

“I DON’T WANT TO SPEAK FOR YOU”: PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE  
READING TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF  
MULTICULTURAL TEXTS IN THE K-8 CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore understandings of multicultural literature, ways in which it is being utilized in classrooms, how it is perceived by pre-service and in-service teachers, and what can be done to ensure more students are exposed to high quality authentic multicultural children's literature in the future. This set of three inter-related studies used qualitative methodologies to conduct a systematic literature review and two case studies.

A systematic literature review was conducted to examine articles in practitioner-based journals in the Reading/Language arts field that describe K-8 classroom experiences using multicultural literature. Initial searches turned up 169 articles. However, only 16 articles were included due to predetermined criteria. Three major categories of articles were found. Those focused on teachers or researchers desired a) outcomes for using multicultural texts, b) types of activities utilized in the articles, and c) theories used to support the use of multicultural literature within articles.

A pre-service teacher case study was conducted to develop an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions pre-service teachers, after taking a multicultural literature course, hold about multicultural literature's use in their future classrooms. Participants in the current study (n=7) were enrolled as education majors in a pre-service teacher education program at a large public university in Texas. All participants indicated a desire to teach in a K-8 Reading/Language Arts classroom upon graduation. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 24. Results were organized by starting with the more general

themes regarding orientations towards teaching and literature, then move to more specific themes regarding multicultural texts.

An in-service teacher case study was conducted to develop an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of in-service teachers, after teaching in various classroom environments, hold about multicultural literature's use in their classrooms. Participants in the current study (n=6) were K-8 teachers in Texas and had experience teaching reading/language arts. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 55. Results were organized by starting with the more general themes regarding orientations towards teaching and literature, then move to more specific themes regarding multicultural texts.

Three key conclusions that can be made from the included studies are: a) teachers would benefit from more guidance and support for using multicultural literature, b) by more explicitly linking literacy and/or teaching theories in research articles of multicultural literature would benefit teachers who are trying to accommodate their students' needs with the ever-evolving educational standards set by federal and state guidelines, and c) that real-world teaching tips need to be provided to teachers to overcome practical barriers.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Deanne. I like to think she would have found my work interesting because of her love for sociology and learning. She is deeply missed.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my sister, Jessica, and to Dylan, Kinley, and Ryker. You have been there through it all. Thank you for helping lift me up through the more difficult times and rejoicing with me through the happy moments. Jessica, I love you for being a sister and friend. Dylan, I love you more than there are stars in the sky and fish in the sea. Kinley, I love you more than there is sand on the beach and trees in the forest. Ryker, I love you more than there are drops of water in the ocean and books to be read.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my participants. Without whom none of this would be possible. Thank you for your time.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this dissertation study, and the three articles it includes, is to provide a better understanding of what multicultural literature is, ways in which it is being utilized in classrooms, how it is perceived by pre-service and in-service teachers, and what can be done to ensure more students are exposed to high quality authentic multicultural children's literature in the future.

### **Significance to Field**

In terms of teacher preparation, these ideas may be less common in traditional US teacher preparation but are directly reflected in the mission statement of the more progressive International Baccalaureate (IB) program: "These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right" (Mission, n.d.). IB programs are changing the way pre-service teachers are prepared for the classroom by focusing on multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching methods, and preparing students to teach in diverse communities, including international schools. While IB programs began in international schools, they are now being adopted within the US (Alford, Rollins, Stillisano, & Waxman, 2013), and, therefore, such a philosophy may be seen to impact more teachers' attitudes and perceptions of multicultural literature, or at least bring more attention to this area.

Moreover, with the recent move toward Common Core State Standards and similar changes in other states (TEKS, 2007), we have witnessed even more emphasis on multicultural literature. For example, Common Core learning standards for second grade expect students to read and recount stories, including fables and folktales, from diverse cultures. Similarly, fourth grade standards expect students to compare and contrast how similar themes are addressed in stories, myths, and traditional literature from diverse cultures ([corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/](http://corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/)).

### **Purpose Statement**

My research goal is to familiarize myself with the ways in which teachers and researchers are utilizing multicultural literature in classrooms based on articles published in practitioner based journals, chapter two, and to develop further understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about using multicultural texts within their classrooms through two case studies, chapters three and four. The goal has been to learn what their understanding of multicultural literature is, whether or not they use/intend to use it with their students, how they use/intend to use it in their classrooms, and how their past experiences with multicultural literature may have helped shape their attitudes and perceptions.

### **Summary of Studies**

Below, I will provide brief summaries of each of the three studies included in this dissertation.

## **Section 2**

In section two, I present a systematic literature review that examines articles in-service teachers can find in practitioner-based journals in the Reading/Language Arts field that describe K-8 classroom experiences using multicultural literature. Articles published in four practitioner based journals published by NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) and ILA (International Literacy Association): *Reading Teacher*, *English Journal*, *Voices in the Middle*, and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* between January 1, 2000 and February 1, 2017 were considered. Full text reviews of the 16 included articles were coded for cultures being emphasized, practices being used within the K-8 classroom that teachers could take away from the article, and theories for literacy or teaching being used to discuss the practices suggested. Additionally, I made note of the focus of the teacher's practices. Following conventions in the field, 20% of articles (n=33) identified were recoded to establish interrater reliability. Interrater reliability was 98% agreement. There were three major categories of articles regarding teachers or researchers desired outcomes for using multicultural texts, types of activities utilized in the articles, and theories used to support the use of multicultural literature within articles.

## **Section 3**

For section three, I conducted a case study to develop an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions pre-service teachers, after taking a multicultural literature course, hold about multicultural literature's use in their future classrooms. Three theoretical frameworks were used to inform the study design and analyze participant

responses. These theoretical underpinnings include: Social Cognitive Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Theory of Traditions. The first theory is a learning theory, while the latter two are critical theories. Participants in the current study (n=7) were enrolled as education majors in a pre-service teacher education program at a large public university in Texas. All participants indicated a desire to teach in a K-8 Reading/Language Arts classroom upon graduation. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 24. Transcriptions were compiled by participants' responses to each of the 16 questions. Results were organized by starting with the more general themes regarding orientations towards teaching and literature, then move to more specific themes regarding multicultural texts. As typical for case study presentations, I embed the evidence (quotations) and interpretations within the results section. Conclusions made from the study are that it is essential to understand what pre-service teachers' experiences were with multicultural literature as K-12 students, to consider their pre-service teacher training on the use of multicultural literature, to ensure that students are given instruction on how to incorporate multicultural literature seamlessly, and to consider how literature is being taught in the classroom.

#### **Section 4**

In section four, I conducted a case study to develop an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions in-service teachers after teaching in various classroom environments hold about multicultural literature's use in their classrooms. Three theoretical frameworks were used to inform the study design and analyze participant responses. These theoretical underpinnings include: Social Cognitive Theory,



Postcolonial Theory, and Theory of Traditions. The first theory is a learning theory, while the latter two are critical theories. Participants in the current study (n=6) were K-8 teachers in Texas and had experience teaching reading/language arts. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 55. Transcriptions were compiled by participants' responses to each of the 16 questions. Results were organized by starting with the more general themes regarding orientations towards teaching and literature, then move to more specific themes regarding multicultural texts. As typical for case study presentations, I embed the evidence (quotations) and interpretations within the results section. Several important findings to consider are that it is essential to understand what their experiences were with multicultural literature before entering the classroom as teachers, what, if any, graduate school coursework they were provided on the use of multicultural literature, teachers should be provided training on how to incorporate multicultural literature seamlessly through ongoing professional development, and, finally, how passionate teachers are about reading and their students. The passion teachers have for reading and their students enables them to work to further their understanding of trends in education including those related to incorporating multicultural literature.

### **Definitions**

Below, I will provide definitions of key terms used throughout the current studies: Attitude, Perception, and Multicultural.

#### **Defining Attitudes**

*Attitude* refers to the way a person responds to a person, concept, or event as a way to evaluate the experience (Attitude, 2002). For my purposes, the attitudes of pre-

service and in-service teachers toward the concept of multicultural texts being used in their classroom and the event of actually using the texts are of interest.

### **Defining Perceptions**

*Perception* refers to the way a person defines or understands a person, concept, or event (Perception, 2015). For my purposes, the perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers on how they define multicultural in general and define what constitutes a multicultural text are of interest.

### **Defining Multicultural**

Multicultural literature is an ever-growing body of texts that allows readers of various cultural backgrounds to see themselves within the text and allows students not from the depicted culture the opportunity to consider different cultural perspectives. Typically, readers are more readily able to identify with characters that are like themselves in some aspect (Jose & Brewer, 1983; Al- Hazza & Bucher, 2008). With this in mind, borrowing from Manna and Brodie (1992), I define *multicultural literature* as texts that “recognizes, accepts, values, affirms and promotes individual diversity in a pluralistic setting” (p. xx) and includes cultures based on race, ethnicity, region of origin, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, age, and disability. However, as Manna and Brodie were proposing this definition in 1992, to better reflect the current state of multicultural literature, I will expand it to include sexual orientation and other traditionally marginalized groups.

Other definitions do exist for multicultural literature (Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Kruse, 1992; Norton, 2013), however, they are frequently less inclusive than the one

offered by Manna and Brodie. Often, such definitions only differ on the number of cultures they seek to include (Cai, 1998). For instance, Norton's 2013 textbook, often used in Reading Course focused on multicultural children's literature, defines cultures based on ethnicity. The text over-generalizes cultures into groups such as African American, Native American, Latino, Jewish, Asian, and Middle Eastern. In contrast, my belief is that the fundamental aspect of defining *multicultural* is to understand the term does not have a fixed definition; it allows for expansion as society grows in our understanding of culture and human variation.

## 2. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

Reading teachers have been encouraged for years to incorporate multicultural literature into their text selections for students. With the recent move toward Common Core State Standards and similar changes in other states (Texas Educational Agency, 2007), we have witnessed even more emphasis on multicultural literature. For example, Common Core learning standards for second grade expect students to read and recount stories, including fables and folktales, from diverse cultures. Similarly, fourth grade standards expect students to compare and contrast how similar themes are addressed in stories, myths, and traditional literature from diverse cultures ([corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/](http://corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/)).

Additionally, beyond academic standards, other areas of current emphasis in schools, including anti-bullying (Singal, 2016), culturally responsive teaching (Hollins & Spencer, 1990; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Irving, 2003), social-emotional education (Clayton, 2017), and inclusivity (Henninger & Gupta, 2014) have helped foster the need for literature representing diverse perspectives to be included in the reading curriculum. However, despite much rationale for the need for multicultural literature, there is a disconnect between the perceived importance of reading for diverse perspectives and its inclusion (Hughes-Hassell, 2013). In short, while educators agree that multicultural texts are important, they are rarely being used in classrooms.

## **Defining Multicultural**

Multicultural literature is an ever-growing body of texts that allows readers of various cultural backgrounds to see themselves within the text and allows students, not from the depicted culture, the opportunity to consider different cultural perspectives. Typically, readers are more readily able to identify with characters that are like themselves in some aspect (Jose & Brewer, 1983; Al- Hazza & Bucher, 2008). With this in mind, borrowing from Manna and Brodie (1992), I define *multicultural literature* as texts that “recognizes, accepts, values, affirms and promotes individual diversity in a pluralistic setting” (p. xx) and includes cultures based on race, ethnicity, region of origin, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, age, disability, and other at-risk populations. However, as Manna and Brodie were proposing this definition in 1992, to better reflect the current state of multicultural children’s literature, I expand it to include sexual orientation.

Other definitions do exist for multicultural literature (Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Kruse, 1992; Norton, 2013), however, they are frequently less inclusive than the one offered by Manna and Brodie. Often, such definitions only differ on the number of cultures they seek to include (Cai, 1998). For instance, Norton’s 2013 textbook on multicultural children’s literature, which is often used in teacher preparation programs, primarily defines cultures based on ethnicity. Norton then groups cultures into overarching categories such as African American, Native American, Latino, Jewish, Asian, and Middle Eastern, which may lead to overgeneralizations. In contrast, I contend that the fundamental aspect of defining *multicultural* is to understand the term does not

have a fixed definition or finite categories; it allows for expansion as society grows in our understanding of culture and human variation.

### **Need for Multicultural Literature**

Much of the literary canon used to develop Western curriculum is from the perspective of the dominate culture, a Western, male perspective. Furthermore, our history books, math methods, science texts, and literature heavily focus on information from a predominantly Western-oriented perspective. According to Banks in 1991, the canon fails to represent “people of color, women, and other marginalized groups” (p. 33), but these groups are beginning to demand “their voices, visions, and perspectives be included in the curriculum” (p. 33). Although Banks was writing in 1991, the demand for literature that represents a broader array of voices has not changed markedly (Hughes-Hassell, 2013, p. 213). In contrast, Hughes-Hassell explains that the demand for multicultural texts continues to increase rapidly; more cultural groups are looking for representation within the cannon.

To further illustrate the need for multicultural literature in the classroom, we should consider how rapidly the demographics of schools in the United States are changing. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (See Table 1), in addition to changes in the overall population demographics, US public schools are losing White students to private schools. Specifically, the percentage of White students in public schools dropped from 59% in 2002 to 51% in 2012. The center’s projection for 2024 suggests the percentage of White students will decrease to 46%. Simultaneously, public schools are gaining Hispanic students as the percentage of

Hispanic students increased from 18% in 2002 to 24% in 2012. The projected numbers for 2024 suggest a further increase for Hispanic students to about 29% of the student population. Additionally, the number of students identifying as being multiethnic, at least two ethnicities, is likely to increase. Collection of this data began in 2012, showing 3% of students identify as multiethnic. The projection for 2024 suggests a 1% increase in students who select this identification option (NCES).

| Race        | 2002 Actual | 2012 Actual | 2024 Projected |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| White       | 59%         | 51%         | 46%            |
| Hispanic    | 18%         | 24%         | 29%            |
| Multiethnic | No Data     | 3%          | +1%            |

**Table 1.** NCES data on public schools.

Meanwhile, the Department of Education reports that in the 2011-2012 school year, there were 5,821,176 students served by IDEAS, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, in the United States ages six to twenty-one (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 230). The number of students provided sources through IDEAS is important to consider when we are expanding the definition of multicultural to include a wide range of marginalized groups that includes people with disabilities. In Texas, there were 395,654 (6.4% of students) students served by IDEA in the 2011-2012 school year (p. 229) (See Table 2). Furthermore, the data shows that students served by IDEA are diverse. Of the students between six and twenty-one served by IDEA, 14.3% are identified as Native American, 4.2% Asian, 11.3 African American, 8.2 Latino, 13.5 Native Hawaiian, 8.2 White, and 6.5 identify as belonging to at least two races (p. 118).

As seen above, the numbers of students from various non-White ethnicities is rising in public schools, so it is natural to assume the numbers of students served by IDEA will change in a similar pattern within US public schools.

| Total % | Native American | Asian | African American | Latino | Native Hawaiian | White | Multi Ethnic |
|---------|-----------------|-------|------------------|--------|-----------------|-------|--------------|
| 6.4%    | 14.3%           | 4.2%  | 11.3%            | 8.2%   | 13.5%           | 8.2%  | 6.5%         |

**Table 2.** IDEA data for 2011/12 school year.

Understanding the cultural make-up of schools helps us to better prepare to offer those cultures a voice; however, it is important to continue to reexamine the expanding definition of *multicultural*. Race and ethnicity are not the only factors when considering cultures within the classroom. For instance, cultures based on gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or non-beliefs, and disabilities should be considered when considering the cultural make-up of the classroom. Unfortunately, such data is currently more difficult to collect due to many factors. Within the US, conceptions of gender and sexual orientation are actively evolving and their very definitions have recently become a center of conflict. Additionally, students who are transgender, homosexual, gender neutral, or asexual may be hesitant to self-identify or unsure of how to identify. A person's identity may shift throughout development, particularly adolescence. Likewise, religious belief or non-belief is also difficult to track. Young people tend to outwardly identify with the religion of their parents; however, they may not inwardly identify that way.



By creating and expanding our space for the voices of diverse cultures represented within our classrooms, we help to insure our students feel their voices matter. We should strive to provide role models for each of our students through the characters they read about in texts. Such role models should sometimes come from the same types of backgrounds as our students, thus, making it easier for our students to relate to and understand with the literature. We want to insure texts we offer our students include these voices, so our students see themselves in the stories they read. Seeing representations of people from student's own culture in school, helps students lessen the distance between their school life and their outside of school life.

This is not to say that students can only connect to characters that look like or come from similar backgrounds. For instance, a student may connect with a character from a very different background which can broaden a student's understanding. In my experience teaching a multicultural literature course for undergraduate students, for example, we ask students to select a multicultural text and write a paper focused on a connection they make between their lives and the book. This is a text-to-self connection. In many instances, my White female students frequently connect with books such as *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis. The book's main character is a young African American child growing up during the Great Depression and searching for his father. Some students connect to Buddy's search for his father by relating it to their experience going off to school. Others relate to Buddy by making connections to their exploration of self-identity.

