learning. Each student enters a class with a set of skills and abilities, some at grade level, some not. It is the goal of each teacher to move students forward in the learning process during their time with them. Common Core rubrics for English Language Arts are a useful tool to assess where a student's abilities lie and where those students should be at the end of the course. The research and activities of this study were not intended to fix past mistakes or missed opportunities. The purpose was to guide instruction so each student develops those skills which are necessary for other classes, college, and beyond.

It is much easier to blame the past experiences of students and the failings of other teachers or schools. Ladson-Billings states, "we lack complex understandings of how individual, family, community, school, and societal factors interact to create school failure for some students." (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This sentiment alludes to the difficulties in providing adequate cultural instruction to coincide with academic knowledge. Neither can appear in a vacuum and need to be addressed throughout all education processes. However, today's instruction must be generated with these failures in mind so the needs of each student can be addressed.

Educational policy and practices must be focused on providing equitable education. Noquera sums it up perfectly, "even with changes intended to promote equity under way, it will undoubtedly take some time before significant reductions in the achievement gap are evident." This does not mean the challenge should be met with frustration and blaming. Instead, now that the gap can be identified, it is the responsibility of the teachers and instructors to address those issues and find creative ways to close the gap. New instructional practices, personalized learning, and equitable processes can be accomplished in the classroom daily.

This process was executed in the research study. Students, of all writing levels and learning abilities, participated in writing a research paper. During the eight week process, each student received specific instruction according to their ability. Past frustrations or failings were addressed then used as a learning tool, not a crutch or excuse. The results, addressed in later chapters, display a movement along the continuum toward mastery. There was no loss of instruction for those students who already possessed the necessary skills. Instead, all students completed the research paper, learned necessary skills, and are prepared for the next step in their educational journey.

Conclusion

In some aspects, the current state of education is better than ever. Technology allows for teachers and students to share in successes and best practices through social media and online forums. Creating and sharing lessons is as simple as a few clicks of the mouse. Blogs brag about ‘a-ha’ moments and encourage others to participate to post their own. Students can learn basic skills and concepts by watching tutorial videos on numerous websites and mediums. There is no lack of information. Cultural awareness and character education are also prevalent in education and many schools make holistic learning part of their mission and vision statement, demonstrating the importance of educating the student in entirety, not simply in one subject area.

On the other hand, educational research clearly demonstrates the achievement gap for numerous sub-groups of students. English Language Learners, low socio-economic groups, and Special Education students are but a few of the populations who suffer from the wide achievement gap. The factors for these failings are numerous: financing, resources, family structure, support, and qualified teachers are a brief listing. Many researchers are investigating and writing about the problems while fewer are writing about the solutions. It is the job of

administrators and teachers to learn about the achievement gap while promoting change in their schools to address the failings.

It is the work of teachers, on a day to day basis, to close the gaps. A journal article does not fix the change, just as an Ikea instruction booklet does not build the dresser. It is the work of the teacher to read the article and generate change in their classroom. Equitable instruction is labor intensive, it demands absolute adherence to the principle of providing what each student needs, when they need it.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

Abstract

The achievement gap in education is recognized as any gap of learning between groups of students. The majority of concern regarding the achievement gap stems from the distance between white students and their African American and Hispanic peers. However, the gap could also be for any grouping of students where a difference in achievement is noticed. There are many studies about why the gap occurs and even more research in finding ways to close the gap. Before results can be experienced in any school environment the reasons for the gap need to be examined. Some of the gaps are easily understood, such as with Special Education students or English Language Learners (ELL). Others are harder to diagnose like those for disadvantaged students.

Equality has been a goal in education for decades. Since the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education*, equality has been legislated into classrooms. Unfortunately, this has not resulted in widespread integrated classrooms. According to the New York Times Magazine, 87% of black students in New York City attend segregated schools (defined by less than 10% white student population). The same article also stated that in three states, California, New York, and Texas, 50% of Hispanic students attend a segregated school. The numbers continue to illustrate the issue when it comes to resources and experienced teachers. Across the nation, school districts with a majority of students of school color receive 15% less per student funding. (Yin) Schools with high percentages of black or Latino students are more than twice as likely to have first-year teachers in the classroom.

With the problem of segregation still being experienced across the country, equality is not being realized. The issue of equality is not to be ignored or forgotten. Instead, the movement has been towards equity in the classroom. "An equitable education system can redress the effect of broader social and economic inequalities. In the context of learning, it allows individuals to take full advantage of education and training irrespective of their background." (Faubert 2012) If instituted correctly, equity in the classroom can overcome the inequalities which are prevalent in society. According to the report, *No More Failures*, equity can be viewed through two separate aspects: fairness and inclusion. (Field, Kuczera, and Pont, 2007) Inclusion refers to making certain all students receive the educational basics with the necessary structure to help them reach their potential. Fairness, like equality, is designed to prevent any outside factors such as socio-economic or ethnic origins from being an obstacle.

As equity is a newer topic in education conversations, the amount of research and results is limited. However, the research question remains one that can be examined and discussed: With the goal of equity in place, what are the best practices in making a classroom inclusive and fair? In order to examine this issue, this chapter will focus on three areas: supporting school leadership, fostering a supportive school climate and culture focused on learning, and ensuring effective classroom learning strategies. Each section will discuss the research that has been done in creating a more equitable school and create a more inclusive and fair classroom.

Supporting School Leadership

Schools have little to no control over most of the issues that make the rounds in a 24-hour news cycle. While society bemoans the lack of funding, complains about unqualified teachers, notices achievement gaps, and expresses concerns with the use of technology, the school has very little to do with those educational problems. A school and district are able to control the

leadership and direction of the leadership at each school site and this needs to be the first area of change in regards to creating equity in the classroom. School leadership is able to generate policy and programs which support and build low performing students.

Good intentions and a culturally diverse leadership group do not alone make for positive results in equity education. The same can be said for the negative and that lack of success should not be confused with indifference or a lack of effort on the part of the school. The argument between success and failure needs to be set aside in order for real educational transformation to begin. Strong leadership recognizes that inequity has many different causes and works to diagnose and treat those sources. In a study of Berkeley High School (BHS), the leadership team wanted to better understand how one school with 40% white and 40% African American enrollment was able to create an educational experience that was so different for each ethnic group. The leadership team broke down the data of course enrollment by ethnicity. The study found that 87% of the students enrolled in honors geometry, a prerequisite course necessary for completing A-G requirements were White. Of the other hand, new enrollees placed in the lowest pre-Algebra course were 83% African American. (Noguera 32) Once this pattern was discovered, BHS was able to address this concern with their counselors and parents and change their course registration process in order to create an equitable solution.

A strong school leader cannot hide behind the data it is wishing to combat. If there are glaring issues, easily viewed by the school's stakeholders, the information needs to be addressed. Noguera's study took this one step further and broke down the results by zip code and GPA. They created a map which displayed each zip code of each area that feeds into BHS. They color-coded the map according to average GPA of the students in that zip code. Not surprisingly the data showed the lowest GPAs in the poorer, African American and Latino areas. (Noguera 33)

This easily understood data can then be used by the administration to look at more data like attendance rates, grades in English versus Math classes, discipline reports. By breaking down the numbers and asking the difficult questions, school leaders can confront the issues of inequity faced in our schools. "Disadvantaged schools tend to reinforce students' socio-economic inequalities." (Mullis, Martin, and Foy, 2008) There is no entity more able to change this conception than the school's leadership.

Diagnosing the problems is only a start of a strong and effectual teacher. By setting high expectations for students and teachers to succeed, administration influences student achievement. "Effective school leadership is identified as crucial to student outcomes, second only to the quality of the teacher." (Augustine et al, 2009) What are the areas of focus for administrators? Pont, Nusche, and Moorman describe three: developing teacher quality, financial and human resource management, and collaborating with other schools. It is important to have a clear plan for improving performance at a school site. As mentioned by the Augustine article, teaching is the most important factor in education. Thus, quality teachers are imperative. Strong school leaders need to focus most of their time and energy on improving the quality of teacher at the school site. While recruiting new, experienced teachers are always helpful, it is not always possible in a low performing school with a history of setbacks. Exemplary schools foster effective teaching that makes it possible to overcome the problems of disadvantages. School leaders also need training in regards to financial and human resource deficiencies since they most likely are former classroom teachers. The classroom environment is very different from the front office. While classroom management and developing a strong lesson plan are essential in the classroom, they are not as relevant for administrators. However, it is important for them to know how to request funds, manage ineffectual staff members, and balance a budget. This is not

something that should be left to the devices of the Principals on their own. Instead, school districts need to devote lots of time and training to new leaders in order to help them in their new roles. Finally, by networking, school leaders can support each other in the improvement process while mentoring new administrators and guiding them towards best practices at other sites.