*Bud, Not Buddy* is an exemplar of a historical fiction text with diverse, authentic characters, and this brings me to another important aspect of selecting multicultural texts: it is crucial to remember that we do have a responsibility to ensure the texts are as true to the culture represented as we can manage. It would not be advisable to include texts that rely on stereotypes of the represented culture such as Scott O’Dell’s *Sing Down the Moon* (1970). Although a Newbury Honor book, which has received accolades for the writing, this book depicts Navaho culture as using names like Bright Morning – names that do not represent the culture of the Navaho and continue a stereotype of Native American names. Alternatively, if such a book was used, it would be important for teachers to introduce the controversy surrounding the book so that students could critically analyze the positive and negative aspects of the text.

Additionally, we want to encourage students to read texts focused beyond the cultures represented in our classroom. In fact, according to the Common Core Standards, understanding “other perspectives and cultures” (National Governors’ Association, 2010, p. 7) is an essential skill for college and career ready students. Once our students leave the classroom, they will enter a world full of people who do not think, act, believe, or live the same way as the student. It is part of our responsibility to help prepare our students for this experience. We should strive to incorporate texts that provide as many different ways of experiencing the world as possible in hopes that students do not see some as *right* and others as *wrong*, but so that our students see there are simply many ways of being *right*.

## **Benefits of Multicultural Literature**

Reading multicultural texts can help us broaden our understanding of the world by promoting social awareness. According to Lobron and Selman, social awareness refers “to the knowledge children have that allows them to understand and relate successfully to other people, both people like themselves and those who are from different backgrounds” (2007, p. 528). It helps us see the richness of what it can mean to be human. Multicultural reading experiences also help readers begin to notice that, even though people may speak different languages and look different, there are similarities between various cultures. Moreover, reading texts from multiple cultural perspectives can alert readers to cultural differences which may help students become more sensitive to traditions and beliefs unlike their own (Norton, 2013).

The social benefits lead to academic benefits of reading texts from multiple cultural perspectives. Multicultural reading can help include traditionally disenfranchised non-dominant cultural groups by giving them models in the reading that look like them. Reading about characters that we can easily identify with will help us better connect to a book. When we can connect easily to the books we are reading, we are more likely to be more motivated to read (Bui & Fagan, 2013).

Additionally, according to McCollin and O’Shea (2005), using multicultural literature can help students tap into the background knowledge to help with improving comprehension. A lack of background knowledge is a common issue for readers from non-dominant cultures who are asked to read books that reinforce the status quo.

For instance, my first time teaching Freshman Composition, an introductory level college writing course, I asked my students to write a short essay about a favorite book from their childhood. I also wrote an essay as an example. As I shared my essay on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, students began asking questions that were not related to writing. In particular, I had Hispanic and African American students in the room who did not understand my connections to the sections on the tea party and playing croquet with the Queen of Hearts. I was suddenly very aware of my own whiteness and/or socio-economic privilege. I thought all children, especially girls, enjoyed playing tea party and every family had played croquet at one point or another. However, I was wrong, and I was wrong in assuming that most of the students would have read that book.

### **Obstacles to Integrating Multicultural Literature**

Despite the benefits of using multicultural literature in the classroom, there are many reasons teachers may not integrate multicultural literature into their classroom. Three likely obstacles are lack of teacher knowledge about book options, lack of time, and lack of teacher knowledge about cultures.

**Teacher Knowledge.** One reason could be lack of teacher knowledge about book options. While there are lists of books for specific cultures, the lists are not always easy to find and they often focus on a particular culture. Official lists are even more uncommon; most of the accessible lists I can locate through web-searches are created by individuals on Amazon, Barnes and Nobel, or Pinterest without information regarding the list-maker's qualifications for such a task. Furthermore, I have found these lists

usually do not give descriptions of books. Teachers must take the time to read many potential texts to find ones appropriate for their classrooms or student reading levels.

**Time.** Another reason could be that teachers lack time to devote to teaching about the culture to support reading comprehension. Class time is limited. Teachers may desire to teach multicultural texts but refrain from it due to lack of time to devote to the culture itself. Reading comprehension requires background information on the culture the text represents (McCollin & O'Shea, 2005). While the fact that building background knowledge may be a benefit to using multicultural texts, it is equally likely to be an obstacle when time is limited.

**Comfort Zone.** Finally, teachers may not feel comfortable teaching about other cultural perspectives. If teachers do not have the background knowledge and understanding of various cultures, it is unlikely they will feel comfortable teaching multicultural literature (Ogletree, 2012). Teachers who are accustomed to the literary canon that focuses on a white, Western culture might not be able to give students the support needed (Gangi, 2008).

Ultimately, it comes down to the Peter Effect; teachers cannot teach what they do not know (Binks-Cantrell, Washburn, Joshi & Hougen, 2012). If teachers are not given the support and resources they need to help them find suitable books, time to help build student's background knowledge to support understanding, and cultural knowledge to help them support students' comprehension, they cannot successfully incorporate multicultural texts into their classroom.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of the current systematic literature review is to examine articles in-service teachers can find in practitioner-based journals in the Reading/Language arts field that describe K-8 classroom experiences using multicultural literature. This can only be seen in articles that focus on studies conducted by researchers and teachers within the classroom environment.

Not only does the inclusion of results found in authentic classroom settings help teachers see the benefits of using multicultural literature in their own classrooms, but it also explains how to implement it within their classrooms. Teachers cannot get this type of information from reading lists of books or opinion-based articles. Therefore, the current systematic literature review examines only those articles focused on classroom interventions and excludes those articles based on opinion or that simply make text suggestions.

Specifically, the goals for the current systematic literature review are two-fold; I examine the types of texts researchers and teachers are using and how they are using the texts. The research questions this paper answers are:

1. What are the teaching recommendations for using multicultural texts in the K-8 reading classroom?
2. What are literacy or teaching theories are those recommendations for using multicultural texts in the K-8 reading classroom based on?

## **Methods**

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The initial criteria were articles published in four practitioner based journals published by NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) and ILA (International Literacy Association): *Reading Teacher*, *English Journal*, *Voices in the Middle*, and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* between January 1, 2000 and February 1, 2017. Using EBSCO and ProQuest search engines, I searched all available databases for each of the four journals using the search term *multicultural literature*. Articles were searched to find the term anywhere in an article.

NCTE and ILA are two well-established organizations focused on providing teachers of English and Language Arts (ELA) research based approaches to teaching reading. NCTE's goal, for instance, is to meet the needs of ELA classroom teachers. Likewise, ILA goal is to provide information on effective reading practices for classroom teachers. Therefore, these two organizations' publications are focused on providing classroom teachers clear teaching strategies they can easily implement into their classrooms. With their goals in mind, I chose to focus only on publications from NCTE and ILA since they are most likely the most readily available and clearly tied to classroom instruction. Their articles tend to incorporate full class instruction or small group instruction, allowing teachers to fully incorporate strategies described.

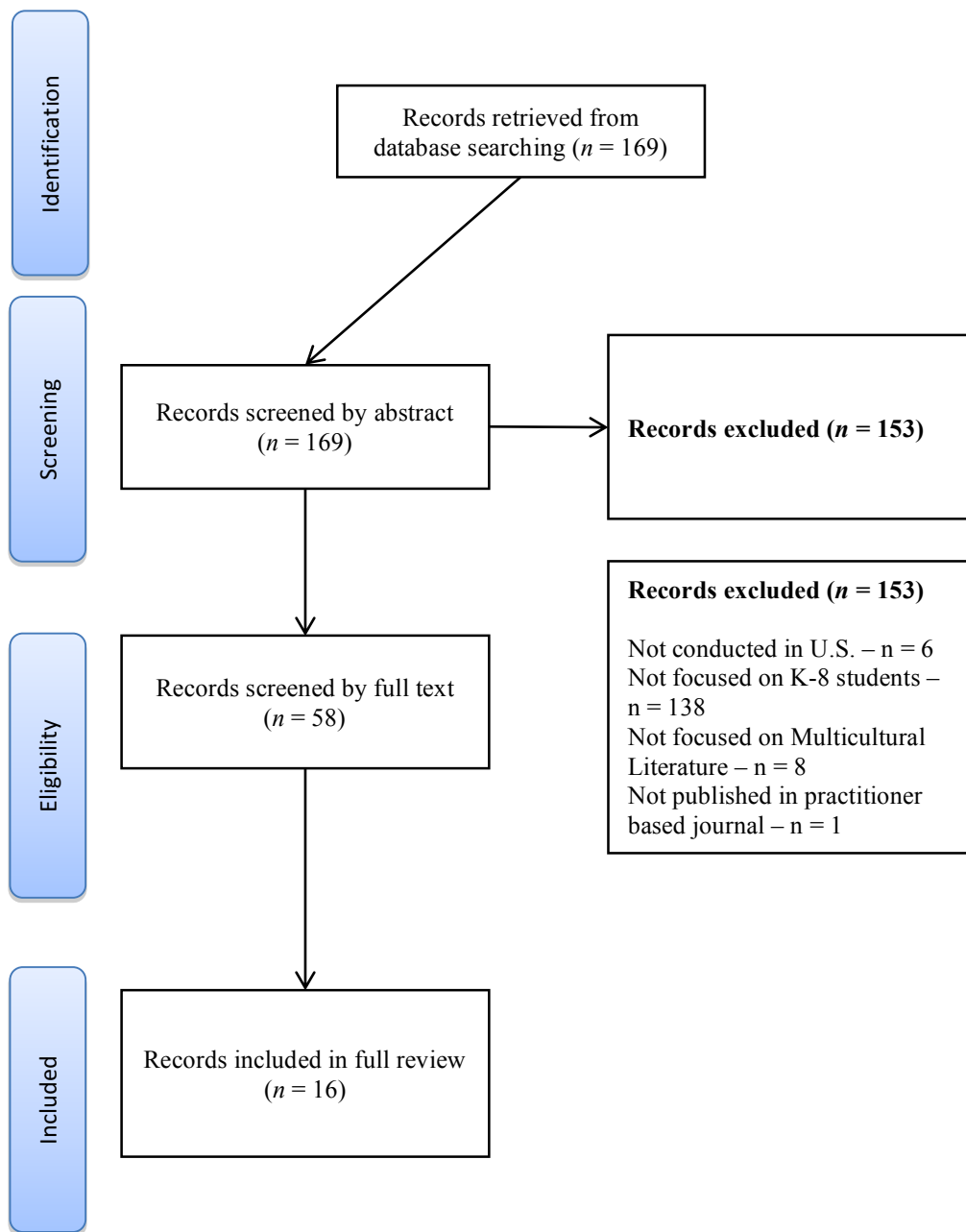
EBSCO and ProQuest are two of the largest research search engines available for academic article searches. EBSCO accesses 189 databases when searching using all

databases, as I did for my searches. ProQuest accesses 50 databases when searching using all databases, as I did for my searches.

Regarding exclusion, I excluded articles that a) did not take place in the U.S., b) did not focus with students in K-8, c) were not focused specifically on multicultural literature within reading classrooms, d) were not observations or studies conducted in reading classrooms, or e) did not recommend methods or practices to practitioners.

The initial searches turned up 169 articles. Of those articles, six articles were excluded for not being conducted in the U.S. These articles were excluded because the U.S. has a unique history in relation to immigration, People of Color, slavery, and treatment of indigenous people. Articles not conducted in the US primarily took place in Australia or England; however, some took place in China. 138 articles were excluded for not focusing on students in K-8. Articles not focusing on students in K-8 included articles that focused on secondary or post-secondary students, teachers, or were teaching tips that did not talk about an actual in-class experience with students. Eight articles were excluded for not focusing on multicultural literature. These articles often referred to some multicultural texts, but the focus was not specifically on using multicultural literature. In some cases, multicultural literature was simply suggested as a possible text to use for an instructional activity described in the article. Finally, one was excluded for not being an article in a practitioner based journal; it was a book. In total, 16 articles were included in the final analysis (See Figure 1).





**Figure 1.** Study identification process.

**Coding Procedures.** I reviewed the full text of the 16 included articles and coded for cultures being emphasized, practices being used within the K-8 classroom that

teachers could take away from the article, and theories for literacy or teaching being used to discuss the practices suggested. Additionally, I made note of the focus of the teacher's practices. In other words, what was the teacher or researcher hoping to accomplish within the study by using multicultural texts?

**Interrater Reliability.** Following conventions in the field, 20% of articles (n=33) identified were recoded to establish interrater reliability. One of the two raters were unaware of the proportion of the included-to-exclude articles to avoid possible rater bias. Interrater agreement for inclusion and exclusion criteria was established with 98% agreement. All discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached.

## **Results**

Below I describe the three major categories of articles regarding teachers or researchers desired outcomes for using multicultural texts, types of activities utilized in the articles, and theories used to support the use of multicultural literature within articles.

### **Purposes of Multicultural Texts**

**Exploring Self Identity.** Articles in this category focused on teaching readers to explore their own cultural identity through reading multicultural literature. It is important to note that multicultural texts were used for this goal in various ways. For example, children accomplished these goals by reading texts, interviewing family or community members, and participating about group discussions about texts.

One study (Schrodt, Fain, & Hasty, 2015) used parent and student journals; this study was done outside of the classroom as a family literacy project as part of a kindergarten literacy strategy. This research allowed kindergarteners to engage in

reading and writing activities. The student journal entries show that students, who are reading books from a cultural perspective similar to their own, are able to expand on the meaning more easily during their journal writing (p. 596).

Three articles (Sciurba, 2015; Hill 2013; Wood and Jocius, 2013) focused on African-American male readers. Texts used with these students were primary from African-American perspectives; however, Hill (2013) did use texts from various other cultural perspectives based on ethnicity. The other two studies in this category (Schrodt, Fain, & Hasty, 2015; Ketter and Buter, 2004) had diverse student populations. Schrodt et al. (2015) utilized texts focused on African-American, Hispanic and English/Spanish bilingual students, and books focused on adopted individuals. In each article, however, the intent was to have students engage in self-reflection and explore their identities more closely.

Sciurba (2015) suggests that we should consider the voices of the students in the class. She states that, traditionally, we have assumed male students of color do not enjoy reading; however, her case study looking at two seventh grade African American males suggests that they not only enjoy reading, but they enjoy many different types of books. For instance, one student Sciurba followed, Omari, suggested that while he positively identified with books such as Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcom X*, he equally identified with the *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling. He was identifying with the struggles characters face in both instances (p. 311-2). Another student, Michael, suggested he found it important to read about characters representing many perspectives and specifically discussed the importance of reading books focused on female characters

(p. 313). Interestingly, Michael, as with Omari, suggested *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was an important book for him to have experienced reading; however, he did not identify with the characters. Instead, he found it an important way of looking at the struggles of others.

Meanwhile, Ketter and Buter (2004) focused on helping students in a rural school district build a better understanding of the world outside their small Iowa town. The school is primarily made up of White students at 94%, and 99% of the faculty, staff, and administration is White. The goal was to “provide students with literary experiences that would help them connect with characters whose lives and experiences differed vastly from theirs and to see how their own race, class, and gender shaped their understanding of the world” (p. 47). In this way, students could learn about their identities through reading texts focused on a variety of cultural experiences. Furthermore, students were provided with new ways of understanding their own culture as White American through the experience. This is something many White people struggle to understand because White culture is the default culture in the U.S. As the researchers point out, by way of Gay, “too often such groups [people of color and other marginalized groups] are portrayed ‘as victims, servant to society, passive participants, second-class citizens, and imperfect imitations of European, Anglo male models’ (167)” (p. 47). In other words, mainstream media often give the impression that White culture is normal and other cultures deviate from those norms.

**Empathy and Intercultural Understanding.** Articles in this category were focused on building empathy in readers or developing intercultural understanding via

multicultural texts. This was accomplished through art projects, reading texts, group discussions, and journaling.

All of the articles in this section focused on diverse groups of learners. Interesting in this group were the types of multicultural texts used. While three articles (Martens, Martens, Doyle, Loomis, Fuhrman, Furnari, Soper, & Stout, 2015; Dressel, 2005) used various ethnic based books, others focused on specific non-ethnic groups. Meese (2012) focused on books about adoption and foster care and Oslick (2013) focused on books with incarcerated characters. Additionally, Styslinger and Whisenant (2004) used a variety of texts they say focus on “a variety of settings, characters, and situations” (26). Finally, Obijiofor (2003) focused exclusively on books about the African-American holiday Kwanzaa.

For an example of how these texts were used to promote empathy, Obijiofor’s (2003) article focused on books that highlighted the “seven principles of Kwanzaa, known as the Nguzo Saba” (p. 287). Through the application of these principles, the students learned to work together to build a respectful classroom community. For instance, one principle of Kwanzaa the teacher focuses on in the classroom is Ujima, “Collective Work and Responsibility”. When the students are helping each other in class, the students remind each other of Ujima. Likewise, when there are arguments between students, peers point out that Umoja, Unity” is missing from the classroom (p. 289).

**Reading Comprehension.** Articles placed in this category focused on helping students with aspects of reading comprehension directly, rather than inter or intra

personal growth. Written journals and group discussions were the primary tools used to help students develop their comprehension. Three articles (Wilson & Laman, 2007; Louie, 2006; Lehr & Thompson, 2000) in this category focused on longer fictional pieces such as novels. Two articles (Napoli & Ritholz, 2009; Lujan, 2003) focused specifically on poetry or novels in verse.

These articles focused on diverse groups of learners and incorporated multicultural texts primary based on a variety of ethnicities. For instance, Louie (2006) focused on several versions of stories from around the world. Students read five stories related to “Gingerbread Boy”, five stories related to “Magic Brush”, five versions of “Cinderella”, and three stories related to “Tapestry”. The idea was to develop a schema for the story types to help students build background knowledge that aids story comprehension. The use of multiple versions of one story helped students to focus on the more abstract concept of a story schema.

### **Teaching Strategies Utilized**

In the following section, I present the types of activities which surrounded the text-study. For each type, I describe the rationale given for the activity. Additionally, I provide an exemplar within each category.

**Writing Activities.** Several articles (Schrodt, Fain, & Hasty, 2015; Napoli & Ritholz, 2009; Dressel, 2005; Stysliger & Whisenant, 2004) presented types of journaling. Journaling is a particularly recommended way to help students engage with a text because it provides a safe space for each student to explore his or her experience and understanding of the reading material. For younger, pre-readers, art projects such as the

cultural x-ray used in Martens, et al. (2015) could be used instead as a type of writing/creation activity. For example, Marten and colleagues' cultural x-rays were multi-modal self-portraits incorporating words to describe the individual to help children better understand "the complexities in people and cultures" (p. 613). Children in first grade were asked to create these cultural x-rays for characters they read about in class. After creating several for characters, the children were asked to create their own cultural x-rays.

For formal readers, Dressel (2005) utilized Book Club Organizers and Dialogue Journals. The Book Club Organizers gave students a place to "keep track of their novel and to give some shape to their club's discussion time and to help students gain more practice and expertise with literary elements" (p. 755). The information was also used to help groups prepare a final presentation on their book club activities. Dialogue Journals were done with partners who read different books "so that they would learn about two cultures different from their own" (p. 755).

**Read Alouds.** Reading books aloud to students can be beneficial at all ages. Articles that focused on this method (Oslick, 2013; Louie, 2006; Lujan, 2003; Obijiofor, 2003) implemented the teaching strategy specifically to facilitate class discussions and engage students. Students are able to access texts that may be beyond their own reading level via read alouds. Additionally, by hearing fluent and dramatic readers, students can access greater understanding of the emotion and imagery associated with the text.

For instance, Lujan (2003) focused on reading poetry aloud. The school is located in a strip mall and the class met in the mall's coffee house for this activity. Lujan

read poems by Pat Mora aloud and followed this up with “listener writing prompts” (p. 18). The idea is to allow students to “conjure images and negotiate meaning as they listen for concrete details, the author’s and reader’s rhythmic styles, and the texture of the words” (p. 18). Students were provided with hard copies but encouraged to wait until after hearing the poem to read it themselves. The goal is to have students practice their listening and memory skills. Students are expected to listen and write from memory before going to the text (p. 18).

**Small Group Discussions.** Engaging students in small groups to discuss texts helps create a sense of community within the classroom. Students who are shy may be more likely to speak in a smaller group and it is easier for everyone to share than during full-class discussions. Articles focused on this technique suggested it helped create cultural sensitivity to classmates (Wilson & Laman, 2007) and creating a safe space for students to explore their culture (Wood & Jocius, 2013).

Wilson and Laman (2007) used small groups as a way to help create a “space where [students] feel supported and accepted” (p. 666). The collaborative environment of the small group is meant to allow students to “support each other during a moment of academic struggle” (p. 666). Furthermore, students are able to not only support each other, but realize that everyone has moments of being the supportive group member and receiving support from others. In this way, the small group not only helps with reading comprehension, but it also helps students gain self-confidence. Some conversations highlighted cultural perspectives. For instance, one student, Bryan, explained to his peers that Jesse Owens was disadvantaged because of his race when deciding on a college. He



goes on to say, “Like, if y’all were born back then y’all have to tore up books and I would have the new books” (p. 667). Jason, another student, responds that Bryan is not White, he is “mixed”. This exchange takes into account how Bryan’s perception of his race and how others perceive it differ. In Bryan’s mind, being “mixed” is the same as being White, but Jason clearly does not agree. Authors note that this conversation “was not an offtask sidebar conversation; it was a critical examination of self and text such that personal lives were included and created a deeper and more meaningful experience” (p. 667).

### **Teaching and Learning Theories Utilized**

Researchers drew upon multiple theoretical orientations which influenced both their purpose for including multicultural texts, as well as the types of activities that they engaged students in. The most common theoretical orientation was reader response; however, other authors utilized schema theory, critical literacy, reading motivation, and culturally responsive teaching.

**Reader Response.** Articles using reader response theory (Sciurba, 2014; Oslick, 2013; Dressel, 2005; Styslinger & Whisenant, 2004; Lehr & Thompson, 2000) focused on Rosenblatt’s (1938/1968) work challenging the “passive views of reading and underscor[ing] the dynamic nature of the reading process” (Lehr & Thompson, p. 480, 2000).

Lehr and Thompson (2000) explain that their focus for this research was to provide “ways of understanding and gaining insight on the children’s attempts at making meaning” (p. 483). They stress the need to understand that meaning is built interactively.

Lehr and Thompson identified seven categories of responses from the students in their study: Literal thinking; Inferring; Moral responses; Personal/connecting; Building meaning interactively; Interpretation/dialogic responses; and Background knowledge.

**Schema Theory.** Louie (2006) focused on providing a schema for a story type. Schema is what Piaget called the categories information is sorted into as we experience the world. In this case, information about a story type, such as “Cinderella,” is sorted so that a child learns what to expect in related stories. For instance, children may expect to find a young girl who is treated cruelly by a step-mother. While the author did not cite Piaget in the article, the theory was implied with the use of multiple text families.

**Critical Literacy.** Wood and Jocius (2013) focused their study on the theory of critical literacy. They define it as a theory that includes “social, political, and historical contexts and allow students to examine the influence of institutions on their everyday lives” (p. 663). Furthermore, the article is focused culturally relevant texts, collaboration, and critical conversations. The combination of the three elements created a learning experience that helped participants explore what it means to them to be African-American young men.

**Reading Motivation (Self-Determination Theory).** Napoli and Ritholz (2009) focused on reading motivation in their article. Specifically, they cited self-efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the belief that one can successfully complete a task, as a way to increase participants’ motivation to read Jacqueline Woodson’s *Locomotion*. Additionally, the authors supported their use of reading motivation by citing Guthrie and Wigfield’s 1997 study on reading engagement.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** Schrodt, Fain, and Hasty (2015) focused their work on culturally responsive teaching, a set of teaching practices that foster each student's learning by utilizing cultural knowledge, examples, and narrative styles the students are already familiar with (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This study's use of culturally responsive teaching helped kindergartners and their families have meaningful experiences reading together.

## **Discussion**

### **Research Question One**

Answering the first research question, *what are the teaching recommendations for using multicultural texts in the K-8 reading classroom*, is difficult because of the diversity in teaching situations included in the 16 articles. Teachers and students help create the context for each study. Rarely were instructional recommendations presented in a manner that could easily translate to a new context. This limitation is understandable given the complex interplay between the cultural backgrounds of the students with the culture presented in the texts. However, teachers wanting to find instructional recommendations would have to carefully comb through the articles and make large adaptations, as it is unlikely a teacher reading any of these articles would have a similar arrangement. However, that being said, there are some general techniques I think are important to consider. There were three common types of activities teachers could find useful when teaching with multicultural texts: Writing Activities (4/16 or 25% of included articles), Read Alouds (4/16 or 25% of included articles), and Small Group Discussions (2/16 or 13% of included articles).

Writing activities such as journals are helpful in allowing students space to explore their understanding of texts. Additionally, writing allows teachers the opportunity to assess reading comprehension without resorting to quizzes. Read alouds help students by giving them an opportunity to engage in the listening process, and they allow students to be exposed to more difficult texts than they may be able to read independently. Finally, small group discussions provide a social way for students to further explore their understanding of the text. Within the group, students are negotiating meaning with their peers and able to work out difficult passages with support from each other.

Much like was found in the literature review, reading activities and small group discussions provided evidence that the use of multicultural literature can help students by allowing them to access cultural background knowledge than might otherwise not be prioritized in schools. Additionally, all three types of activities provide students with opportunities to build social awareness (Lobron & Selman, 2007). Social awareness is furthered through writing activities that help students think further about their readings, read alouds that provide opportunities to experience a wide range of texts, and small group discussions that allow each student the opportunity to teach their peers and learn from their peers.

### **Research Question Two**

To answer the second research question about *what literacy or teaching theories are those recommendations for using multicultural texts in the K-8 reading classroom based on*, I examined what theories were mentioned within the articles. Of the 16

included articles, 9 (56%) made some reference to theory. These theories included Reader Response (5/16 or 31% of included articles), Schema Theory (1/16 or .06% of included articles), Critical Literacy (1/16 or .06% of included articles), Reading Motivation (1/16 or .06% of included articles), and Culturally Responsive Teaching (1/16 or .06% of included articles). The remaining 7 (44%) made no mention of theory.

**Theoretical Framework and Purpose.** When considering the theories researchers used to ground their recommendations for using multicultural texts in the K-8 classroom, it is important to examine the purpose for those theories. Ultimately, each of the included articles aimed to aid students in reading comprehension because the instruction occurred within a reading classroom. However, the various approaches provide insight into ways of thinking about the benefits of reading and how best to support student understanding of texts. In these articles, teachers worked at different levels of learning.

Reader response focuses on personal connections and background knowledge to help construct meaning; it helps readers connect on a personal level when reading. Schema theory helps students who may not have the background knowledge needed to fully understand a text. The goal is still to aid comprehension, but it is focused on a different point in the process. Meanwhile, critical literacy is designed to get students to think deeply about the text's cultural and historical context. Reading motivation leads focuses on student's wanting to read; in this way, it also aids comprehension. When students enjoy reading, they are more likely to understand what they read. Finally, Culturally Responsive Teaching incorporates many of the above aspects. CRT aids in

comprehension because it means teachers are selecting books their students are mostly likely to connect with; it means selecting texts students possess the background knowledge to understand and are motivated to read, and allows for deep discussions about cultural and historical context.

Both pre-service and in-service teachers need to be exposed to a wide array of theoretical approaches. Not all theories meet every need, so we should work to insure teacher training includes a variety of theories for teachers to pull from in the classroom. In pre-teacher education, the focus should be on helping students see the benefits to teaching using theoretical approaches. Pre-service teachers should be given opportunities to explore various approaches and provided examples of how to incorporate those approaches into their lesson plans and activities. Additionally, in-service teachers should be provided up-to-date information on theoretical approaches they can easily pull from when developing lesson plans.

**Disparity between Teacher Use and Preservice Teacher Preparation.** As I considered how the included articles helped to answer the first research question, I realized they also speak to how teachers group multicultural texts. Traditionally, pre-service education textbooks, such as Donna Norton's classic textbook (2013) with versions dated back until 2001, have grouped texts based on the culture represented. The goal is to teach the culture; however, none of the articles included in this study focused on teaching cultures. In fact, the closest an article came to that purpose was Obijiofor's (2003) article that focused on Kwanzaa books; however, the ultimate goal of the strategy was not to teach African American culture, nor was it to teach about Kwanzaa, the goal

was to help guide students in the building of a classroom community that prioritized understanding, unity, and working together.

In this way, many articles (n=7) focused on teaching empathy or developing intercultural understanding, as researchers suggest is one benefit to using multicultural literature. Additionally, six articles focused on using multicultural literature to help students gain self-knowledge and understanding. Pre-service teacher education must take into account how teachers are utilizing multicultural texts and begin to examine how that reflects the preparation of future teachers to help bridge the gap between pre-service expectations and in-service reality.

One issue to consider is that there has been a shift in how teachers use multicultural texts in the classroom. While it was once acceptable to pull out African American books just for February's focus on Black History, that is no longer the case. Additionally, many newer books are winning major awards and, therefore, are included in more classroom libraries. For instance, *Freedom in Congo Square* by Carole Boston Weatherford is a 2017 Caldecott Honor Book. The book focuses on Congo Square in New Orleans and discusses the cultural history of African Americans in New Orleans. Additionally, *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* by Javaka Steptoe is the 2017 Caldecott winner. This book focuses on Jean-Michel Basquiat, an African American artist.

Additionally, more focus has recently been placed on cultural texts, as stated previously in the introduction, through the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. The standards require students to be exposed to a variety of texts from a

multitude of cultural perspectives. As the shift to a more global approach to teaching continues, more emphasis will be placed on multicultural literature. Likewise, the current trend of inclusion in the classroom and the growing number of books focused on people with disabilities and other traditionally underrepresented groups increases aids in the growing popularity of multicultural texts in the classroom.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

Limitations of the current study include small sample size of only 16 included articles. The narrowness of the search term limited the number of initial articles found, and the focus on finding articles that specifically took place in a K-8 classroom with students further limited the number of acceptable articles. Additionally, I focused on four practitioner-based journals that I feel most teachers would have some way to access and are easily readable in the limited time available to most classroom teachers.

Two primary areas of future interest for research are to consider the number of multicultural texts available within classroom libraries. This could be done by scanning books found in classrooms and exploring the number and types of cultural perspectives represented. The second area of future interest is to do primary research on how teachers are using multicultural texts within their classrooms. This research would potentially require interviews, focus groups, observations, and the development of a survey to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers are using multicultural texts.

Additionally, future literature reviews should include more variety in types of texts used. For instance, there was no mention in the 16 included articles of using texts focused on characters with disabilities or sexuality. Articles primarily focused on



multicultural texts related to ethnicity, with a few exceptions, and those exceptions were very narrow in focus. The lack of studies focusing on a wider range of multicultural perspectives is likely due to the limited word search utilized in the current study.

### **Conclusion**

Despite much agreement regarding the importance of using multicultural texts in K-8 classrooms, when searching for practitioner-based articles there are relatively few articles that report classroom experiences. Even fewer articles provide clear recommendations to fellow teachers. Therefore, considering the many obstacles that teachers may face in using multicultural texts in the classroom, they would benefit from more guidance and support related to the inclusion of multicultural literature in the classroom. Teachers are under pressure to meet curriculum standards so authors, both researchers and practitioners, would provide greater benefit to the field if they cite literacy and/or teaching theories in their work. Additionally, more real-world teaching tips to help guide readers in ways to implement meaningful practices for teaching multicultural literature may enhance the integration of multicultural literature. Finally, the results indicate that multicultural literature is being used for many benefits, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and for reading instruction, but we may not be preparing teachers to consider multicultural texts in that manner.

### 3. CASE STUDY OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

#### **Introduction**

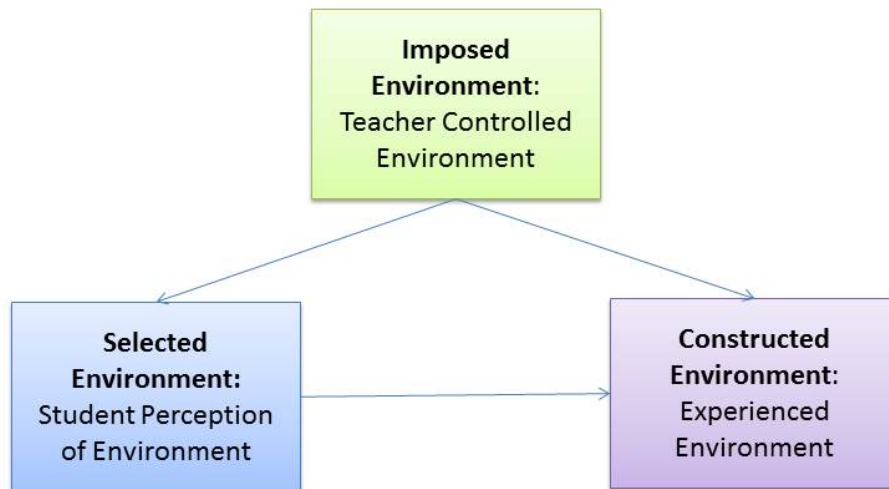
The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions pre-service teachers after taking a multicultural literature course hold about multicultural literature's use in their future classrooms. Specifically, I aimed to learn what these pre-service teachers' understanding of multicultural literature is, if they intend to use it with their students and if so, how they intend to use it in their classrooms. Additionally, I sought to understand how their past experiences with multicultural literature may have shaped their current attitudes and perceptions. With a clearer understanding of what frames pre-service teachers' views of multicultural literature, we can develop a better idea of what persists after taking a multicultural course, and what factors may contribute to that persistence.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Below, I will provide an overview on the three theoretical frameworks that were used to inform the study design and analyze participant responses. These theoretical underpinnings include: Social Cognitive Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Theory of Traditions. The first theory is a learning theory, while the latter two are critical theories.