Fostering a Supportive School Climate and Culture Focused on Learning

Cultural differences outside of the classroom result in students starting behind grade level, feeling ignored or underrepresented, or left behind entirely. By bringing cultural awareness to the classroom, students can feel more connected to the school, which in turn encourages motivation. This includes building connections and relationships with students so they trust the teacher and instruction. Building these relationships means learning and understanding what each student needs in terms of equity, and creating a modified curriculum which will support that student and help them to learn.

Cultural awareness

In order to change the culture in education and address issues of equity and equality, the differences in culture need to be addressed inside and outside of the classroom. For students who have a learning disability, they are provided an individualized education plan, a case manager, and yearly progress meetings. For a student who is learning the English Language, they are 'sheltered' in smaller classes and receive specific lessons in order to help reclassify them as fluent in the English language. There are no such support structures for students who fall behind or for students who come to our schools from a low-socioeconomic background.

Cultural awareness is understanding the differences between themselves and people from other backgrounds. Yet, that does not seem to be enough. Cultural awareness needs to be extended to also mean understanding the differences and respecting those differences. "Teachers

who want to understand... culture must recognize this heterogeneity of cultural experience." (Ladson-Billings 2014) By allowing our students to express themselves in authentic and personal ways, we are allowing our students to take ownership of their learning. Just like there is not only one way to learn a new concept or skill, there is not one cultural history that needs to be examined and studied in classes.

While there have been more discussions regarding equity in education and cultural awareness at the school site, there are few concrete examples of best practices. "Schools and teachers who have adopted a culturally responsive pedagogy have the ability to act as change agents in their schools to help bridge the divide and encourage more equitable schooling experiences." (Griner 2013) What does that look like? "Students who concentrate on learning activities, avoid disruptive behaviors and adhere to the rules of the school generally get better grades and perform better on standardized tests." (Wang and Holcombe, 2010) But how can we do this? Engage students in the school environment and school culture. Students who are involved in school activities, clubs, and sports are more likely to perform better in school. As educators, it is imperative to connect students with the school. Whether it is finding students playing soccer during lunch and getting them to participate with the soccer team or seeing a student reading during recess and connecting them with a group of students who share a similar interest in that genre of book, each educator needs to commit to helping each student find something with which they are connected to at school.

The final way in which a school can address the cultural issues is by being responsive to the needs of culturally diverse students. The school needs to generate a questionnaire which gathers data and information regarding the school's current ability to be aware of the different cultures on campus. Once the specific data is available to the school's leaders, they can break

down the numbers and determine where changes can be made, policies implemented, and awareness needs to be addressed. One such tool is provided in Marzano's High-Reliability Schools. There are many surveys provided to order to determine areas of need. The level 1 tests provide information about cultural awareness and diversity.

Building relationships between teacher, student, and community

Building relationships are important in every school. Teachers and administrators stand at the forefront of the relationship and it is their role and responsibility to engage in discussion with all stakeholders. The conversations that occur in and around a school campus are important. Possibly the most important area of change needed in order to bring about equitable change in schools is in the relationship between the school and community. If a school is to serve the needs of the stakeholders, it needs to understand the stakeholders. This can occur in many different ways, but however it occurs, it needs to be a priority. Teachers need to get to know their students. Teachers need to communicate with parents. Administrators need to be visible and approachable. Office help needs to be welcoming and helpful. While all of this seems obvious, it is not always at the forefront of educational research. An anecdote overheard at a convention portrays the idea perfectly. An African American Principal was working on changing the culture at her school site and making progress with the African American student population but having difficulty seeing the same results for her Latino students. In digging deeper to find a possible reason, she discovered a glaring oversight on her part. Language. Report cards were sent home in English, attendance calls were made in English, mailers were sent home in English, all school meetings were held in English. It was a quick fix to change the language and provide interpreters and the change in results for Latino students was rapid and began to mirror the results of the African American students. It was not that the Latino parents did not want to participate in their

children's education, it was that they were not allowed to. When the change occurred, so did the results.

To that extent, teachers are the first line of support in the relationship between students and school. "Students, especially disadvantaged students, learn more and have fewer disciplinary problems when they feel that their teachers are dedicated to their success. Perceived support from teachers may also reduce the attainment gap between minority and non-minority students in some cases." (Wang and Holcombe, 2010) By having conversations with their students, teachers let students know they are valued and appreciated in the learning environment.

The last area of improvement in affecting change in school culture is building relationships with parents and community members. Griner addresses this in her work, *Addressing the achievement gap and disproportionality through the use of culturally responsive teaching practices*. Culturally responsive teaching practices center around inviting parents and community members to the school in order to help create and guide curriculum and instruction. "At the first meeting I attended, I realized that I was one of the only people that looked like me in that meeting." (Griner 2013) This summarizes the problems with having a multicultural school environment but not having multicultural instructional practices. Parents should be used regularly. Some of these are being instituted already through School Site Council, PTA meetings, and LCAP goals. However, it is not enough.

Ensuring Effective Classroom Strategies

The final area of focus discovered through the Literature Review has been effective classroom strategies. While there are many different ideas as to how to incorporate equity in the classroom, some are easier for schools to accomplish while others call for more policy from state

and local governments. As the role of this review is to provide feedback to school sites, not districts, the suggestions listed below are ones a school can utilize with minimal assistance.

There are fundamental differences in how students learn. The obvious ones are learning styles, engagement, emotional health, and interest in the subject. Some of the underlying concerns for learning are social and cultural backgrounds. Due to these differences, each student learns at a different pace and teachers need to adjust instruction accordingly. In a high performing school, these differences do not pose a significant obstacle to instruction. In a low performing school, the gaps are larger and more complex.

Specific classroom instruction and assessments can be beneficial to disadvantaged students. (Faubert 2012) The students we are focusing on improving reading levels and math scores are able to make significant gains through these methods. Thus teachers need to possess many different methods of implementing their curriculum. Some ideas for improving this are a Learner-centered environment, structured and well-designed lessons, and social, collaborative learning. (Dumont, Instance, and Benavides, 2010)

A learner-centered environment is in opposition to the usual direct instruction of most classrooms. Teachers pose a problem and allow students time to find a solution on their own time and in their own way. This allows each student to use their strongest skills while working with the material in order to learn the content. Faubert's research shows that direct instruction works when students possess the basic content and skills but

Structured and well-designed lessons are an obvious part of every viable curriculum. However, it's extremely important for disadvantaged students in order to allow students to work between direct instruction and learner-centered lessons. This is also used in the next two strategies.

Collaborative learning has been around for decades with mixed success. "Co-operative learning methods, which involve the teacher placing students within the same class in small, temporary groups with mixed abilities focusing on tasks that require them to rely on each other's skills, tend to work equally well for all types of students." (Dumont, Istance, and Benavides, 2010) The research shows the high learners gain as much as the lower achievers, but only when heterogeneous groups are made by the teacher.

Another aspect to ensuring effective classroom strategies is to have high expectations. "Schools need to set high expectations for what every child can achieve, despite their levels of disadvantage and the achievement levels which they enter the school." (Hamre and Pianta, 2005) Too often the bar is set low for students who are not achieving. It is almost a condescending way of viewing struggling students. This does not allow students the structure or content necessary to close the gap, instead, it continues the problem without providing solutions. Linking modified curriculum, to student-centered instruction, and viable formative assessment is a challenge. However, as mentioned earlier, structured and well-planned lessons will allow the teacher to push students.

Conclusion

Modern technology allows students to share ideas and pictures on social media, save their work to the cloud, and watch videos from around the globe. It allows educators to immediately find current events to help reinforce their lesson and make meaning to show real-world examples to the ideas discussed in the classroom. Parents are able to examine test results and read about the effectiveness of the schools their children attend. Yet, there are still a growing number of students who are not receiving an equal education. While the equality issue is serious and must be solved, the problem of equity is one that can be addressed by school leaders and communities.