**SCT.** Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001) describes three environmental structures we need to consider to understand how pre-service teachers learn and develop an understanding of multicultural literature. As Bandura explains, the environmental structures “include the imposed environment, selected environment, and

constructed environment. These different environmental structures represent gradations of changeability requiring the exercise of differing scope and focus of personal agency” (p. 15). In other words, teachers’ attitudes and perspectives, including the textbooks and materials utilized within the classroom, impact the learning environment of their students, and these further impact students’ behaviors and attitudes about multicultural literature (See Figure 2). As the current study focuses on understanding the impact of a multicultural literature course on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, the college classroom environment is of particular interest.



**Figure 2.** SCT in the classroom- student focused.

Note: Figure 2 explains how the instructor controlled imposed environment acts upon the selected environment of the student. The selected environment of the student combines with the imposed environment to create the constructed environment.

For my purpose in the current study, SCT works to explain why participants' responses appear to be heavily influenced by a single class. In the course, the imposed environment was structured to provide evidence of the importance of teaching with multicultural literature; however, of even stronger support for participants' selected environment were reading materials such as the textbook used by the instructor. In the case of all seven participants, the same textbook was utilized, Donna Norton's *Multicultural Children's Literature: Through the Eyes of Many Children*. This means to understand preservice teachers' attitude towards multicultural literature, it is essential to consider how pre-service teachers are taught, by whom they are taught, and with what materials they are taught.

**Postcolonial Theory.** In literature, postcolonial theory attempts to “intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, and, for intellectuals who come from post-colonial societies, to write their way back into a history others have written” (Culler, 2007, p. 131). This definition clearly connects to my desire to give space for traditionally unheard voices. It also connects to my broad definition of *multicultural* as including more than race and ethnic groups. So many voices have been written out of history, and are trying to write their way back into the history. One way to do this is through storytelling, or writing books that represent the author's culture.

Postcolonial literature helps provide the “Counter-stories” (Solorazano & Yosso, 2002), defined as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 26). The conversation is further understood through Sandra Hughes-Hassell's discussion of challenging the “Single Story” (2013, pp. 215-218). Hughes-

Hassell explains “Multicultural literature can not only challenge the single story... but also encourage and empower teens of color and indigenous peoples to take action in their own lives and in the world around them” (p. 217). Even by allowing space for the stories of people from a variety of cultures to be read by students, students are indirectly encouraged to think critically about who defines knowledge and has power.

Additionally, postcolonial theory “tends to be dominated by the theoretical discourses associated with POSTMODERNITY, or in other words DECONSTRUCTION” (Macey, 2000, p. 305). This is to say that postcolonial theory seeks to deconstruct the ideas of who defines knowledge and who has power. Therefore, I suggest, through deconstruction, we begin to acknowledge that colonial power did not only affect the colonized ethnic groups, but also the marginalized within the dominate group such as women, the disabled, and other groups seen as inferior or undesirable. As Williams and Chrisman say, “In many respects, discussion of ethnicity is always also by implication a discussion of gender and sexuality” (p. 17). It is an issue of “patriarchal discourse” (1994, p. 17). That is to say that colonial power is concerned with women’s roles within the dominant culture and the other cultures it seeks to control.

Ultimately, the issue of who defines knowledge and who has power is determined by the ongoing struggle for space to be equally available to all groups’ voices. This is of particular importance in the reading classroom because much of the literary canon used to develop curriculum is from the perspective of the dominant culture, a Western, male perspective. According to Banks, the canon fails to represent “people of color, women, and other marginalized groups” (p. 33), but these groups

continue to work for progress regarding “their voices, visions, and perspectives be included in the curriculum” (1991, p. 33). The next step is to understand the conditions that lead to teachers incorporating, or not incorporating, multicultural literature into the classroom, as they often act as the gatekeepers for change.

This is an issue of postcolonial pedagogy. The teacher’s role in postcolonial pedagogy is to prepare students to analyze society and understand how power and knowledge are constructed through cultural and socio-historical context (Andreotti, 2001, pp. 180-181). By allowing multiple cultural voices to be available to students, students are better able to see the complexity of how knowledge and power are constructed through cultural and socio-historical context. Again, leading back to the need to incorporate multicultural literature into the classroom.

**Theory of Tradition.** Theory of tradition (Drout, 2006) describes how units of culture called memes (Dawkins, 1976) pull together into groups of memes called a meme-plex, or a meme eco-system, that becomes a tradition over time. These traditions are strongest and more likely to be passed on when they carry memes that require belief as an essential component. For example, memes associated with religions and beliefs in God(s) are very strong and difficult to change. Drout (2006) and Dawkins (1976) suggest that this is why Christianity was able to transform memes associated with Pagan holidays to be associated instead with Christian holidays. For example, the pagan tradition of trees being brought into the house and decorated during the winter, was made to be Christian and only changed by making an association to Jesus’s birth. It would have been rather difficult to destroy the meme, but it was possible to change the

meme's association from one tradition based on strongly held belief to another one based on a similarly strongly held belief.

Understanding how participants' world-views are influenced by the traditions and belief-systems they follow provides insight into how their selected environments are formed. It informs what memes may be transferring over into teaching and, specifically, how they view multicultural literature. For instance, one strong meme associated with religious traditions is that God has a path for the individual; one's goal is to find her or his "calling". This meme may drive someone to pursue a career in education such as becoming an elementary teacher; however, that same meme, strong because it is associated with strong belief, becomes part of the pre-service teacher's view of teaching.

In this way, we see the colonialist meme transmitted to focus on "saving" children, a view associated with the White Savior, a term associated with Rudyard Kipling's colonialist poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899). Kipling's poem becomes an anthem to colonialist powers that see it as a moral duty to rule non-Christian, non-White people. As it is a moral duty and implies associated memes with religion, the moral obligation is to pull up those who were not born Christian and White, so that their souls might be saved from Hell. This colonialist tradition of the White Savior is extremely strong; modern movies and books are frequently reiterating the idea and often associated with teaching. For instance, *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and *Freedom Writers* (2007) both feature White female teachers transforming the lives of Black and/or Brown students. The role of postcolonial theory, and for my purposes postcolonial or

multicultural literature, is to reinstate the voices of the colonized and marginalized cultures.

In the current study, the theory of tradition serves as a way to characterize the underlying perceptions about teaching and using multicultural literature in participants' future classrooms. Through considering the word choices in their responses to interview questions, I have found that there are certain belief-based memes that appear to cross over into participants' ideas about teaching and culture.

### **Methods**

Here, I provide information on the methodological approaches used in the current study. I will begin with my positionality statement, discuss participants, provide information on the interview protocol, explain the interview environment, and detail the analysis process. To recap, the purpose of this study is to gain insight into the way pre-service teachers think and feel about using multicultural literature in their future classrooms. To do this, I interviewed seven pre-service teachers about their experiences with reading, multicultural literature, and personal thoughts on the use of multicultural literature in their future classrooms.

#### **Positionality Statement**

My love of reading books from a variety of perspectives, including non-human characters such as in Kathryn Lasky's series *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* or the dwarves, elves, and hobbits from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, positioned me to be comfortable from an early age with reading and connecting to diverse characters. In fact, I have a difficult time understanding when people talk about not being able to connect to



characters for various reasons. This is, in part, because the books come alive for me as I read. I find it easy to escape into the world of well-written books. In fact, I take my role as reader very seriously.

When I was around eight years old, someone explained the idea of *suspension of disbelief* to me. The term was coined by the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a way of defining the relationship between the reader and author of a text. The author must do everything within her or his power to ensure the reader can believe the world created in the text, and the reader, in turn, must try to believe the events of the book within the world created by the author are real. For me, as long as I am able to suspend disbelief, I can read and enjoy the book, and that includes being able to find a character or characters I can make connections with easily.

My interest in reading and literature causes my focus to be placed on what I have students read in the classroom. I believe reading texts from as many perspectives as possible is vital to helping students broaden their cultural understanding and worldview. Also, I need to have a better understanding of why teachers choose to, or choose not to, include multicultural literature in their classrooms.

Considering my research focuses on multicultural literature's use within the classroom, I see my goal as helping create space for multiple voices to be heard. While I cannot give a group a voice, I can insure there is opportunity for those groups' voices to be heard. This begins with including space for the voices of those within my classroom, as with Culturally Responsive Teaching, but it goes further. I should include space for those voices that are not represented in the classroom as well.

By including space for the voices of cultures represented within my classroom, I help to insure my students feel their voices matter. I should strive to provide role models for my students who come from the same types of backgrounds, look like them, and who, therefore, my students can easily relate to and understand. I want to insure texts I offer my students include these voices, so my students see themselves in the stories they read. However, it is crucial to remember that I do have a responsibility to ensure the texts are as true to the culture represented as I can manage. It would not be advisable to include texts that rely on stereotypes of the represented culture.

Additionally, I want to encourage students to read texts focused on cultures not represented in my classroom. Once my students leave the classroom, they will enter a world full of people who do not think, act, believe, or live the same way as the students. It is part of my responsibility to help prepare my students for this experience. I should strive to incorporate texts that provide as many different ways of experiencing the world as possible in hopes that students do not see some as *right* and others as *wrong*, but so that my students see there are many ways of being right.

Furthermore, I believe that everyone benefits from exposure to multiple voices. With this in mind, I see my work as positioning itself within postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory focuses on the Other. The Other is any culture seen as different from the dominant culture, and is often considered inferior in some way (Andreotti, 2011, p. 6). While Andreotti's discussion of postcolonial theory tends to focus on ethnic cultures, I see colonial influence in how people of different races, ethnicities, regions of origin,

religions, socioeconomic statuses, genders, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, and other at-risk populations are viewed.

### **Participants**

Participants in the current study (n=7) were enrolled as education majors in a pre-service teacher education program at a large public university in Texas. All participants indicated a desire to teach in a K-8 Reading/Language Arts classroom upon graduation. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 24. Additionally, while it was not my intention for this to occur, all participants were either currently enrolled in methods courses or were about to begin their methods courses at the time of the interviews and had all taken the same multicultural literature course for one of two instructors, myself being one.

**Recruitment.** Initial contact was made by use of a flyer approved by the IRB office. In most cases, I handed out the flyer during classes in which I was invited to talk with about the project. In one instance, a participant emailed me after hearing about the project from another instructor. All participants were provided a copy of the consent form and agreed to take part in the interviews. Participants had no monetary incentive to participate. However, I offered participants in this study the opportunity to have one piece of writing edited by me, but only one participant took advantage of the opportunity.

Additionally, I offered participants the option to see the protocol before the interview to help them feel at ease, so they knew the types of questions they would be asked. All participants took advantage of the offer. Finally, all but one student, Felicia, were my former students who had taken their reading course in multicultural literature

with me as the instructor. Felicia took the same course taught by a different instructor; however, the course syllabi were extremely similar, and Felicia was aware I taught the course at the time of the interview.

**Data Collection.** As previously identified, all but one interview took place face-to-face and most were conducted on the university campus. One interview took place at a local coffee shop. The one interview conducted remotely was conducted via Google Hangout. Google Hangout was chosen for its ease of use and convenience since both parties were familiar with the online tool. Before interviews began, participants were given time to read over the interview protocol and consent form. Each participant was asked to sign the consent form before beginning the interview.

**Participant Background.** Out of the seven participants, six were female and one was male. Three of the participants self-identified as White, one as Latina, and one as Hispanic. The remaining two participants did not self-identify their race or ethnicity. Four participants were either just beginning or enrolled in junior methods, while the other three had completed junior methods and were enrolled in senior methods. All names are pseudonyms.

Allison had just begun her junior methods courses. She was assigned to a mentor teacher and had been observing the class for a few weeks by the time we sat down for the interview. The interview took place at a local coffee shop. Allison had attended public schools in Texas for K-12 and began her post-secondary education at a community college before transferring to her current university. She self-identified as White and heterosexual without prompting from me.

Bethany was about to begin junior methods when we sat down for our interview. This interview was on campus and face-to-face. She attended school in Texas K-12, but did not identify if that was private, public, or both. Bethany entered her current university upon graduation from high school.

Crystal was also about to begin junior methods when we sat down for our interview. The interview took place on campus in a classroom. She attended school in Texas K-12, but did not identify if that was private, public, or both. Crystal attended a community college before entering her current university. She did self-identify as White and middle class without prompting from me.

Darla was taking senior methods courses at the time of the interview. She was assigned a mentor teacher and working in the classroom several days a week. Her interview took place using Google Hangout. She mentioned that she had not completed all of her K-12 education in Texas, but she did attend all public schools. Darla had attended a community college before enrolling in her current university.

Elizabeth was enrolled in senior methods at the time of the interview. Her face-to-face interview took place in a classroom on campus. She was assigned a mentor teacher and had been observing in the class for a short time. Additionally, Elizabeth had attended public school in Texas for K-12. She did not discuss her transition from high school to college, so it was unclear if she transferred in to her current university. Elizabeth did self-identified as Latina without prompting from me.

Felicia was about to begin junior methods at the time of the interview. Her face-to-face interview took place on campus in an office. She attended private schools in

Texas throughout her K-12 experience and had entered her current university upon high school graduation. She did self-identify as White without prompting from me.

Finally, Greg was enrolled in senior methods at the time of the interview. His face-to-face interview took place in a small office on campus. Greg was assigned to a mentor teacher and observing the teacher several days a week at the point of our interview. Greg did not comment on the types of schools he attended before entering his current university; however, he did self-identify as Hispanic.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was developed through a process I began in a graduate course on grounded theory; as part of that process, I was able to develop the protocol and evaluate the questions during a pilot study. The questions were reviewed by peers. The protocol was also edited based on feedback from a small pilot study where I interviewed three pre-service teachers who were similar to participants in the current study.

These interview questions include:

1. Tell me a little about yourself as a pre-service teacher, how long you have you had an interest teaching, and why you went in to teaching.
2. Who was your favorite character from a book you read as a child?
3. What helped you connect with [character's name]?
4. Did you find it easy to connect to characters when you read?
5. What types of characters did you find it easiest to connect with?
6. What types of characters did you find it most difficult to connect with?
7. Did you read books about other cultures as a child?
8. What types of cultures?

9. When you hear the term “multicultural,” what do you think of? How would you define the word “multicultural”?
10. What experiences did you have in reading multicultural texts in school?
11. How do you feel your views of multicultural literature have been shaped by your experience with it?
12. How do you feel about having your [future] students read texts from other cultures?
13. How valuable do you feel it is to read texts focusing on a variety of cultures?
14. What, if any, possible obstacles to using multicultural texts do you [expect to] face?
15. What makes a multicultural reading experience meaningful to the reader?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add about your thoughts on using multicultural literature in the classroom?

The above questions can be broken down into four types of questions: Opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Opening questions are meant to ask for information that will be easy for the participant to discuss (p. 44). For instance, question 1 is an opening question; it provides an opportunity for the participant to talk about her or himself. Introductory questions introduce the topic (p. 45). Here, 2-4 are introductory questions; these questions help focus the questions on reading and the participant’s experience with reading as a child. Transition questions move the conversation into the key questions. In the above protocol, questions 5-6 are used to transition the conversation toward talking about multicultural literature. Key questions directly address the research interest. Questions 7-15 are designed to directly look at participants’ attitudes and perceptions about using multicultural literature. They are also meant to help establish what type of experiences the participants had with multicultural literature as a child. Finally, an ending question is used to catch any data

the participant wishes to provide that was not covered in the other questions (p. 46). I developed question 16 for this purpose.

### **Data Analysis**

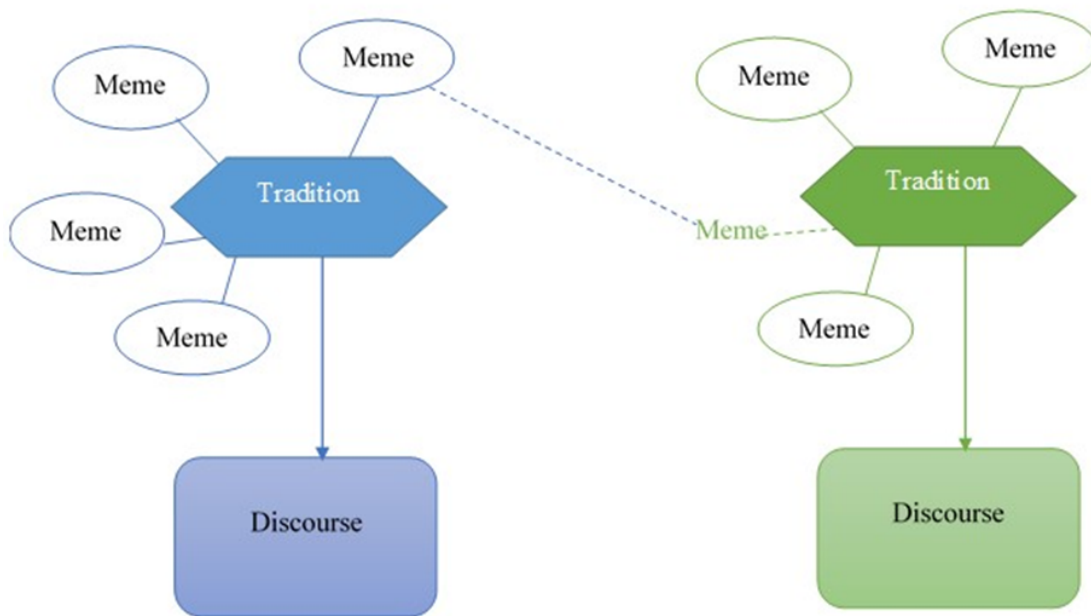
Once interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. First, I tried using index cards to break up data from the interviews and sort into themes; however, I found it much more helpful to print the transcriptions and highlight. Eventually, I made copies of the transcriptions that compiled all participants' responses to each one of the 16 questions. I was then able to see how each person had responded to a single question or group of questions without going back and forth between documents. As I proceeded through this process, I relied on discourse analysis to make judgements.

**Discourse Analysis.** Discourse analysis (Gee, 1990) is a way of looking at language that allows the researcher to understand how discourses are created and utilized. Discourses are “stretches of language” that “hang together” (p. 129). More specifically, a discourse is a way of communicating specific ideas within a certain environment. A single person may have many discourses in which they are literate. For example, a person may be literate in a religious discourse and professional discourse such as the religious discourse of a specific Christian denomination and the discourse of teachers and education.

The idea that a single person has multiple discourses she or he is fluent with is essential in understanding how students situate meaning when exposed to a new discourse. Situated meaning, according to Gee (1990, p. 112), requires the individual to make judgements about meaning based on context and experiences and helps the



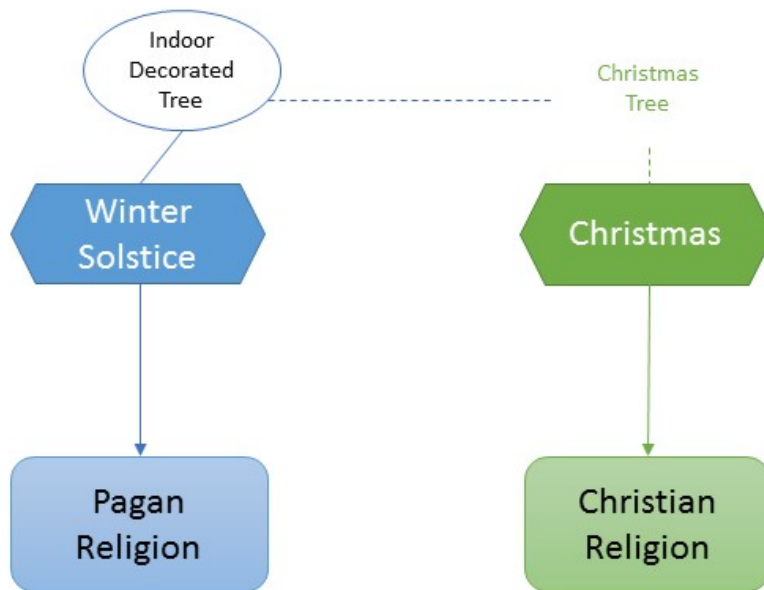
individual create a figured world, “a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal”. This is accomplished, in part, based on theories the individual holds about the topic. In other words, the traditions and associated memes the individual already has in place aid in the understanding of the new discourse (See Figure 3). While Gee did not discuss memes or transitions, the two ideas combine to help give a more complete picture of how meaning is made and information is processed.



**Figure 3.** Interplay between Traditions and Discourse for pre-service teachers.

Note: Figure 3 shows the relationship between multiple element that help to understand the figured worlds (Gee, 2011, p. 114) expressed through the discourse of participants. Individual memes, smallest units of culture, create traditions that are expressed through discourse. Individual memes may be transferred to new discourses as a person encounters new experiences. However, these transferred memes are not exact copies; they maintain some of their original context, but it is subverted and influenced by the new tradition it is being associated with in the new discourse.

In the current study, one meme associated with the tradition of Christianity, for instance, is Christmas tree as I discussed previously. Here the meme *indoor decorated tree* is transferred from the pagan religion to Christianity and becomes associated with Christ's birth, making it a *Christmas tree* (See Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Example of meme transfer for pre-service teachers.

Note: Figure 4 provides a visual example of a meme Indoor decorated tree transferring to another discourse, from the pagan discourse of celebrating White Solstice to the Christian discourse of celebrating Christ's birth.

## Results

In the following section I present the results in the following manner. I start with the more general themes regarding orientations towards teaching and literature, then move to more specific themes regarding multicultural texts. As typical for case study

presentations, I embed the evidence (quotations) and interpretations within the results section.

### **Teaching Interests**

Here, I will consider how participants discussed their interest in teaching and what led them to decide to major in education. This data was collected in one question of my interview protocol: *Tell me a little about yourself as a pre-service teacher, how long you have been interested in teaching, and why you went into teaching.* The responses were analyzed using discourse analysis (Gee, 1990) that led to themes. The goal was to determine what experiences led to their choice in career path.

**Leadership Experiences Working with Youth.** Participants expressed that previous experiences, typically informal, teaching youths profoundly impacted their decision to enter the teaching profession – whether a recent decision or one made previously. While most of the participants (n=6) expressed a long-held desire to pursue a career in teaching and education, one participant, Allison, said she came to the decision after some time as a sociology major in college. Her interest in teaching, she said, “came from wanting to do more than study sociology. I wanted to be active in helping people” (Q1P1, ln. 3-4). Allison’s desire to help people led her to realizing that she wanted to teach. However, her shift in focus was also facilitated by an experience she had working at a summer church camp. As a leader at the camp, Allison experienced, first-hand, the impact she could have on young people’s lives. She explained, “I got to work with kids every day that week, and I really enjoyed it. I just liked being able to feel like I was doing something special and that I had fun doing it” (Q1P1, ln. 4-6).

Additionally, Bethany's experience working with her church's vacation bible school was most enjoyable because she "just loved being able to work with the kids and see them grow as in their faith" (Q1P2, ln. 6-7). This focus on her students' developing faith as a reason to want to go into teaching was interesting. Her program is focused on preparing pre-service teachers to teach in public school programs. However, there is a cultural assumption that Bethany seems to be making by assuming that the experience of teaching will help her students grow in a similar way. It could be that she is envisioning a teaching experience outside the public school system, or it could be that she sees spiritual growth as being connected to education. She may identify herself as someone who aims to facilitate growth in others, in a global sense.

Interestingly, Elizabeth's experience working at a summer church camp gave her a different perspective entirely from the one described by Bethany. Elizabeth said, "It was great because I got to be in charge; I got to plan my own lessons. I would read them Bible stories, and we did activities. I loved it so much that I kept doing it even after I came to college!" (Q1P5, ln. 3-5) Here, it appears Elizabeth was excited by the actual experience of teaching and planning. She enjoyed being in control of the lessons and executing her plans. This experience is more aligned with the manner that typical pre-service education programs prepare students to do as public classroom teachers.

However, the language used by participant when talking about the experience of working with youth during church camps revealed a shared Christian value of finding one's *calling*. Bethany and Allison both described it as "God showing" (Q1P1, ln. 7)

them their “calling” (Q1P1, ln. 7; Q1P2, ln. 5); while Elizabeth simply said she “realized my purpose” (Q1P5, ln. 1) through her work with the church.

Church was not the only experience working with youth that led participants into education. Greg, for instance, decided he loved working with young people after working in an after-school program. He found it easy to connect with the students, and his “energy just matches theirs” (Q1P7, ln. 4). In fact, Greg said, “I love working with kids. They are fun!” (Q1P7, ln. 1) and “I just knew I should be a teacher because I enjoy working with kids and seeing them have fun and learn” (ln. 4-5). For him, the role of teacher was appealing, not for the formal processes of planning and instructing, but more related the interactions and informal processes.

In fact, interestingly, the idea that participants enjoyed working with children was more important in their decision to major in education than their love of a subject area. No participants indicated a love for reading as their motivation from becoming a teacher. This could be because the focus was on pre-service teachers who planned to teach K-8, thus be generalists. It might be that those students who have a strong desire to teach a particular subject, because of a love for a discipline (e.g., history), choose to focus on secondary or post-secondary education. One reason this might occur is that secondary certification requires a major in the content area, so people drawn to literature and reading major in English rather than education.

Another interesting aspect of participants’ responses is that the focus is on helping individuals rather than goals associated with eliciting social change or social justice. When the focus is on social change or social justice, the emphasis tends to be on

listening to those who are oppressed. It is not about being the leaders, it is about being the support team for those who are affected by the injustice.

In fact, the emphasis was often about describing their enjoyment or what they derived from the experience of working with children. Here, referring to postcolonial theory, we can see evidence of what is at the heart of the White savior meme -- the idea that I get to feel good by helping others. This is one reason why movies like *Freedom Writers* (2007) or Oprah Winfrey's 2017 movie *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* can be enjoyable to White audiences. In the case of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Lacks becomes a supporting character in her own story. The hero is the White woman who insures Lacks's story gets told. It is the White savior's story that is important to tell in these instances, and we see the same idea expressed here in why participants want to become teachers. It is about their story and their feelings, and to a lesser extent about the future students.

Interestingly, Greg's desire to work with children does not appear to fall into the same White savior traps. His reasons focus on the enjoyment of playing with the students and having fun while learning. This could be a different meme all together that is associated with the male roles in childcare. There are some memes in American culture that suggest fathers are doing extra work when they care for children. The father caring for the children while the mother is out means he is "babysitting". While some seem to consider this reverse sexism, it is not. It is still making the assumption that women are responsible for the children. The father, who is not considered equally

responsible, is doing the mother a favor. The discourse, therefore, of male parental roles could be at the center of how Greg views his experience working with children.

**Influence of Mother Figures.** Some participants (n=2) explained that watching a close relative's love for teaching led them to their choice in education as a major. Both Crystal and Felicia found their way to education through seeing the fulfillment their relatives felt as teachers. Furthermore, both women appear to have confidence of their ability to adapt to teaching because they have watched close family members in the teacher role throughout their lives. Interestingly, while both Crystal and Felicia said they wanted to be teachers after seeing their relatives' experiences, their responses when talking about how that led them to teaching were more focused on their ability to teach and manage time rather than appearing to be about a true desire to work with children. This is contrast to those participants who chose to teach after experiencing working with children who tended to focus on the way their experiences made them feel and the enjoyment they got from working with children, participants who decided on education based on their personal relationships with teachers focused on their ability to understand the mechanics of teaching.

Crystal said, "I want to be like my mom; we are very much alike. Best friends, you know" (Q1P3, ln. 2-3). Crystal views her mother as a sort of image of her future self. Crystal went on to explain, "[I] am sure some of the people in my classes are going to be surprised when they see a real classroom. I feel like I know a little better what to expect. So I always knew I wanted to be a teacher like my mom. Well, I don't want to teach older kids, but you know, like, I want to teach because I know how rewarding it

can be” (Q1P3, ln. 5-8). Crystal is counting on her perceived similarities to her mother’s personality and interests to ensure success in teaching.

Likewise, Felicia expressed a special bond with her aunt saying, “I knew I wanted to be a teacher because my aunt is a teacher. I’m really close to her, and she tells me a lot about what to expect. My aunt is always there for me” (Q1P6, ln. 2-4). Additionally, Felicia feels that the close relationship with her aunt give her a better understanding of what it means to be a teacher. She explained, “I know [my aunt] will be a great resource when I’m in the classroom. I think I know more about the classroom management stuff because I can talk to her. Like, I just feel I’ll make a good teacher because I already understand what it is really like in real life” (Q1P6, ln. 4-6).

Crystal and Felicia’s responses were almost entirely focused on their understanding of the tasks related to teaching based on their experiences with role models who are currently teachers. In contrast to Elizabeth, Allison and Greg, there was no evidence in their discourse of independent enjoyment of working with students or fostering a love of learning. The focus is on the procedural aspects of the classroom and their interpretation of competence. Additionally, both women assume they will enjoy teaching solely based on the experiences of their relatives. Teaching appears to be a practical choice for Crystal and Felicia rather than a choice based on their own desires or a feeling of being called to it.

**Experiences as Students.** Interestingly, only four participants expressed having extremely positive experiences, as students which they credited as part of the reason for choosing to major in education. For instance, Allison, who decided on education after



she was already in college, said that she had teachers who “inspired me to want to be like them” (Q1P1, ln. 8).

Bethany and Darla focused on their experiences as students. Bethany explained, “I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was in fourth grade. My teacher let us pick where we wanted to sit, like anywhere. Um, we could even sit on the floor! She was my favorite teacher and I want to be like that with my students” (Q1P2, ln. 2-5). Bethany’s positive experience with a motivating teacher not only motivated her as a student, but it also lead her to want to teach.

Meanwhile, Darla said:

I guess I just want to be a teacher. I used to play school and pretend I was teaching my students. My sister would get really mad because I’d give her homework. I was the teacher! It was my favorite thing to play when I was little. I loved school and all of my teachers! I went to a really small school when I was really little and then we moved to Texas and my school wasn’t small anymore, but I still loved it! It is the only thing I have ever wanted to do since I was like six (Q1P4, ln. 1-6)

Darla loved school so much that it was something she even wanted to play at school. It is interesting to notice that she did not play she was a student, but the teacher. Clearly, Darla saw school as enjoyable and exciting, and it seems to fit that she would decide to enter a pre-service teacher preparation program as an undergraduate.

Much like the previous discussion about participants who connected their desire to teach based on their relatives who are teachers, positive role models appear to inspire

future educators. Additionally, participants suggested it was primarily elementary teachers who inspired them to want to teach. This could have influenced their choice in grade level, but it could also refer to the more student-focused approach of education programs designed for elementary school children over the content focused experiences of secondary education.

Finally, it is interesting to note that experience in working with children and good experiences as teachers tend to focus the choice on a personal interest in teaching that does not appear to as clearly come out when the choice is based on experience with family members who are teachers. There seems to be passion for teaching in the voices of participants who have personal experience working with children and a love for education in the voices of participants who had positive experience as students; however, the two participants who focused responses on their relatives' experiences as teachers focused on more practical aspects of teaching- classroom management and understanding the demands of teaching.

### **Favorite Characters**

Here, I will examine the types of characters participants identified as favorites and why they found those characters so relatable. This data was collected in two questions of my interview protocol: *Who was your favorite character from a book you read as a child?* and *What helped you connect with this character?*. The goal was to determine what types of characters participants were naturally drawn to and why they enjoyed those characters in particular.

**Specific Characters.** Only two of the participants were able to provide specific characters they found it easy to connect with when reading as children. Allison said, “my favorite character was Anne from *Anne of Green Gables*” (Q2-3P1, ln. 1). Meanwhile, Elizabeth “liked Junie B. Jones” (Q2-3P5, ln. 1). Both Allison and Elizabeth were very clear in their choice.

Likewise, both women found it easily to explain their choices. Allison said of her choice of Anne, “I could just relate to her because, you know, she was like me. Well, I mean not like I’m an orphan, but like I could see myself in similar types of situations. And I knew that I would have felt like her. Our personalities were similar” (Q2-3P1, ln. 2-4). She went on to add, “I could have been friends with Anne. We would have gotten along” (ln. 4-5). Allison is describing a deep personal connection with Anne.

Similarly, Elizabeth suggested that Junie B. Jones, the character, made her laugh. She said the books “were funny and totally made me laugh. Plus, she was always getting into something- just like me.” (Q2-3P5, ln. 1-2). Surprisingly, Elizabeth did admit that she had not enjoyed reading in general as a child, so it was important that books she read were fun to her.

Allison and Elizabeth both chose White Western European characters as their favorites. They could see themselves in the stories. However, it is important to also note that they both mentioned being able to relate to the characters’ personalities; both made comments about the similarities in their behaviors to the characters they chose. They may also have been exposed primarily to White Western European characters.