The research reveals specific methods administration can take in order to address the inequity which results in disadvantaged students not being able to succeed in the classroom.

Schools and districts can implement specific changes to affect change. The strategies and programs described in the research articles listed above all create various ways to provide equity for our students - giving them what they need when they need it. Whether the student needs assistance with reading skills or relating the current curriculum to their futures, students will succeed when they are engaged in their learning. These change agents are easily overlooked when added to the stresses of lesson planning, grading, meetings, tests, and emails. However, as Griner mentions, if the objectives are the focus of instructional planning and the mission/vision of the school, the change agents can be used successfully.

Each school is different, just like every child. It is the responsibility of the administration and teachers to determine which factors would work best for the students at their site. Once the students who are falling behind are recognized, the achievement gap can begin to close by creating a plan that best suits the needs of those students. I doubt one plan alone with generating the desired change, just like one teacher alone cannot. However, a school working together can certainly make the learning process more equitable.

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Chapter Three

Methodology

Education reform has always been an ongoing process with various stakeholders weighing in on the best options and desired outcomes. Most of the major reform efforts have been in response to a previous policy. *Brown v. The Board of Education* was a landmark decision because it ended the previous policy of segregation allowed under the Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The era of tracking students along a college or labor path was met with a college readiness plan for all students. No Child Left Behind was a policy put in place in order to determine if schools were meeting those needs by testing state standards. Once those standards were determined to be subjective rather than objective, Common Core was introduced to the nation. Smaller education reforms have followed a similar back and forth pendulum such as how the use of phonics in elementary schools was met by whole-language reading lessons. Over the years, English Language Learners have been moved into sheltered English classes, blended classes, and back again.

While the trendy education topics and reforms will continue to enter our classrooms and then ‘graduate’ a number of years later, the focus of instruction should never be forgotten: learning. Education reform has always focused on instructional practice. There have not been major reform efforts which focus on student learning. The learning has been a by product of the changes surrounding the school, administration, classroom, or teaching style. By changing the focus of education reform to the students and learning, the emphasis of reform moves toward the desired audience, the students themselves.

Equity in education is the process of providing the student with what they need in order to achieve. Attention is placed on individual students and their specific needs, whatever that may

be. Obvious recipients are Special Education students and English Language Learners while less obvious are those students lacking necessary skills or those who need a modified curriculum.

The topic of this thesis is finding an answer to this research question: What does equity look like in the classroom and what are the best practices in order to ensure student learning?

Design

The research performed in order to answer the research question will be primarily quantitative with qualitative formative assessment throughout the process. The basis for the research will be to understand the role of the teacher in impacting student learning. All students will be participating in a research paper process which will take up most of the fourth quarter of the school year.

Initial data will be collected through a pre-test to determine where students are at the beginning of the project. The questions of the pre-test will center around three areas of the research writing process: research, incorporating quotes and data into a research paper, and the writing process itself. The students will then be placed in groups according to their comfort level revealed through the survey. The students will receive direct instruction in order to assist them in better understanding the research and writing process to help them gain the skills necessary to write a five to seven page research paper on American History.

There are sections of the course being taught by various teachers on campus who will not be participating in the direct instruction portion but will be having their students complete the research project. They will be given the pre-test and the post-test to determine their growth during the project. The results of the control classes will be compared to the research class in order to determine if the growth in skills and content is greater for those who received personalized learning.

There will be information and collected through readings and interviews in order to establish best practices, successful classroom strategies, and other forms of differentiated instruction where the students are able to learn the material according to their needs instead of the “one-size fits all” direct instruction classroom.

Reading research papers and conducting interviews will be the final source of information. The students will be completing various assignments during the process, including a working thesis, an outline with concrete details and writer commentary linking the quotes to the thesis, a rough draft, and the final draft. The students will be able to demonstrate growth and mastery over time and the teacher will be able to provide specific feedback of the writing process in order to advance them along and moving the students towards mastery.

Participants

The main site for research will be Eastlook High School in the Ourway Unified School District. It is a suburb of San Diego and is regularly ranked as one of the best public high schools in California. The demographics of the school are diverse and will allow information to be studied for various ethnic groups along with socioeconomic groups.

The participants for this study will be from the 11th Grade U.S. History students at Eastlook High School. U.S. History is a required course for graduation so each student will be enrolled in U.S. History during their junior year. This course was also chosen because of the age level and experience of working with juniors. They have attended the school for two years and are familiar with policies and procedures.

The other reason to use 11th grade students at Eastlook High School is because all U.S. History students participate in the Junior Research Paper. This project allows students to pick a topic in American History and research the effectiveness of its legacy. The students are

instructed to pick a topic between the end of World War II and the terrorist attack of 9/11. The personalized learning aspect of the research project lends itself to equity practices because each student will need various levels of support in order to write the paper. Some students will need assistance in finding sources, others will need help writing a thesis, while some will struggle to locate evidence that supports the thesis.

Setting

Eastlook High School is a newer school in the suburbs of a major Southern California city. It is a comprehensive school with over 2300 students attending and participating in normal high school activities including varsity sports, over 70 on campus clubs and organizations, and a rigorous A-G curriculum which graduates over 99% of those students who attend. The demographics are diverse. Table 3.1 shows the demographics of the students at Eastlook High School.

Table 3.1: Eastlook Student Demographics

Student Group	Total Enrollment	Percent of Enrollment
Black or African American	43	1.8
American Indian	6	0.2
Asian	679	29.4
Filipino	181	7.8
Hispanic or Latino	227	9.8
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	11	0.4

White	1,038	45
Two or more races	121	5.2

These numbers are from the School Accountability Report Card for the 2016-2017 school year.

The report was published at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. Other demographic information is contained in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Other Subgroups of Note

Student Group	Total Enrollment	Percent of Enrollment
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	295	12.8
English Learners	76	3.3
Students with Disabilities	219	9.5

The school is on a fast paced 4x4 schedule. This schedule has students take four courses at a time for a term. The courses are on a block schedule and meet every day for an hour or more. The students are randomly assigned to the teachers based on period availability and the needs of other course requirements. This random sampling of students will provide convenient quantitative and qualitative evidence and data.

The school has a built in thirty minute block of instruction called Wolverine time, which meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This time is to be used at the student discretion for make-up work, tutoring, or a study hall. Students are free to choose which classes to attend unless the teacher determines a student needs extra help in which case the student can be mandated to go to a specific room. This time will be used for some of the direct instruction necessary during the research portion.

Instrument(s)

The initial research will be performed through a pre-test. The process of the research paper will be broken down into sub-units and then questions will be asked of the students regarding their own level of mastery in each area. The sub-areas will be: research, note-taking, thesis writing, locating evidence, and writing commentary. There will be a scale of 1-4 with 1 being no level of comfort and 4 being mastery. This scale is used so there is not a middle number; students must admit they are better or worse than average. Each student's results will be dissected in order to determine the area of need for each student. The instructor will be given the information and able to use it in order to provide differentiated instruction for the groups of students who need assistance in each area of the research paper.

The post-test will be given after the papers have been turned in and graded. The students will receive the same questions and then rate their own growth over the process. There will also be written comments available in order to allow the students to write about their own growth mindset and perceived learning during the process, along with their reflections on the process. The comments will be conducted of willing students who will remain anonymous.

The same pre and post-test will be administered to 3 other sections of the US History course. The exact same questions will be used, along with the same opportunity to provide comments on the process. The data from these control groups will result in more students taking the test who did not participate in the personalized learning environment. However, the student populations are the same since the courses are populated randomly via the registration process. None of the courses in the experiment are honors or Advanced Placement, nor are any of the sections specifically designed for English Language Learners. There will be a small sampling of special education students, a few English Language Learners, and other mixed demographics,

but the numbers in each section are within a couple students so there should not be an outside influence which could skew the results. There will need to be data collected from the teachers about how the personalized and differentiated instruction worked for each of them. Interviews will be conducted in order to get specific areas of success and other areas of improvement.