**Books or Series.** An additional three participants could narrow their choice down to specific books. Bethany, Darla, and Felicia focused on books or series they most enjoyed. Bethany and Darla preferred classic books. Bethany specifically listed *Little Women* and *Little House on the Prairie* as her favorite books growing up, and Darla said her favorite was *The Secret Garden*. When discussing her reasons for enjoying the book, I decided to ask her about another book by Burnett, *The Little Princess*. Darla explained, “Oh, that’s by the same person? Yes, I really loved that book too! And the movies” (Q2-3P4, ln. 6-7). Felicia, however, preferred books like the *Babysitter’s Club* series.

Here, much like with participants who provided specific characters, the focus was on personal connections to fictional characters. Bethany said, “I like female characters because they were like me” (Q2-3P2, ln. 1), and she went on to explain that she preferred books with female characters because she “could relate to them because [she] was a little girl too.” (ln. 3-4). Bethany is expressing a need to see herself in the story. The characters in the books she preferred are White and of a Western European background. The books themselves represent the dominate culture as viewed from the female perspective.

**Non-Specific Choices.** Greg could not offer specifics on characters or books, but he did say that he enjoyed books about sports and “real things” (Q2-3P7, ln. 2). Crystal could only offer that she preferred characters in “real situations” (Q2-3P3, ln. 1). When asked if there were any specific characters that she could think of, Crystal responded, “not really” (ln. 2). It seems clear that these participants were less focused on reading. Greg did say, “I didn’t really like reading very much” (Q2-3P7, ln. 1). This could be

why he found it difficult to provide more specific information. This also provides additional evidence that he entered the teaching career through an interest in the students, not the content.

Something else to point out is that Greg self-identifies as Hispanic. He may have enjoyed reading more if there had been books available with Hispanic male characters. Additionally, he may have enjoyed historical nonfiction if it had been offered as an option. For instance, when Greg mentioned liking realistic books, I specifically asked him about historical fiction such as *The Watsons go to Birmingham*. He responded that he might have enjoyed books like that, but he could not recall being offered any historical fiction options.

Meanwhile, Crystal focused more on character that “were doing things [she] might do” (Q2-3P3, ln. 1-2). Again, this might help explain her response because characters may not stand out in her memory as well. It would seem more likely that characters doing regular things that she might do could run together in her memories of reading. Additionally, this kept her from choosing books from particular genres because the characters were not enough like her or were engaged in activities she could not take part in. When asked about fantasy for instance, Crystal said, “Nope, I hated fantasy. Harry Potter, nope” (Q2-3P3, ln. 4-5). Likewise, while a reader like Greg may have enjoyed the opportunity to select historical fiction, a reader like Crystal may have been less likely to enjoy it since the characters’ experiences would likely be much different than her life experiences.

Ultimately, participants' choices in favorite characters, books, series, or genre helped provide insight into how they perceived the world as young readers. While six of the participants specifically said they preferred characters or to read books that had characters like themselves, Greg stands out as the one participant who seemed interested in only reading books about his interests. Again, this could be because of the lack of books available to Greg depicting characters similar to himself. Overall, the lack of self-awareness about favorite characters may impact how well they are able to sell the idea of reading or particular books to future students. Additionally, if they lack the ability to connect easily to characters, how will they be able to help their students make meaningful connections to characters? Finally, where will that enthusiasm for reading come from if the teachers do not feel it themselves? Further research is required to answer these questions.

### **Making Connections with Characters**

In the following sections, I examine the reading experiences participants described with making connections to characters. This data was collected in three questions of my interview protocol: *Did you find it easy to connect to characters when you read?*; *What types of characters did you find it easiest to connect with?*; and *What types of characters did you find it most difficult to connect with?* The goal was to better understand the types of characters participants were drawn to and see what made the difference between a character they found it easy to connect with and those they found more difficult to connect with when reading.

**Connecting with Characters.** Five participants explained they found some ease in connecting with characters; however, this assertion was followed up with a caveat about the importance of characters being similar to the participant. For instance, Allison said, “I [am] straight and White, so I could connect to characters like that” (Q4-6P1, ln. 2). Allison’s response is very specific; characters not only needed to be White but also straight. I believe her response about being both straight and White came from discussions in the multicultural class she took with me as the instructor.

The phrase “like me” (Q4-6P1, ln. 1; Q4-6P2, ln. 1; Q4-6P4, ln. 3) came up often. Participants preferred characters that came from similar backgrounds as their own. Furthermore, Chrystal said she preferred characters “who were mostly doing things I did” (Q4-6P3, ln. 3). Additionally, Darla said, “I grew up in a strict house where girls were expected to learn to cook and stuff. I like books with girls who were ladylike” (Q4-6P4, ln. 3-4). Felicia said she could connect, “if they were regular books about regular girls” (Q4-6P6, ln. 1). Overall, it appears there was little chance these participants would have self-selected books from a variety of cultural perspectives.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, self-identified as Latina, and Greg, self-identified as Hispanic, both made it clear they had found it very difficult to connect to characters as young readers. Elizabeth said, “no, I didn’t relate to characters usually. I mean, they weren’t like me. I’m Latina, and you know, there weren’t a lot of books like what we read in your class” (Q4-6P5, ln. 1-2). Similarly, Greg lamented, “no, it wasn’t easy for me to connect to characters. I didn’t really read a lot. (Q4-6P7, ln. 1-2). It could be that, given the options of reading more multicultural texts as a young reader, both Elizabeth

and Greg would have found it easier to connect to characters when reading. As mentioned earlier, it is essential that readers are able to see themselves and their cultures represented within the texts they are reading.

**Difficult Characters Connections.** Understandably based on their responses in the previous section, participants found it difficult to connect to characters less like themselves. Additionally, as above, five participants were clear in their discussions about types of characters they found it difficult to connect with, while Elizabeth and Greg continued to explain that they had difficulty finding characters to connect with when they were young readers.

Allison explained, “if I couldn’t see myself doing the same types of things or their families were too different from mine, I didn’t really like those books” (Q4-6P1, ln. 3-4) I asked her specifically about fantasy novels such as Harry Potter because I so often used that as an example in classes. Allison responded, “no, I hated anything like that. I wasn’t allowed to even watch Harry Potter anyway, but I wouldn’t want to read it because it isn’t really like me. I’m not a witch” (ln. 6-7). This was similar to Crystal’s response. She said, “I didn’t like fantasy or anything that was not real. I didn’t like magic or anything like that.

Both Bethany and Darla said they had trouble with books focused on male characters. Bethany explained that she had trouble connecting to “characters that were boys or in crazy situations” (Q4-6P2, ln. 3), and Darla said, “I didn’t really like tomboys of boy books... like books that had mostly male characters” (Q4-6P4, ln. 5-6). Again, Bethany and Darla’s responses do fall into line with the idea that connections are easiest



when the characters are like the readers, or, at least, when the readers perceive the characters to be similar to themselves.

Felicia's response was similar in tone to those of the other participants, but she focused on needing characters to be like herself without giving specifics on what that meant for genre or gender. She said, "if [characters] were too different and had lots of really bad things happening to them, I just couldn't see myself in those books. I mean my family was very normal" (Q4-6P6, ln. 4-5). Considering how many books focus on major life changes, Felicia's reading experiences for connecting with characters limits the options greatly.

Overall, participants felt characters should represent their experiences very closely. This is very limiting for their reading options. Whole genres are dismissed, huge numbers of books refused because the character's gender is not the same as the participants, and many books are left unread simply because characters experience life events unfamiliar with those of participants. To me, it feels like the point of reading has been missed in the education for this group of future teachers. By reading a wide range of books, we are able to safely experience so many different versions of what it is to be human even when the characters are not human themselves.

Additionally, there is some concern that since participants tended toward finding it difficult to make connections when reading there may be future implications for their future classrooms and students. Teachers are responsible for selecting books and materials for student consumption, so it does bring to mind the idea of what these participants would select based on their focus when reading. If they cannot make

connections with a wide range of characters and books, it stands to reason that they may likely limit the types of available texts in their classrooms.

### **Experiences with Multicultural Literature**

In the following sections, I examine the experience participants described with multicultural literature. This data was collected in four questions of my interview protocol: *Did you read books about other cultures as a child?; What types of cultures?; What experiences (for example, did you do a unit on a particular culture) did you have in reading multicultural texts in school?; How do you feel your views of multicultural literature have been shaped by your experience with it? Either in K-12, college or outside of school.* The goal was to find out what, if any, experiences participants had reading multicultural literature and what impact those experiences had on shaping their views of multicultural literature.

**Lack of Multicultural Literature.** Overwhelmingly, participants (n=5) said they could not recall any use of multicultural literature in their educational experiences until college. Bethany, for instance, said, “No. I’m pretty sure we didn’t read anything about culture. No. I don’t remember anything like that” (Q7-8;10-11P2, ln. 1-2). Bethany’s phrasing here seems odd, perhaps; however, in light of the Norton textbook’s focus on teaching in-depth units on literature from cultural groups, it seems that she could be assuming there would have been more than a book or two. Likewise, Elizabeth said, “I don’t remember any” (Q7-8;10-11, ln. 1) and Felicia explained, “Not really any, we didn’t read many books. I don’t think I read anything multicultural until college” (Q7-8;10-11, ln. 1-2). Additionally, Greg’s response made it clear that he could not

remember reading any multicultural literature either. He said, “We didn’t read anything that I think fits as multicultural” (Q7-8;10-11, ln. 1).

Participants could not recall having read anything they felt fit as multicultural literature. This means they either had not read assigned text, multicultural texts had not been assigned, or they simply could not remember the books they had read. If participants failed to read texts that had been assigned, this could create an interesting topic for reflection as pre-service teachers. Of interest here is the idea that if, as students, they chose to ignore reading assignments, then how will they encourage their future students to not ignore reading assignments in their classrooms. If, however, multicultural literature was not assigned during K-12 education, the issue becomes what multicultural literature was available at that time and what we can do to insure the gap in reading multicultural literature is lessened or filled in completely. On the other hand, if participants could not remember the texts they read, the issue seems more with the lack of meaningful connections and meaningful experiences reading the multicultural literature. Perhaps too, if a teacher did not draw attention to the fact that a book occurred in a culture that was not their own, they may not have even attended to that aspect of the book.

**Holocaust Studies.** Two participants suggested they had read multicultural texts; however, when they discussed those texts, they were both talking about a very popular book set during the Holocaust. For instance, Allison said, “Oh, maybe like Number the Stars. I think my teacher read that to us. So, yeah, I guess it was just Jewish culture really” (Q7-8;10-11, ln. 1-3) and Crystal explained, “we really didn’t read a lot of books.

I don't think any were about other cultures. Oh, there was that one. About a girl and there was a necklace she wasn't Jewish but it was the Holocaust" (Q7-8;10-11, ln. 1-3). Crystal was describing the same book Allison had read.

*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, and it is not a multicultural text using my operational definition that "recognizes, accepts, values, affirms and promotes individual diversity in a pluralistic setting" (Manna and Brodie, 1992, p. xx) and includes cultures based on race, ethnicity, region of origin, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, age, and disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalized groups. It is historical fiction, it is a wonderfully written book; however, it is not about Jewish culture or any culture. It is a White savior text about the people of Denmark working to save the lives of their Jewish neighbors once the Nazi occupation begins. There is not focus on the everyday lives of Jewish people or anyone else. It is a special case in a specific historical context and is ultimately meant to help expose children to a horrible moment in history, the Holocaust, and the fight against the Nazis.

Too often teachers and students are confused by the Holocaust. It is assumed that books focused on the Holocaust are automatically multicultural and about Jewish culture. However, there are several issues with this. The first is that books set in the Holocaust do not even always have well developed Jewish characters or, at least, do not have main character that are Jewish. However, there is another issue that is often overlooked: the burden of the Holocaust becomes placed entirely on the Jewish culture. The sum of the experience of being Jewish (a religion and rich cultural traditions which

have existed for over 3500 years) becomes the story of the Holocaust (a tragic 5-year period of genocide).

**College Experience.** As discussed earlier, all participants had taken a course on teaching reading using multicultural literature that was taught by me (n=6) or another professor who used a very similar course design (n=1), so all the students had similar exposures to information about using multicultural literature. Their responses indicate the course was beneficial to them because it exposed them to texts they otherwise would not have read or even been aware of without it.

Participants appear to have found the course beneficial because of the exposure to books. For instance, Allison said, “I didn’t even know those books existed really until your class. It made me realize I needed to consider more options for my classroom” (Q7-8;10-11P1, ln. 7-8) and Bethany stated, “In college, after taking the multicultural class, I knew I wanted to have books like that in my future classroom” (Q7-8;10-11P2, ln. 4-5). Likewise, Crystal explained, “I really like your class. It showed me that there are a lot more options than I thought there would be” (Q7-8;10-11P3, ln. 5-6). Clearly, exposure to multicultural literature is important.

As with other participants, Darla explained that the class made her think about teaching reading in a different way and gave her more options. She said, “I really liked the book I read, *Bud, Not Buddy*. I will have my students read more things like that” (Q7-8;10-11P4; ln. 6-7). Elizabeth said she “realized there were a lot of books [she] didn’t know existed. A lot of good books!” (Q7-8;10-11P5; ln. 2-3). Felicia and Greg said it made them realize that more cultures should be represented in the literature they

use in their future classrooms (Q7-8;10-11P6; Q7-8;10-11P7). Every single participant explained how the class had impacted their understanding and thoughts about what they have students read; however, it is unclear if students truly have internalized this or if my being the interviewer impacted their responses. While I am sure they were exposed to many wonderful books, there could be some bias in these responses.

Overall, no participants recalled reading texts that would technically be considered multicultural literature. Five participants specifically said they had not read any multicultural texts and the remaining two provided the name of a text that was not actually multicultural. This means that participants got all their information on multicultural literature from their college course on teaching reading using multicultural literature. In fact, comments like, “Until college there weren’t any really” (Q7-8;10-11P1, ln. 4). This means the course and its contents and materials are essentially the only tools these pre-service teachers are taking forward with them into the classroom.

### **Defining Multicultural**

Here, I examine how participants defined the term *multicultural*. This data was collected in one question of my interview protocol: *When you hear the term multicultural, what do you think of? How would you define the word multicultural?* The responses were analyzed using discourse analysis that led to themes. The goal was to determine if word choice helped further understand participants’ definitions and underlying attitudes or perceptions about multicultural literature in general.

Participants tended to define *multicultural* by what or who they felt it included. All participants (n=7) began by listing cultures based on ethnicity such as *Latino*,

*Chinese, Indian* used for people from India, *Native American, Middle Eastern, Jewish, Asian,* and *African-American*. See table 1 for a breakdown of specific ethnicities mentioned by participants. Typically, the responses came as a restatement of the question. For instance, Darla said, “Hmm, how would I define multicultural? Like, what does it mean? Well, like in the class we talked about...” (Q9P4, ln. 1). Likewise, Allison said, “Oh, like in your class. We read about...” (Q9P1, ln. 1).

| Participant | Latino | Chinese | Indian (India) | Native American | Middle Eastern | Jewish | Asian | African-American |
|-------------|--------|---------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------|-------|------------------|
| Allison     | X      |         |                | X               | X              | X      | X     | X                |
| Bethany     | X      | X       | X              | X               | X              | X      |       | X                |
| Crystal     | X      |         |                | X               | X              | X      | X     | X                |
| Darla       | X      | X       | X              | X               | X              | X      |       | X                |
| Elizabeth   | X      |         |                | X               | X              | X      |       | X                |
| Felicia     | X      |         |                | X               | X              | X      | X     | X                |
| Greg        | X      | X       | X              | X               | X              | X      |       | X                |

**Table 3.** Breakdown of ethnicities listed by participants.

All participants used the terms “Latino,” “Native American,” “Middle Eastern,” “Jewish,” and “African-American” (See Table 3). This is mostly likely because they had all taken the same undergraduate course in teaching reading using multicultural literature with the same textbook, Donna Norton’s *Multicultural Children’s Literature: Through the Eyes of Many Children*. This book includes chapters specifically using these terms. Furthermore, Norton suggests that these terms are labels for specific cultures and focuses her text on teaching the cultures using literature. Norton also includes “Asian” as a culture in her book. As shown in table one, three participants used it in their definitions

of *multicultural*. This is important to note because it means the class does have impact on how pre-service teachers form their perspectives of what *multicultural* means based on the information from undergraduate courses, and likely provides an organizational structure for new learning. Therefore, it is essential that those courses evolve over time to stay current in the field's trends. In fact, Greg remembered that I had specifically talked about the importance of not discussing all of Asia as a single culture. He said, "I also remember you told us that we shouldn't just lump a whole lot of countries together. Like China and India aren't the same culture" (Q9P7, ln. 3-5).

Additionally, participants used phrases such as, "like in class" (Q9P2, ln. 1; Q9P4, ln. 4) or variations of it to position their definitions within the context of the course on using multicultural literature to teach reading. The language suggests a shared discourse between participants and researcher, which there was since I had taught the course before and all but one participant were my former students. This also suggests that they had not experienced much with multicultural literature prior to the course which, again, elevates the importance of the course.