Procedures

The person leading this process is an insider at Eastlook High School. They are an 11th Grade teacher with 1 section of U.S. History. There are other teachers involved, so the data and research was not only conducted by the insider. The insider status allowed the researcher to easily understand the process of the Junior Research Paper. The teachers who are conducting the courses are all colleagues, participated in a grade level Professional Learning Community, and have worked together for a couple years so the conversations will be open and honest. Another participant in the process, though not in the data collection, will be the librarian who assists each class. The librarian presents instruction regarding primary versus secondary sources, how to use the databases provided by the school, and how to use the MLA format for writing the paper. As the librarian performs the same tasks for all sections of the course, the instruction performed will be identical for each section.

The research paper will be introduced to all students at the same time. They will be given a timeline of the necessary submissions, due dates, and final draft. The main areas of focus for the paper are research, analysis, citations, and writing. Each step will be introduced to the students over the course of the project. Using the data from the pre-test, those students who report results of not fully understanding the process will be placed in a smaller group of students who will receive more specific direct instruction from the teacher.

Students in the research group who score an average of 2 or less on the pre-test will receive direct instruction during class time and Wolverine Time. The groups will be based on the areas addressed in the paper: research, analysis, citations, and writing. As these areas are unrolled to the entire class over the course of the project, those students needing additional help will meet with the teacher. When the extra-sessions are completed, there will be brief discussions with each student in order to determine their comfort level with the current step of the process and encourage them to attend another review session if they do not understand the process or need extra assistance.

The goal of these meetings will be to provide individual and equitable instruction to each student. Detailed classroom instruction is beneficial to students. (Faubert 2012) One of the common complaints among teachers is that a previous class, school, or curriculum has resulted in a student being less than proficient in a subject area. The mind set of teachers needs to shift from lamenting a lack of knowledge or skills and move towards teaching those students the skills they are lacking. This shift in mentality, from blame to support, is essential in a classroom where each student possesses a different level. An equitable classroom is designed to manage this problem and create solutions which assist the students, instead of having students remain behind in skills and knowledge.

The process of teaching the Junior Research Paper will mostly continue without interventions or other changes. Once the papers have been turned in the post-test will be distributed to each student who took the pre-test. There will be available comment sections in order for the participants to list their thoughts of the process and explain any changes they experienced during the equitable learning strategies. There will also be an opportunity for students to volunteer for interviews in order to create a narrative surrounding the process.

The final step will be a debrief with the participating teachers. This will include analyzing the data, viewing student responses, and conversing about the personalized learning aspect of the process.

Analysis

Analysis of the research performed will be twofold. The first part will be analyzing the results of the pre-test in order to place the students in appropriate ability level groups. The second analyzed part will be the results of the post-test in order to interpret the results of the equitable instruction for each student who received support.

The post-test results will be broken down according to those students who received guided instruction and compared to the results of the students who also participated in the research paper process but did not receive the facilitated guidance. Each aspect of the paper process will be compared between the two groups. How much growth was experienced by the analyzed group compared to the control groups? Obviously all students who participate in the research paper will experience levels of growth. The goal of the project, for all students, is to give them experience in the process of research and writing. However, the research group will hopefully experience greater gains on their post-test surveys due to the specific instruction provided to each student.

The data will be interpreted through the lens of a teacher who is analyzing areas of need for each student. Some of the student needs will be more prevalent and obvious, such as those with an IEP. Other students will have underlying needs that may not have been exposed prior to the pre-test. As the primary instructor, the teacher will have a level of trust and experience with the students going into the research. They will have spent eight weeks together and the teacher will have thorough knowledge of each students' ability levels. The instructor will

be able to use the established trust while administering the pre and post-tests and during the small group instructional times. The teacher will also be able to use outside resources which are usually available to the classroom teacher such as administration, counselors, and communication with parents or guardians if necessary.

Interpreting the data through this lens will mean the data is not merely about the numbers and observing growth; the improvement experienced by the students will also mean the students have successfully written a 5-7 page research paper. The teacher and students, together, will be able to celebrate the accomplishment. This camaraderie is an important piece of the classroom culture which allows for trust, growth, experimentation, and reflection.

Validity will be addressed through accurate reporting of the numbers. The numbers of the pre-test are important in order to properly group the students. The individual and equitable work will be the main point of instruction and the area where the most growth can occur. This is the main objective for equity in education and each student will receive the instruction they need.

Conclusion

Focusing on the needs of each student transcends the issues of language, learning disabilities, and background. The research question about equity in the classroom is an attempt to address areas of need in the classroom by providing students with individualized instruction in their areas of need. The test comes from finding the areas of need and addressing those on a case by case basis for each student.

Appendix

The pre-test and post-test consisted of the following topics. Students were asked to report their own feelings about being able to complete the task based on a 4 part Likert scale. A response of 1 signifies no prior knowledge and a 4 means the student feels completely comfortable completing that portion of the research paper process. A 2 registers as being familiar with the topic but not being comfortable using that skill. A 3 signifies the student is familiar with the concept and has used those skills before.

RESEARCH
 Primary Sources
 Secondary Sources
 Tertiary Sources
 Periodicals
 Scholarly or Academic Journals
 Differences between .gov/.org/.edu
 How to navigate the library's resources to find sources and information

CITATIONS
 Annotated Bibliography
 Work Cited
 Parenthetical Citations
 How to designate/cite/mark items such as books, court cases, songs, speeches, etc

WRITING PROCESS
 Writing a thesis statement
 Writing an introduction
 Writing a topic sentence (supporting thesis)
 Adding quotations as supporting evidence
 Using or paraphrasing evidence in the paper
 Writing commentary which connects the support thesis to the main thesis
 Writing a conclusion

The following tables demonstrate the class averages for the pre and post-tests. Each question is listed in order they were asked of the participants. These were the numbers used in determining the value of personalized, equitable instruction in the classroom.

RESEARCH GROUP

QUESTION	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	PERCENT CHANGE
Primary Sources	3.28	3.56	7.9%
Secondary Sources	2.78	3.28	15.2%
Tertiary Sources	2.72	3.28	17.1%
Periodicals	2.72	3.1	12.3%
Scholarly or Academic Journals	2.78	3.1	10.3%
Differences between .gov/.edu	2.94	3.56	17.4%
How to navigate the library's...	3.17	3.44	7.9%
Annotated Bibliography	2.78	3.17	12.3%
Work Cited	2.89	3.39	14.7%
Parenthetical Citations	2.44	3.17	23%
How designate items in writing	2.22	2.61	14.9%
Thesis Statement	2.83	3.33	15%
Writing an introduction	2.94	3.22	8.7%
Writing a topic sentence	3	3.33	9.9%
Adding quotations as support	3.44	3.56	3.4%
Using evidence in a paper	3	3.42	12.3%
Writing commentary	3.11	3.44	9.6%
Writing a conclusion	2.89	3.39	14.7%

CONTROL GROUPS

QUESTION	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	PERCENT CHANGE
Primary Sources	3.67	3.74	1.8%
Secondary Sources	3.58	3.59	0.3%
Tertiary Sources	3.44	3.56	3.4%
Periodicals	3.33	3.48	4.3%
Scholarly or Academic Journals	3	3.19	5.96%
Differences between .gov/.edu	3.14	3.33	5.7%
How to navigate the library's...	3.41	3.48	2%
Annotated Bibliography	3.37	3.48	3.1%
Work Cited	3.56	3.63	1.9%
Parenthetical Citations	2.96	3.15	6%
How designate items in writing	2.7	2.93	7.8%
Thesis Statement	3.44	3.52	2.3%
Writing an introduction	3.11	3.3	5.8%
Writing a topic sentence	3.22	3.33	3.3%
Adding quotations as support	3.62	3.71	2.4%
Using evidence in a paper	3.22	3.33	3.9%
Writing commentary	3.22	3.33	3.9%
Writing a conclusion	3	3.22	6.8%

Work Cited

Brown v. Board of Education, 98 S. Ct. (Aug. 3, 1953).

Faubert, B. (2012). A Literature Review of School Practices to Overcome School Failure. OECD Publishing.

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 S. Ct. 537 (May 18, 1896).

Chapter Four

Data Analysis

Education in the United States is under constant scrutiny. The media regularly publishes unflattering comparisons to other countries, schools are scrutinized by parents and the community in regards to high-stakes testing, and the students experience an assembly line educational system which moves them along a conveyer belt of learning, whether they have achieved mastery or not. Schools are compared to each other through state dashboards and national magazines which results in parents ‘school shopping’ for the best school for their child. This results in schools needing to market themselves in order to attract students and maintain average daily attendance funding. The search for solutions involves numerous ideas which include Charter Schools, vouchers, more testing, benchmarks, longer school days, longer school years, block schedules, just to name a few.

Yet, most of the options do not discuss or address the most critical aspect of education. The one area of education where changes can be made immediately, without a change in funding. Teachers are in the classroom each and every day, creating curriculum, leading instruction, and assessing learning. Teachers are not only proficient in their subject matter but also masters in knowing what their students are capable of accomplishing and where the students needs a little support to move forward.

Providing training and encouraging teachers to use equitable instruction methods is simple way to impact student learning. Due to various reasons, such as learning disabilities and language acquisition, each classroom is populated with students who achieve at different levels. One type of instruction is not enough to move every student forward. All too often, in trying to meet the needs of all students, teachers are left teaching to the lowest performing student.

Equitable instruction means this does not have to be the case. Each student is treated specifically according to their needs. If a student is not reading at grade level and is struggling in understanding the textbook, equitable teaching is providing a similar reading which is easier to comprehend but still provides the same content. It is important to remember the goal is not to only ensure the student learns the content, but also improves their reading ability in order to be at grade level.

Student learning begins and ends in the classroom. Qualified and trained teachers can impact student learning, in fact, it's the only way. Educators using equitable instruction is the only way to close achievement gaps. Students receiving the skills and curriculum they need instead of standards will bring those students lacking skills to the ability of their peers. Training teachers in methods of equitable instruction is a simple solution to a major problem.

Data Presentation

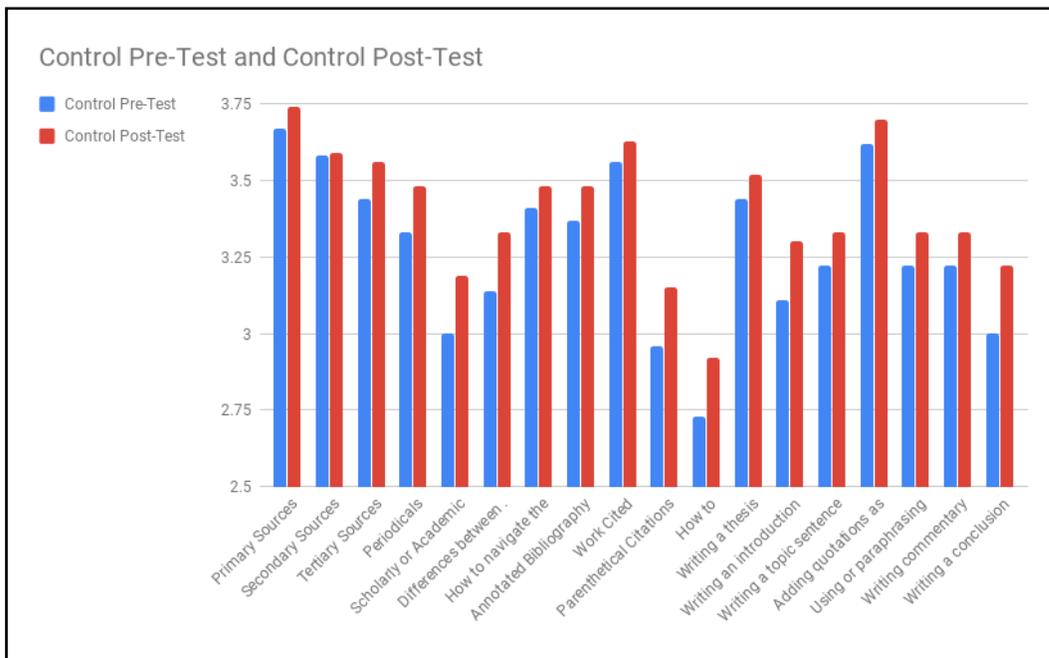
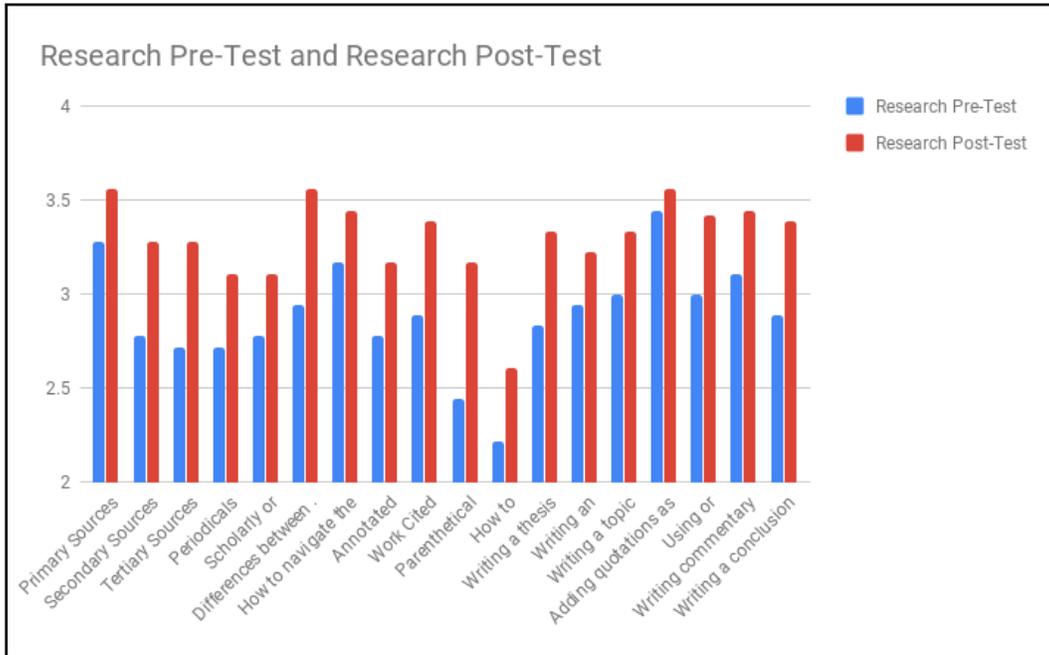
The Junior Paper Research Paper is a simple way to test personalized learning in a mainstream classroom. The juniors in the research groups must all participate in the research paper in order to pass the course. Each student arrived in their class with various skills and knowledge about the research process yet each student was expected to perform the same task. Those tasks include finding a topic of interest in American history between the end of World War II and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The reason for this time frame is to keep the topics recent while also allowing for enough time to have lapsed in order to understand the repercussions of those actions. Students need to find primary and secondary sources which provide details about their topic. Once the students have a better understanding of their subject, they need to develop a thesis and find supporting details to prove their thesis. Students will then write about the event of the effects on America in a five to seven page paper.

Some students are comfortable in the process, having participated in similar tasks throughout their schooling. Other students have been less exposed and do not feel capable of developing and writing. Since all students are expected to complete the assignment, using the US History course as a testing ground for equitable learning made sense. The research questions: What does equitable education look like in a secondary classroom? How does equitable learning take place in the classroom? What are the best practices in personalized learning? are all answered in the results of the research.

The students took a pre-test which was designed to assess their level of mastery with the research process. All students, in the research group and control groups, participated in the same survey. The survey focused on three areas of the research project: sources, citations, and writing. A 4 Part Likert scale was provided for the students to assess their own level of mastery. A one signals little to know experience with the subject. A two means the student is familiar with the topic, but not comfortable. A three represents the student has been exposed to the concept and has used it in some capacity. The highest rating, a four, was the way for the student to say they are confident in using those sources or skills in the project. The same questions were used in the post-test in order to establish the growth experienced by each student.

The appendix in Chapter 3 contains the itemized numbers from the research group and control group. The pre-test averages for each questions are listed in the table. Next to those numbers are the post-test averages for each question. The final column displays the percent change (always an increase) in the findings.