### **Teaching with Multicultural Literature**

In the following sections, I examine the experience participants described with multicultural literature. This data was collected in five questions of my interview protocol: *How do you feel your views of multicultural literature have been shaped by your experience with it? Either in K-12, college or outside of school.?*; *How do you feel about having your [future] students read texts from other cultures?;* *How valuable do you feel it is to read texts focusing on a variety of cultures?;* *What, if any, possible*



*obstacles to using multicultural texts do you [expect to] face?; and What makes a multicultural reading experience meaningful to the readers?.* The goal was to determine the value participants placed on using multicultural literature in their future classrooms and what concerns they might have about using it.

**Importance of Exposure as Undergraduates.** All seven participants explained they found their course in teaching with multicultural literature valuable in shaping their opinions of using it with their future students. Primarily, this was because none of the participants had previous experience with multicultural literature prior to college. Also, it is interesting to note that all seven participants find value in multicultural literature and want to use it in their future classrooms after taking the one course.

There are many reasons for the responses students had that relate to the importance of the course. One, as with previous discussions, could be that I was the interviewer. All but one participant took the class with me, and the one who did not take my class was well aware that I did teach it. Additionally, they all knew they were taking part in my dissertation study, so that might have impacted responses as well. For instance, Allison said, “I guess they were mostly shaped by your class. I learned that I needed to take into consideration the cultures represented in my classroom and that I should encourage students to read about other cultures” (Q11-14P1, ln. 1-3). The primary goal of the course is to expose students to a wide range of multicultural texts. We also talk about culturally responsive teaching methods. Likewise, Elizabeth said, “I learned about ways of incorporating a lot of different cultures into teaching. I think it is

really important that students have options and feel supported when reading multicultural texts” (Q11-14P5, ln. 1-2).

In fact, book selection was something that several students suggested was most valuable about the course. Bethany said, “I did learn there are a lot of books available” (Q11-14P2, ln. 1) and Crystal said, “I have learned that there are a lot of books out there I didn’t know about” (Q11-14P3, ln. 1-2). Additionally, Darla said, “I learned a lot about how to pick books and about teaching cultures from class” (Q11-14P4, ln. 1). Through experiencing choices, or autonomy, in their weekly readings, participants were able to see that there are many multicultural options available. As Greg said, “[we] need to plan for students to have a lot of options. They shouldn’t just read about one culture all the time” (Q11-14P7, ln. 1-2).

Between the focus on multicultural literature and culturally responsive teaching practices, the course provides a working understanding of postcolonial pedagogy that helps enable pre-service teachers to consider their students and the texts they bring into their future classrooms. Likewise, the course provides memes associated with culturally responsive teaching that can be taken forward as part of their new teacher discourse. Specifically, a course can impact the language, or discourse, used to discuss teaching by providing memes that help establish the importance of culturally responsive teaching and the use of multicultural literature. Memes may include seemingly small things like using “Native American” rather than “Indian” to discuss indigenous peoples of North America. It can also be larger ideas like the idea that a person cannot be “illegal” even if their legal status in a country is “undocumented”.

Additionally, six participants expressed that their views of what makes a reading experience meaningful came from the course. Allison, Crystal, Darla, and Felicia all comments on their experiences writing letter essays as being something they plan to do with their future students. This assignment came from another required reading the students all did for the class. It is one of Nancie Atwell's ways of getting students in the zone. Here, again, we see the importance of materials used in the course to help shape students' views about using multicultural literature. Likewise, Greg and Bethany both expressed the importance of booktalks, another one of Atwell's strategies.

In fact, only one participant chose to look beyond the course to bring up an option. Elizabeth suggested, "maybe have them bring foods from different cultures when we are reading? I mean who doesn't like food?" (Q15P5, ln. 1-2). While this is activity has markers of culturally responsiveness, it is not ideal as a group assigned activity, for a number of reasons. First of all, not all students can take part. Some students will not have the ability to bring food or may not have access to the necessary ingredients. Others may have allergies that excludes them or need to be on restricted diets for various reasons. Additionally, some may view the bringing of foods from other cultures than one's own as a type of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is when one culture, typically White or another dominate culture based on region, selectively takes over parts of another culture. However, it is promising that the Elizabeth is reaching beyond typical reading activities, and those presented in the course, in order to generate additional interest in cultural learning.

**Future Concerns.** Participants fell into two categories when asked about future concerns of teaching with multicultural literature. They either had no concerns (n=2) or their concern was about time to have students read multicultural literature (n=5). Here, we may be seeing the effects of one class, or two if they have taken their required multicultural education course, put up against everything they are getting in all their other courses. It seems that more integration of the importance of multicultural literature and culturally responsive teaching should be encouraged. Another issue is that all of the participants took the multicultural literature course before a major shift in focus took place. Their courses focused heavily on a single textbook by Donna Norton called *Through the Eyes of Many Children*.

The text explains in detail how to teach cultures, and in particular, the African-American, Native American, Latino, Asian, Jewish, and Middle Eastern cultures. Norton's process is focused on an in-depth study of the literature of each course that is often unrealistic in the classroom. Several students realized the approach would not work. For instance, Bethany said, "I just don't know how to make the time to do it like Norton teaches" (Q11-14P2, ln. 4) and Elizabeth explained, "I don't think we have to do the whole process like in the textbook" (Q11-14P5, ln. 2-3). The textbook focuses too heavily on requiring the teacher to teach each culture. However, if we take a look back at postcolonial theory, we realize that removes the voices from the culture. Teachers do not need to teach the culture to have students read multicultural books. In fact, teachers cannot teach cultures they do not belong to, and they cannot even ever teach their own

culture fully. The multicultural texts are themselves snapshots of experiences, just as our lives are snapshots of the experiences within our cultures.

### **Conclusion**

Through the process of talking with pre-service teachers about their perceptions and attitudes about using multicultural literature in their future classrooms, I have found several important issues to consider. First, it is essential to understand what their experiences were with multicultural literature as K-12 students; second, it is important to consider their pre-service teacher training on the use of multicultural literature; third, it is important that students are given instruction on how to incorporate multicultural literature seamlessly; and, fourth, that we consider how literature is being taught in the classroom.

With a good understanding of what pre-service teachers learned in K-12 about cultures, understanding what books they may have read, and how they connect to characters when reading, we can begin to see what gaps there may be that need to be filled during their pre-service teacher education experience. For instance, my participants had a lack of experiences with multicultural literature coming into college. This means that they needed to receive a strong foundation during a single semester-long course.

The course was successful in helping establish memes and, therefore, a discourse, for teaching with multicultural literature. Participants have working definitions of *multicultural*. Most of them took their definitions from the textbook used

in their course. This means it is important to plan courses around research-based, high quality materials to help establish a strong foundation for students.

Additionally, it is extremely important that students are provided a clear understanding of how to incorporate multicultural literature while still ensuring all state requirements are met. If they consider that the two are incompatible, they will likely forego multicultural literature in favor of aligning teaching with standards and high-stakes tests. I believe this can best be accomplished by focusing on themes or topics rather than cultures. While the class may require students to read multicultural texts, assignments can be developed to help students pair more familiar texts with multicultural texts to help students see how easily multicultural literature can be incorporated. Additionally, students can be challenged in class to consider the practical issues of merging the two goals within lessons or units of study.

Finally, as important as teaching how to incorporate literature into their classrooms is, having literature in the classroom does little good without providing instruction on what to do with it. We should work to ensure students learn how to make meaningful connections with a wide range of texts and help them find ways to facilitate perspective taking between their students and characters in future. After all, empathy is needed to encourage social awareness. According to Lobron and Selman, social awareness refers “to the knowledge children have that allows them to understand and relate successfully to other people, both people like themselves and those who are from different backgrounds” (2007, p. 528). It helps us see the richness of what it can mean to be human through the connections we make to characters when reading.

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this study. First, case studies require a focus on a small number of instances, so there were only seven participants. This means that no meaningful generalizations to the overall population of pre-service teachers can be made based on the findings. However, that is not the goal of case studies. Second, there was little variation in participant's experience. All participants were from the same program and all had taken the same course on teaching reading using multicultural literature, with little differences between texts available and structure of the course. Even in demographics, there was little variation. Yet despite shared demographics, the group often provided heterogenous responses to questions. Finally, third, there is the issue of bias. Students may have been influenced by the fact that I was the interviewer. While I did explain that there were no *right* or *wrong* answers, I often felt participants were looking to provide the answers they thought I wanted. This may have led to an overly positive bias towards the use of multicultural literature.

## **Future Research**

Future research in this area should consider larger groups. To do this, there should be a questionnaire developed that can more easily reach a wider number and range of participants. I believe that, as part of the questionnaire, questions should be developed to consider participant reading motivation and maturity. Understanding participants' motivation, or lack of, will lead to a stronger understanding of their ability to connect with a wide range of characters when reading. Likewise, understanding their reading maturity, or what and why they read, will provide information on their use of

resources to fill in information gaps when reading. For instance, it might help in determining if they are likely to consider reading historical fiction. Someone with a lower reading maturity who does not read for information may be less likely to read historical fiction since they are unable or unwilling to look up historical facts and consider accuracy.

Additionally, a longitudinal study would be valuable in looking at how perspectives and attitudes shift as participants move from pre-service to in-service teachers. Do their choices in text selection continue to develop, stagnate, or regress to focus less on multicultural texts? Are they able to find the time to incorporate multicultural texts into the curriculum? Do their concerns change from time-focused to something else? While longitudinal studies are often considered difficult to maintain, they are extremely beneficial to fully understanding teacher development.



## 4. CASE STUDY OF IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

### **Introduction**

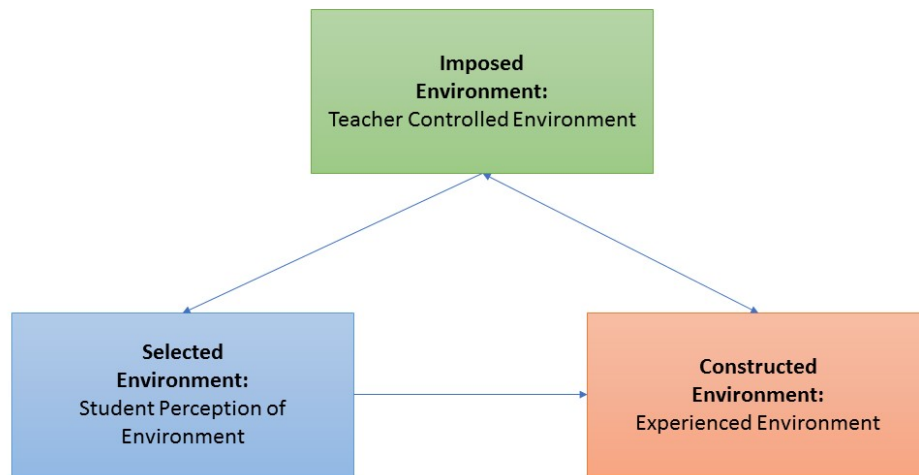
The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions in-service teachers after teaching in various classroom environments hold about multicultural literature's use in their classrooms. Specifically, I aimed to learn what these in-service teachers' understanding of multicultural literature is, the extent that they use multicultural literature with their students and, how they use it in their classrooms. Additionally, I sought to understand how their past experiences with multicultural literature may have shaped their current attitudes and perceptions. With a clearer understanding of what frames in-service teachers' views of multicultural literature, we can recognize the major influences on teacher's decisions to include or exclude multicultural literature. Furthermore, this insight may help in understanding the roadblocks teachers see in more fully incorporating multicultural literature into their classrooms.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Below, I will provide an overview on the three theoretical frameworks that were used to inform the study design and analyze participant responses. These theoretical underpinnings include: Social Cognitive Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Theory of Traditions. The first theory is a learning theory, while the latter two are critical theories.

**SCT.** Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001) describes three environmental structures we need to consider to understand how in-service teachers

learn and develop an understanding of their student's needs related to multicultural literature. As Bandura explains, the environmental structures "include the imposed environment, selected environment, and constructed environment. These different environmental structures represent gradations of changeability requiring the exercise of differing scope and focus of personal agency" (p. 15). In other words, teachers' attitudes and perspectives, including the textbooks and materials utilized within the classroom, impact the learning environment of their students; however, the constructed environment experience informs the teacher of the needs of her or his students. Therefore, the process is not one-way, it is reciprocal. The constructed environment impacts both the students and the teacher (see Figure 5). As the current study focuses on understanding the impact teaching experience has on in-service teachers' attitudes, the students' impact on the teachers' environment is of particular interest.



**Figure 5.** SCT in the classroom- teacher focused.

Note: Figure 5 explains how the instructor controlled imposed environment acts upon the selected environment of the student. The selected environment of the student combines with the imposed environment to create the constructed environment. Finally, the constructed environment then impacts the teachers’ understanding and, therefore, the way she or he constructs the imposed environment in future encounters.

For my purpose in the current study, SCT works to explain why participants’ responses are so heavily impacted by the students they have taught. While some participants also discuss graduate course work that influenced their understanding of multicultural literature, all participants credit their interactions with students in the classroom for their desire to incorporate multicultural literature in their classrooms. Therefore, it is essential to consider how the imposed environment of the teacher evolves based on the constructed environment encountered in the classroom.

**Postcolonial Theory.** In literature, postcolonial theory attempts to “intervene in the construction of culture and knowledge, and, for intellectuals who come from post-colonial societies, to write their way back into a history others have written” (Culler, 2007, p. 131). This definition clearly connects to my desire to give space for traditionally

unheard voices. It also connects to my broad definition of multicultural as including more than race and ethnic groups. So many voices have been written out of history, and are trying to write their way back into the history. One way to do this is through storytelling, or writing books that represent the author's culture.

Postcolonial literature helps provide the "Counter-stories" (Solorazano & Yosso, 2002), defined as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 26). The conversation is further understood through Sandra Hughes-Hassell's discussion of challenging the "Single Story" (2013, pp. 215-218). Hughes-Hassell explains "Multicultural literature can not only challenge the single story... but also encourage and empower teens of color and indigenous peoples to take action in their own lives and in the world around them" (p. 217). Even by allowing space for the stories of people from a variety of cultures to be read by students, students are indirectly encouraged to think critically about who defines knowledge and has power.

Additionally, postcolonial theory "tends to be dominated by the theoretical discourses associated with POSTMODERNITY, or in other words DECONSTRUCTION" (Macey, 2000, p. 305). This is to say that postcolonial theory seeks to deconstruct the ideas of who defines knowledge and who has power. Therefore, I suggest, through deconstruction, we begin to acknowledge that colonial power did not only affect the colonized ethnic groups, but also the marginalized within the dominate group such as women, the disabled, and other groups seen as inferior or undesirable. As Williams and Chrisman say, "In many respects, discussion of ethnicity is always also by implication a discussion of gender and sexuality" (p. 17). It is an issue of "patriarchal discourse"

(1994, p. 17). That is to say that colonial power is concerned with women's roles within the dominant culture and the other cultures it seeks to control.

Ultimately, the issue of who defines knowledge and who has power is determined by the ongoing struggle for space to be equally available to all groups' voices. This is of particular importance in the reading classroom because much of the literary canon used to develop curriculum is from the perspective of the dominant culture, a Western, male perspective. According to Banks, the canon fails to represent "people of color, women, and other marginalized groups" (p. 33), but these groups continue to work for progress regarding "their voices, visions, and perspectives be included in the curriculum" (1991, p. 33). The next step is to understand the conditions that lead to teachers incorporating, or not incorporating, multicultural literature into the classroom, as they often act as the gatekeepers for change.

This is an issue of postcolonial pedagogy. The teacher's role in postcolonial pedagogy is to prepare students to analyze society and understand how power and knowledge are constructed through cultural and socio-historical context (Andreotti, 2001, pp. 180-181). By allowing multiple cultural voices to be available to students, students are better able to see the complexity of how knowledge and power are constructed through cultural and socio-historical context. Again, leading back to the need to incorporate multicultural literature into the classroom.

**Theory of Tradition.** Theory of tradition (Drout, 2006) describes how units of culture called memes (Dawkins, 1976) pull together into groups of memes called a meme-plex, or a meme eco-system, that becomes a tradition over time. These traditions

are strongest and more likely to be passed on when they carry memes that require belief as an essential component. For example, memes associated with religions and beliefs in God(s) are very strong and difficult to change. Drout (2006) and Dawkins (1976) suggest that this is why Christianity was able to transform memes associated with Pagan holidays to be associated instead with Christian holidays. For example, the pagan tradition of trees being brought into the house and decorated during the winter, was made to be Christian and only changed by making an association to Jesus's birth. It would have been rather difficult to destroy the meme, but it was possible to change the meme's association from one tradition based on strongly held belief to another one based on a similarly strongly held belief.