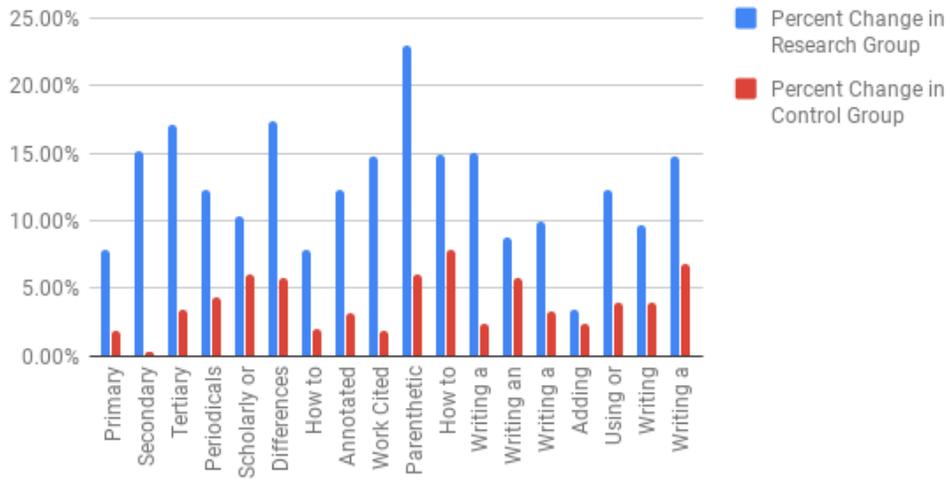
Research Group Bar Graph A



Control

Group Bar Graph B

Percent Change in Research Group and Percent Change in Control Group



Percent

Change in Groups Graph C

Once the pre-test was administered, the results were recorded and analyzed. In the research group, the students were placed in groups to guide instruction and assist in moving the students towards mastery. The methods and instruction are described in Chapter 3. The purpose of this section is to describe the data as it was collected and interpreted.

The first section of questions were in regards to finding sources for information in the research paper. Students were required to find primary sources, secondary sources, and not cite tertiary sources. They were also expected to use periodicals or scholarly journals as required, credible, sources. In the research group, the seven questions received an average of 2.91. According to the Likert Scale, this means the research group has been, on average, exposed to and used various sources. However, they do not feel mastery has been achieved.

On the post-test, research students recorded their feelings about finding and using sources. The same seven questions were used and students replied on the same four-point Likert scale. The average on the responses was 3.33, an increase of 12.6%.

The control group results are similar. The pre-test results from the control group averaged 3.37, which is 0.46 points higher than the research group. The results show the control group was starting with a better understanding of sources and how to use those sources in a research paper. The post-test results, like the research group, show an increase in understanding and movement towards mastery. The increase in the average results was 3.48, an increase of 3.1%.

The students in both the research and control groups improved their understanding of various sources to be used in the paper. However, the research group improved at a smaller rate and the research group closed the achievement gap. During the pre-test, the differences in perceived understanding were 0.46 of a point different. Once the writing project was completed, the difference dropped to 0.15 of a point. The research students, while beginning slightly behind the control group, moved forward a faster rate with the personalized instruction.

The second group of questions asked of the students were in regards to citations, specifically in the Modern Language Association (MLA) formatting of writing. The questions are in regards to creating an annotated bibliography and a work cited page. There was also information about using parenthetical citations in citing sources and the fourth question was about designating specific items in writing, such as using italics for a satellite or Supreme Court case. The four questions were posed to both research and the control groups.

The research group, much like the previous grouping of questions, averaged lower than the control group. The average of the 4 questions in the research group was 2.58. The average for the 4 questions in the control group was 3.15. The difference between the two areas was 0.57 before the research project began. When the project was completed and the post-test results were broken down and analyzed, the results were similar to the previous grouping of questions. The research group improved to an average of 3.09, an improvement of 16.5%. Part of the reason for

this significant increase was the increase in understanding of parenthetical citations. The original number of 2.22 was the lowest area of understanding in the research pre-test. The post-test results demonstrate a similar pattern of increasing both research and control groups while showing a significant increase and closing of the gap by the research group. Where the research group ended at an average of 3.09, the control group ended with an average of 3.33. Where the original gap between the groups was 0.56, it closed and ended at a difference of 0.21. Again, much like the original grouping of questions, the gap closed and both groups were recording a better understanding of the citations and writing structure prescribed by MLA.

The final grouping of questions were in regards to the writing process itself. The questions were about writing a thesis statement, introduction, and conclusion. There were also questions about writing topic sentences and incorporating quotations into the body paragraphs of the paper. The questions were written in combination by the instructor of the research group, along with the teachers in the control group. The Professional Learning Community had detailed the desired outcomes of the writing process in the junior research paper.

The research students reported an average level of understanding of 3.03 on the questions. The control group students were at a self-identified level of 3.26, or a difference of 0.23. The surprising results were in the post-test where the research students reported an average level of understanding of 3.38 and the control group students reported a 3.39. The perceived achievement gap was closed and the students essentially felt the same in regards to the writing process.

Data Analysis

The quantifiable data was easily understood and interpreted. By using a pre-test for the students to establish a baseline of understanding, the starting point of where the students felt

before the project began. If the students were not comfortable with an area, they could be honest by responding with a low score on the Likert scale. The students were placed in groups where direct instruction was given to assist in moving the students towards mastery of the research project. This is an equitable classroom because the students received the instruction necessary to complete the task. While the students were all asked to complete a research paper, each student needed various assistance in completing the paper. This is a proper replication of the classroom environment where each student requires content and knowledge.

The post-test results were a way to establish learning. The goal of every classroom is to teach skills and content in order to bring the student along the path of learning. This is not always accomplished as some students may not learn the content or skills at the same rate as the other students. The goal of an equitable classroom is to move every student forward, not at the same rate, but as the student needs. The results of the research clearly demonstrate learning.

The pre and post-test questions were divided into three areas: research, citations, and writing. In each area, both the research group and the control group demonstrated learning in all three areas. The research group, in each topic, started at a lower level of understanding. The averages for the research group were 2.91 in research, 2.58 on citations, and 3.03 in writing. These numbers, when applied to the Likert Scale, signify a level of understanding and exposure to the ideas, but not near comfort of use which would be a level of 4.

Personalized learning strategies were implemented and each student received the necessary instruction to educate them. This included small group direct instruction and one-on-one assistance in order to ensure the student understood what is expected of them in order to write the research paper. The results of the post-test show progress towards mastery. The research portion of the project moved from 2.91 to an average of 3.33, or an increase of 12.6%.

The citation section of questions started at an average of 2.58 and was assessed at at 3.09 in the post-test. This was an increase of 16.5% and also the area of largest growth of the sections. Part of this could be the students unfamiliarity with using parenthetical citations in the writing process which increased at 23%. The final area of improvement was in the writing portion. This included being able to write a thesis, using quotations to support the thesis, and adding commentary to connect the concrete detail to the thesis. In this section, the research group started at 3.03 and ended with an average of 3.38, or an average increase of 10.4%.

The research group moved forward by over 10% in each category, a clear indication of student learning. As mentioned earlier, assessing student learning is difficult due to the nature of assessments and education. However, in the personalized responses provided by the students, the researcher is able to ascertain the students gained understanding and how to apply those lessons to the research paper project. This type of growth and learning is the real reason for equitable instruction in the classroom.

The control groups also demonstrated growth and understanding, although without the specific personalized learning strategies of the research group. The control group started at an average of 3.37 in the research area and recorded an improvement to 3.48, an increase of 3.1%. In the citation portion of the post-test, the control group moved to an average of 3.3 from 3.15, an increase of 4.5%. The final area tested, writing, showed similar gains for the control group. The average in the pre-test was 3.26 and moved to 3.39, an increase of 3.8%.

The reasons why the control tested higher on the pre-test are unclear. It could have been prior instruction from the classroom teachers. The two teachers who also taught US History and assigned the Junior Paper Research Paper assignment may have incorporated many of the skills of the paper in prior instruction knowing those skills would be used in the paper. It is unlikely

those students entered the course with prior knowledge since the students are randomly assigned instructors. During PLC time the paper was discussed and the teachers implied their courses are structured to teach research and writing skills to their students. Another possible reason for the higher pre-test scores could be from the instruction prior to administering the pre-test. As the research group was instructed by the researcher, there could have been an misunderstanding of the purpose of the pre-test and the students could have responded with a higher self-score due to a desire to demonstrate a level of understanding instead of a true assessment of ability.

No matter the discrepancies of the pre-test numbers, the post-test numbers moved the research group closer to the levels of the control group. Graph C shows the percentage improvement for each question of the post-test. In each category, the research group showed greater improvement and closed the gap. For the research section of questions, the difference between research group and control group of perceived level of comfort was 0.46 of a point. According to the post-test, the difference dropped to a difference of 0.15. Similar results were seen in the citation and writing portions. The citation differences started at 0.57 of a point and ended at a difference of 0.21. The writing results showed the gap closing the most with a starting difference of 0.23 and ending at a difference of 0.13 of a point.

Interpretation

The equitable classroom clearly showed results greater than the control classroom. While there was a gap of self-perceived ability in the research writing process, the gap closed in each area assessed in the research. By providing the resources and instruction necessary to learn, the teacher expects each student to acquire the desired skills and content. Unfortunately, because each student enters the room with differing ability levels, one-size-fits-all instruction is not enough for most students. If each student receives the same instruction, some students will

naturally succeed due to factors out of the control of the teacher. Sadly, some students will not obtain the same skills and will remain behind the levels of their peers. This is one of the achievement gaps experienced in education. These gaps are easily seen in standardized test results which show minority students or English Language Learners achieving lower scores. Closing this achievement gap is a serious need in education and indicative a larger problem in education.

The equitable classroom is a solution to this problem, but does not specify demographics in order to guide instruction. The equitable classroom is created in order to determine the level of each student and guide instruction to meet the needs of each student. The research students were provided instruction according to their needs. One example was a student who needed help writing a thesis statement. A thesis statement is supposed to be clear, concise, and controversial. Without an area of focus, the students will not be able to research areas in order to prove their point. The student wanted to write about the effects of the terrorist attacks on 9/11. This is a wide area and starting with a vague statement will not allow for a clear course of research. It was immediately observable the student did not know what to write about upon reading their initial thesis. With guidance and support, the student was able to narrow down their statement and talk about the effects of 9/11 on the safety of Americans. Then the student was able to research laws and changes in American society which were instituted post-9/11. This led the student to finding the PATRIOT Act, the 9/11 Commission Report, and various speeches by President George Bush. Without the guidance of narrowing down a thesis, the student would have been left writing an opinion piece without primary sources. The commentary was directed to the actual laws and related back to the improved thesis.

This type of individualized instruction allowed for the student to improve the skills necessary to learn. The data provided in Graphs A and B show the results of the pre and post-tests. All students moved forward and improved their perceived writing ability. The results from the research group were important because of how those students were more closely aligned to the skills of those students in the control group. The gaps between the groups closed by an average of half a point. The equitable classroom provided the instruction necessary for those students to learn *more* than the control groups.

Chapter Five

Recommendations and Lessons Learned

Much like the modern news cycle which is dominated by negative headlines, information about education usually revolves around the failings of our schools. There is ample information regarding standardized testing, the efficacy of school vouchers, why math results are always low in America, and the role of parents in education. By only reading headlines, one would assume education is in dire straits and our schools are failing our students.

One of the most damaging pieces of information discussed in the news cycle is the achievement gap. The achievement gap is identified by the difference in the leading group and those groups who do not score as well on the standardized tests. These groups include, but are not limited to, English Language Learners, Special Education Students, low socioeconomic students, and minority students. The reasons for the achievement gap are plentiful: failing schools, unqualified teachers, and lack of resources are but a few of the stated reasons. While discovering the reasons for the achievement gap is necessary, it does not necessarily solve the problem. While the news cycle is negative it does demonstrate the need for education reform and change in schools across America. If the reasons for the failures are ignored and fingers are pointed to politicians, teachers, and parents, the real losers will be the students.

Creating solutions and finding ways to close the achievement gap is the best way forward. Pointing fingers and placing blame does not solve the problem. Addressing the issue and finding real, quality solutions, will help those students who need assistance. One, tangible, solution is incorporating equitable teaching strategies in the classroom. Equitable solutions in the classroom involve techniques and strategies which address the needs of each student. This is in direct conflict with equal solutions which treat each student the same and provide the same

resources to each student, regardless of their needs or ability level. The clear and constant need for equitable curriculum reform in education is necessary for all students to succeed in today's society. Teachers must break the current trends and methods of instruction which led to the gap between demographic groups and incorporate new, equitable strategies which will help every student learn.

The research conducted to prove this point will demonstrate how equitable practices in a classroom can move a student forward by using personalized learning and individualized instruction. The study surrounding writing a research paper was an attempt to incorporate individualized instruction in the classroom. The pre and post-test results clearly demonstrate the positive effects of equitable instruction. Quantifiable data was used to determine where each student started in the research paper process, where they felt uncomfortable or had little knowledge of the process. That information was used to guide instruction and generate specific lessons to move the students towards mastery of those areas of need. The control group received more equal instruction where the entire class was given the information at one time via class lecture. While both the research and control groups both learned the desired material and skills, the research group, which received equitable instruction, moved forward at a greater pace than the control group.

The two main variables in the study are those students who received personalized instruction and those students who received traditional direct instruction in a group. Both settings were in a traditional US History class at a comprehensive high school. All students were randomly assigned to the courses via the registration process and scheduling. All courses were populated with various demographics which align with the demographics of the student

population. There were a few students who traditionally fall in the ‘left behind’ demographic in all courses, including Special Education students and English Language Learners.

Finding Summary

The research was conducted over the course of eight weeks at a comprehensive high school located near San Diego, California. Chapter 3 describes the demographics and culture of the successful and nationally recognized high school (it was recently ranked in the top 2% of high schools in the United States by US News and World Report). All students in their junior year are expected to complete a Junior Research Paper as part of their US History course. The assignment is not required by the state or district, it is an assigned at this school in order to provide experience writing a research paper. The requirement was designed in order to accomplish many tasks, including teaching skills which would be used in college. The assignment, while also designed to teach content, is also a skills based assignment. The students are expected to be able to research a topic, write a thesis, find supporting details, and construct a coherent and informative research paper.

Content is the driving force in every classroom. Whether State Standards or Common Core, every classroom is designed to teach students the mandatory curriculum. One of the other goals of educators is to teach skills. Each course has different necessary skills. Science courses teach the scientific method to create a hypothesis, run tests, and evaluate the results. Math classes teach logic through geometric proofs. English and Social Studies classes teach reading skills and writing analysis. It was these skills which were used in creating the research paper assignment. It was also these skills which were analyzed and examined during the research conducted in this equitable learning experiment.

The pre and post-test contained 18 questions about the process of researching and writing a paper. The questions are in the appendix of Chapter 3. The questions were divided into three groups: research, citations, and writing. The students responded according to a four part Likert Scale where a 1 response meant little to know knowledge and a 4 signified skill mastery. The pre-test results for the research group averaged a 2.84. This result meant the students, as a class average, felt exposed to the necessary skills, but not completely comfortable to be able to write the research paper. For the section of questions regarding research, the research group averaged a 2.91. The lowest scoring questions were in regards to identifying tertiary sources and periodicals.

There were four questions about writing citations in the paper and the research group averaged a 2.58. This was the lowest of the 3 categories and signifies a lack of understanding how to incorporate sources in their writing and avoiding plagiarism. The lowest scoring question in this section was in regards to designating specific items in writing such as the names of Supreme Court cases and satellites. Students were expected to use the Modern Language Association (MLA) format in their paper. The original instruction for this was conducted by the school Librarian and was the same for research groups and control groups.

The third and final category of questions were about the writing process. The research group recorded an average score of 3.03 on the writing questions, the highest of the 3 categories. There are many possible reasons for this area scoring the highest. The most plausible reason being the students experience with writing in all of their courses and the prep work done by the teacher to expose the students to the writing process in preparation for the research paper. The question which received the lowest average score in this section was about writing a thesis statement (2.83).

The control group was composed of 2 sections of US History students who also needed to write the research paper. Those students received the same pre-test and their results were broken down in the same manner as the research group. For the 18 questions, the control group averaged 3.26 which represents a better understanding of skills needed to write the research paper. The higher result could be from any number of factors, including teachers who have taught the research paper before and exposed their students to the process before beginning the actual assignment. While those students started with a higher average than the research group, the difference is less than half a point.

The control group scored an average of 3.37 on the questions regarding research. This was the highest average of the three sections for the control group. The lowest scoring question was about familiarity with using and identifying scholarly journals in their research. The control also scored the lowest average, 3.15, in the section about using citations in their writing. The least understood concept was the same as with the research group, designating Supreme Court cases in their writing. The final category of questions, about writing, was an average of 3.26 for the control group. While the control group scored lowest about writing a thesis statement, the control group responded with an average of 3.44, one of their highest areas of the 18 questions. The lowest score of their responses was an average of 3 about writing a conclusion.

The hypothesis provided in this paper is that equitable instruction will allow for students to receive the content and skills necessary to close the achievement gap. The process of providing specific and direct instruction by the research teacher would be successful in providing the needed information to write a research paper according to the US History Professional Learning Community's (PLC) agreed upon standards and rubrics. In the context of the research paper process, the personalized instruction was on-going for the 8 week project. Each category of

the pre-test, Research, Citations, and Writing, were introduced during the 8 weeks of instruction. However, where the control groups only received direct instruction, the research group took an extra step. The results of the pre-test informed the instructor which students needed more support and in which areas. Any student who self-diagnosed a score of 2 or lower was then brought into a group during class time in order to go over the specific steps of the process. The research group received examples of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources in order to see exactly what each look like and why they are important. Periodicals and academic journals were also introduced at this time. The school library's database was used in order to instruct the students about how to find the sources using the provided resources. The students were allowed to ask questions and required to provide their own sources before moving on to the next step of the process. A similar process occurred for the category on citations. Once the entire class received direct instruction on the area, the students who recorded a 2 or lower were again brought into a smaller group setting and received more specific examples of creating a work cited page and using the appropriate MLA process in writing about books, Supreme Court cases, Congressional hearings, etc.

The writing portion, being the most important skill required, was more involved. The direct instruction was on-going throughout the course, but the small group work needed to be more regular and personalized. Each student submitted a thesis statement and those statements were evaluated for clarity and content. While all students, in both the research and control groups, received this type of feedback, the students who scored 2 or below in the research group were able to spend time with the teacher and wrote the thesis with their assistance. Those same students were checked upon each week to ensure they were finding quotes and data which supported their thesis. Their outlines were graded with more feedback. They were able to turn in

a rough draft which would be read by the instructor instead of the peer feedback/editing that the other students received.

The findings of the study clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the equitable learning strategies incorporated by the research teacher. The research group improved an average of 13.17% on the post-test self-evaluation compared to an average of 3.8% for the control group. Another way to look at the numbers and evaluate the effectiveness of the equitable instruction is to examine the closing achievement gap. The research group, on the pre-test self evaluation, averaged a score of 2.89 while increasing that average on all 18 questions to 3.3 on the post-test questions. The control group, as stated earlier, scored a higher average on both the pre and post-tests. The pre-test average on the 18 questions was 3.28 while the post-test average was 3.41. The difference between the research and control groups at the beginning of the process was 0.39 of a point. The difference at the end of the paper process was only 0.11.

At the beginning of the junior paper, the research group felt less prepared and ready for the major components of researching and writing a 5 to 7 page research paper. By the end of the process, with personalized instruction and guided practice from the teacher, the research group was able to close the perceived gap and felt more comfortable with the research writing project.

Finding Interpretation

The dependent variables of the study were the research group. The personalized instruction and methods of supporting the students in need was designed to move those students past their current levels and abilities. The prediction of the study was that the equitable instruction methods would allow those students in need to receive the instruction necessary to close the achievement gap. No matter the reason for having less skill, a student who is behind their peers needs extra instruction. It could be the problems associated with learning a new

language, having a learning disability, or simply not understanding the instruction the first time it was delivered, some students fall behind and fall through the cracks. By providing specific instruction, the teacher is able to provide each student with the skills necessary to complete the required task and move forward to mastery of the skills.

The independent variable was the equitable instruction. Small group instruction, one-on-one conversations with the students, and constant supervision of their work were changed compared to the instruction received by the control group. While the control group also received some instruction, it was a one-size-fits-all style of direct instruction and there were not the same sort of learning strategies in place the research group received.

The predicted outcome was experienced in that the students who received more personalized instruction improved at a greater pace than the students who were given regular instruction. It was proven that students who receive the direct instruction they need, when they need it, will improve at a fast pace than students who simply receive normal direct instruction. Small group instruction and spending time with each student made the students learn at a faster pace than the control group who did not receive the same type of detailed instruction.

Findings in Context

The current education system is under the magnifying glass of present society. Parents are constantly trying to do what is best for their children, whether that is finding the best school or teacher for their student. The news media is always searching for a story to cover and usually lands upon how certain demographic groups are falling behind others. Politicians, under the pressure of the community, are trying to implement large-scale solutions which will benefit all students. Each group is attempting to improve education in order to benefit all students, however, most solutions which are presented with equality in mind. By making sweeping changes to the

school system and standards, education reform becomes a one-size-fits-all solution for all of the problems in our school system.

This is in direct conflict to the idea of equitable instruction, which is on a smaller scale and able to affect individual students inside the classroom. The study conducted was a small scale way to use equitable instruction to impact student learning. Making this type of change in a classroom transcends the other reforms which are being implemented on a regular basis. Bowen and Kurzweil, in *Equity and excellence in American higher education*, examine the issue of equity versus excellence. Most claim the two concepts cannot be accomplished at the same time while Bowen and Kurzweil argue the two do not have to be separate.

In fact, equitable instruction made up the difference for many students who were behind on the research and writing process. Whether it was a less than efficient teacher in their past or an English Language issue, students succeeded in the equitable access classroom at a faster rate than the traditional classroom. While the factors such as poverty, Special Education students, and cultural differences were not specifically tracked in the study, it is fair to say the methods of instruction would still be beneficial to other groups of students. The research group was not grouped according to any factor other than their self-proclaimed ability to complete a task.

Cultural awareness is another important topic in educational reform. Understandably, making students and their culture feel welcome and incorporated in the classroom are necessary actions in order to make students feel safe and secure. These actions are completed regularly by teachers across America daily. Unfortunately these actions do not close the achievement gap nor do they drive instruction. Cultural relevancy is an excellent way to make students feel valued and understood in the classroom, but they do not equal learning.

Implications

The future of education depends on all students success, not simply a majority of students. Equitable education means every student receives the instruction they need. This does not mean they receive the Common Core Content Standards and perform Above Basic on standardized tests. By highlighting and announcing that certain schools are scoring poorly on standardized tests, the current system is announcing the failures of schools and students who need the most help. Equitable instruction means students receive the instruction they need, whether that is content or skills depends on the individual student.

It starts with administration and school leadership. The leadership group needs to seek out the inequities on campus and create possible solutions which address the reasons for the failures. Whether the problems are from scheduling or funding, the problems need to be addressed and the administration needs to mount the challenge to change the status quo. Once these have been recognized, they need to be addressed. The process of creating solutions needs to be created by a group of stakeholders in the school, including but not limited to students, teachers, parents, and community members.

When achievement gaps are spotted, solutions need to be created in order to close the gap. Equitable instruction, as carried out in the research study, is one way to address the needs of students who fall behind the abilities of others. Administration can encourage teachers to use equitable practices. Teachers can be sent to conferences and workshops, presenters can be brought in for professional development, and teachers can share best practices during faculty meetings.

Limitations

While the results of the study were favorable for student success and closing the achievement gap, there are a couple problems with the study as performed and analyzed. The

first problem is the study only addresses the needs of one class in one grade level at one school site. A larger study could use similar planning and preparation in order to evaluate how different content areas can learn from personalized instruction. Other studies would be able to see the best practices at various grade levels and account for maturity levels of students. Simply providing small group instruction and review might not be the best practice in an elementary setting and other studies would be able to recognize these successes or failures.

Other areas where the study was limited was in regards to the number of students involved in the study. There was only one research class and two courses used in the control group. Having more students involved would allow for more data and an easier time decoding the numbers to see how much of an impact the equitable instruction played in the learning of the students. It could even be carried out through various schools and districts.

Finally, the study should spend more time analyzing the specific results on Special Ed students and English Language Learners. The original study was not intended to address the needs of those subgroups specifically. Not to say the instruction affected those groups poorly, just that the specific results of those groups were not tracked. If SPED students and ELL were to be analyzed in a different study, the results could quite possibly be the same but it would be interesting to see the effects on those groups over the course of a large project.