Understanding how participants' world-views are influenced by the traditions and belief-systems they follow provides insight into how their selected environments are formed. It informs what memes may be transferring over into teaching and, specifically, how they view multicultural literature. For instance, one strong meme associated with religious traditions is that God has a path for the individual; one's goal is to find her or his "calling". This meme may drive someone to pursue a career in education such as becoming an elementary teacher; however, that same meme, strong because it is associated with strong belief, becomes part of the in-service teacher's view of teaching.

In this way, we see the colonialist meme transmitted to focus on "saving" children, a view associated with the White Savior, a term associated with Rudyard Kipling's colonialist poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899). Kipling's poem becomes an anthem to colonialist powers that see it as a moral duty to rule non-Christian, non-

White people. As it is a moral duty and implies associated memes with religion, the moral obligation is to pull up those who were not born Christian and White, so that their souls might be saved from Hell. This colonialist tradition of the White Savior is extremely strong; modern movies and books are frequently reiterating the idea and often associated with teaching. For instance, *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and *Freedom Writers* (2007) both feature White female teachers transforming the lives of Black and/or Brown students. The role of postcolonial theory, and for my purposes postcolonial or multicultural literature, is to reinstate the voices of the colonized and marginalized cultures.

In the current study, the theory of tradition serves as a way to characterize the underlying perceptions about teaching and using multicultural literature in participants' classrooms. Through considering the word choices in their responses to interview questions, I have found that there are certain belief-based memes that appear to cross over into participants' ideas about teaching and culture.

### **Methods**

Here, I provide information on the methodological approaches used in the current study. I will begin with my positionality statement, discuss participants, provide information on the interview protocol, explain the interview environment, and detail the analysis process. To recap, the purpose of this study is to gain insight into the way in-service teachers think and feel about using multicultural literature in their classrooms. To do this, I interviewed six in-service teachers about their experiences with reading,

multicultural literature, and personal thoughts on the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms.

### **Positionality Statement**

My love of reading books from a variety of perspectives, including non-human characters such as in Kathryn Lasky's series *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* or the dwarves, elves, and hobbits from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, positioned me to be comfortable from an early age with reading and connecting to diverse characters. In fact, I have a difficult time understanding when people talk about not being able to connect to characters for various reasons. This is, in part, because the books come alive for me as I read. I find it easy to escape into the world of well-written books. In fact, I take my role as reader very seriously.

When I was around eight years old, someone explained the idea of *suspension of disbelief* to me. The term was coined by the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a way of defining the relationship between the reader and author of a text. The author must do everything within her or his power to ensure the reader can believe the world created in the text, and the reader, in turn, must try to believe the events of the book within the world created by the author are real. For me, as long as I am able to suspend disbelief, I can read and enjoy the book, and that includes being able to find a character or characters I can make connections with easily.

My interest in reading and literature causes my focus to be placed on what I have students read in the classroom. I believe reading texts from as many perspectives as possible is vital to helping students broaden their cultural understanding and worldview.



Also, I need to have a better understanding of why teachers choose to, or choose not to, include multicultural literature in their classrooms.

Considering my research focuses on multicultural literature's use within the classroom, I see my goal as helping create space for multiple voices to be heard. While I cannot give a group a voice, I can insure there is opportunity for those groups' voices to be heard. This begins with including space for the voices of those within my classroom, as with Culturally Responsive Teaching, but it goes further. I should include space for those voices that are not represented in the classroom as well.

By including space for the voices of cultures represented within my classroom, I help to insure my students feel their voices matter. I should strive to provide role models for my students who come from the same types of backgrounds, look like them, and who, therefore, my students can easily relate to and understand. I want to insure texts I offer my students include these voices, so my students see themselves in the stories they read. However, it is crucial to remember that I do have a responsibility to ensure the texts are as true to the culture represented as I can manage. It would not be advisable to include texts that rely on stereotypes of the represented culture.

Additionally, I want to encourage students to read texts focused on cultures not represented in my classroom. Once my students leave the classroom, they will enter a world full of people who do not think, act, believe, or live the same way as the students. It is part of my responsibility to help prepare my students for this experience. I should strive to incorporate texts that provide as many different ways of experiencing the world

as possible in hopes that students do not see some as *right* and others as *wrong*, but so that my students see there are many ways of being right.

Furthermore, I believe that everyone benefits from exposure to multiple voices. With this in mind, I see my work as positioning itself within postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory focuses on the Other. The Other is any culture seen as different from the dominant culture, and is often considered inferior in some way (Andreotti, 2011, p. 6). While Andreotti's discussion of postcolonial theory tends to focus on ethnic cultures, I see colonial influence in how people of different races, ethnicities, regions of origin, religions, socioeconomic statuses, genders, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, and other at-risk populations are viewed.

### **Participants**

Participants in the current study (n=6) were K-8 teachers in Texas and had experience teaching reading/language arts. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 55. Three participants had experience teaching in public schools in Texas only, two participants had experience teaching in both public and private schools in Texas, and one participant had experience teaching in a private school in Texas only.

**Recruitment.** Initial contact was made by use of a flyer approved by the IRB office. All six participants were recruited through mutual friends, former coworkers, and in one instance a former professor. All participants were provided a copy of the consent form and agreed to take part in the interviews. Participants had no monetary incentive to participate. However, I offered participants in this study the opportunity to have one piece of writing edited by me, but no participants took advantage of this offer. This offer

was made because two participants were current graduate students. Finally, I offered participants the option to see the protocol before the interview to help them feel at ease, so they knew the types of questions they would be asked. All participants took advantage of the offer.

**Data Collection.** Interviews took place in one of two ways: face-to-face or via Google Hangout. Two interviews took place at a local restaurant, one interview took place at a local coffee shop, and three took place using Google Hangout. Google Hangout was chosen for its ease of use and convenience since both parties had easy access to the online tool. I provided instructions to both participants before the interview took place. Before interviews began, participants were given time to read over the interview protocol and consent form. Each participant was asked to sign the consent form before beginning the interview.

**Participant Background.** All six participants were female. Interestingly, none of the participants self-identified their race or ethnicity. As stated earlier, all six participants were teaching in K-8 classrooms in Texas. Three had only taught in public schools, two had taught in both public and private schools, and one had only taught in private schools. All names are pseudonyms.

Heather has been teaching for over twenty years. She has taught in both public and private schools in Texas. Heather holds a Master's Degree in Education. I conducted the interview with Heather face-to-face at a local restaurant. According to Heather, her first teaching experience was in a school district that serviced many Hispanic and Black students from low SES households.

Irene explained that she had been teaching about seventeen years at the point of our interview. This interview took place at a local restaurant. Her experience in teaching has all taken place in public schools in Texas. She has taught first grade, fourth grade, and kindergarten. At the time of the interview, she was teaching fourth grade.

Jennifer was in her sixth year of teaching in Texas public schools at the time of our interview. This interview took place via Google Hangout. At the time of the interview, Jennifer was teaching seventh grade writing, but said that she used reading to help enhance students' understanding of writing specific genres and styles. She had also previously taught third grade reading.

Kristen said she had been teaching for about five years at the time of our face-to-face interview. The interview took place at a local coffee shop. Kristen has taught at the same private school for the duration of her time teaching. She described the school as "experimental" (Q1P4, ln. 2). During the interview, it was difficult to extract clear, specific responses. Her mind seemed to wonder from subject to subject and rarely stayed focused on questions for long; this made me think an experimental private school was a good fit for her. Kristen, at the time of the interview, was taking graduate courses.

Laura said she had been teaching for twelve years. All of her experience teaching was in the same school district, but she had changed schools once. Her interview took place via Google Hangout. Laura was taking graduate courses at a university within the same town as she taught. She had taught fifth grade, but moved to second grade. Laura had been teaching second grade for the past four years at the time we spoke.

Martha said she had been teaching for seventeen years at the time of our interview. This interview took place via Google Hangout. For the first thirteen years, Martha explained she taught in a large urban public school where most of the students were on the free or reduced lunch program and from low socio-economic households. Martha had spent the past four years at a private school. She did not provide information on grade levels taught; the focus was primarily on the differences in the students at the private school from the students she taught at the urban public school.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was developed through a process I began in a graduate course on grounded theory; as part of that process, I was able to develop the protocol and evaluate the questions during a pilot study. The questions were reviewed by peers. The protocol was also edited based on feedback from a small pilot study where I interviewed three pre-service teachers. The questions were then changed slightly to focus on in-service teachers.

These interview questions include:

1. Tell me a little about yourself as an in-service teacher, how long you have you been teaching, and what experiences have you had?
2. Who was your favorite character from a book you read as a child?
3. What helped you connect with [character's name]?
4. Did you find it easy to connect to characters when you read?
5. What types of characters did you find it easiest to connect with?
6. What types of characters did you find it most difficult to connect with?
7. Did you read books about other cultures as a child?
8. What types of cultures?

9. When you hear the term “multicultural,” what do you think of? How would you define the word “multicultural”?
10. What experiences did you have in reading multicultural texts in school?
11. How do you feel your views of multicultural literature have been shaped by your experience with it?
12. How do you feel about having your students read texts from other cultures?
13. How valuable do you feel it is to read texts focusing on a variety of cultures?
14. What, if any, possible obstacles to using multicultural texts do you face?
15. What makes a multicultural reading experience meaningful to the reader?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add about your thoughts on using multicultural literature in the classroom?

The above questions can be broken down into four types of questions: Opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Opening questions are meant to ask for information that will be easy for the participant to discuss (p. 44). For instance, question 1 is an opening question; it provides an opportunity for the participant to talk about her or himself. Introductory questions introduce the topic (p. 45). Here, 2-4 are introductory questions; these questions help focus the questions on reading and the participant’s experience with reading as a child. Transition questions move the conversation into the key questions. In the above protocol, questions 5-6 are used to transition the conversation toward talking about multicultural literature. Key questions directly address the research interest. Questions 7-15 are designed to directly look at participants’ attitudes and perceptions about using multicultural literature. They are also meant to help establish what type of experiences the participants had with multicultural literature as a child. Finally, an ending question is used to catch any data

the participant wishes to provide that was not covered in the other questions (p. 46). I developed question 16 for this purpose.

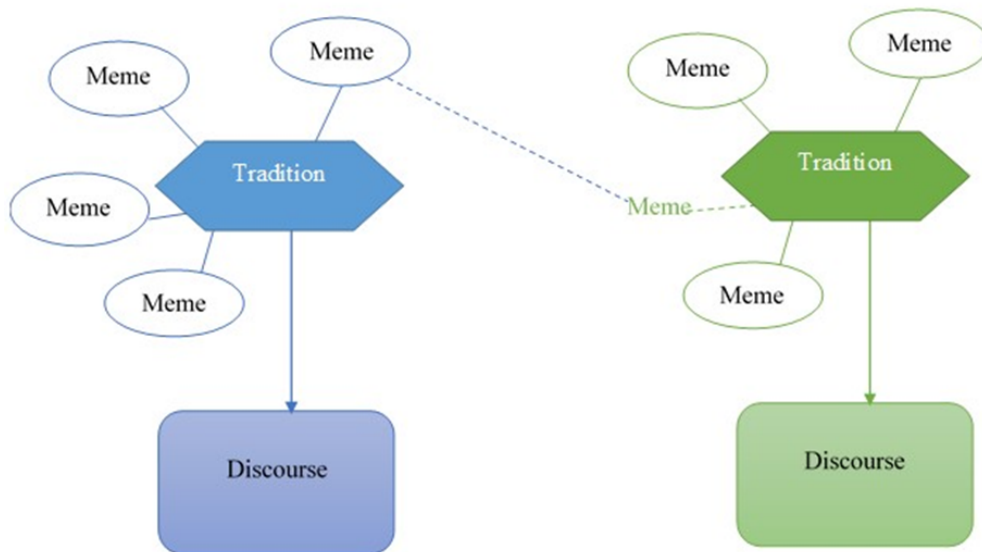
### **Data Analysis**

Once interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. First, I tried using index cards to break up data from the interviews and sort into themes; however, I found it much more helpful to print the transcriptions and highlight. Eventually, I made copies of the transcriptions that compiled all participants' responses to each one of the 16 questions. I was then able to see how each person had responded to a single question or group of questions without going back and forth between documents. As I proceeded through this process, I relied on discourse analysis to make judgements.

**Discourse Analysis.** Discourse analysis (Gee, 1990) is a way of looking at language that allows the researcher to understand how discourses are created and utilized. Discourses are “stretches of language” that “hang together” (p. 129). More specifically, a discourse is a way of communicating specific ideas within a certain environment. A single person may have many discourses in which they are literate. For example, a person may be literate in a religious discourse and professional discourse such as the religious discourse of a specific Christian denomination and the discourse of teachers and education.

The idea that a single person has multiple discourses she or he is fluent with is essential in understanding how students situate meaning when exposed to a new discourse. Situated meaning, according to Gee (1990, p. 112), requires the individual to make judgements about meaning based on context and experiences and helps the

individual create a figured world, “a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal”. This is accomplished, in part, based on theories the individual holds about the topic. In other words, the traditions and associated memes the individual already has in place aid in the understanding of the new discourse (See Figure 6). While Gee did not discuss memes or transitions, the two ideas combine to help give a more complete picture of how meaning is made and information is processed.

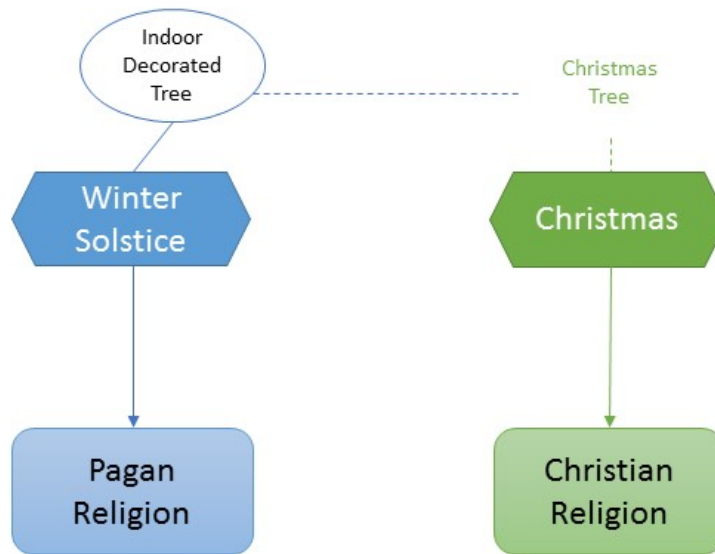


**Figure 6.** Interplay between Traditions and Discourse for in-service teachers.

Note: Figure 6 shows the relationship between multiple element that help to understand the figured worlds (Gee, 2011, p. 114) expressed through the discourse of participants. Individual memes, smallest units of culture, create traditions that are expressed through discourse. Individual memes may be transferred to new discourses as a person encounters new experiences. However, these transferred memes are not exact copies; they maintain some of their original context, but it is subverted and influenced by the new tradition it is being associated with in the new discourse.



In the current study, one meme associated with the tradition of Christianity, for instance, is Christmas tree as I discussed previously. Here the meme *indoor decorated tree* is transferred from the pagan religion to Christianity and becomes associated with Christ's birth, making it a *Christmas tree* (See Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Example of meme transfer for in-service teachers.

Note: Figure 7 provides a visual example of a meme Indoor decorated tree transferring to another discourse, from the pagan discourse of celebrating White Solstice to the Christian discourse of celebrating Christ's birth.

## Results

In the following section I present the results in the following manner. I start with the more general themes regarding orientations towards teaching and literature, then move to more specific themes regarding multicultural texts. As typical for case study presentations, I embed the evidence (quotations) and interpretations within the results section.

## Teaching Experience

Here, I will consider how participants discussed their teaching experience. This data was collected in one question of my interview protocol: *Tell me a little about yourself as an in-service teacher, how long have you been teaching, and what experiences have you had?* The goal was to determine what experiences participants had with teaching that might help inform their ideas about using multicultural literature in their classrooms.

**Self-Reflection.** While all participants (n=6) had at least five years of teaching experience, their years of experience ranged from five to twenty. The level of self-reflection seemed to vary, partially based on years of experience. For instance, Heather, with over 20 years of experience, gave details about how she grew as an educator. She said, “my first teaching experience really taught me that I wasn’t prepared. I was in a classroom with a lot of Hispanic and Black students. I had no idea how to relate to them or their families” (Q1P1, ln. 2-4). With time, Heather was able to reflect on those early years and give a sense that she needed more preparation to be ready for the classroom she found herself in during that time.

Similarly, Martha, seventeen years, reflected on her first teaching experiences in a large urban public school. She said, “it was urban, and those kids needed so much. Most of the kids were free or reduced lunch, you know, low SES homes. They were minority kids and needed more teaching about how to make it in school rather than just focusing on the content. It was a lot of work, but rewarding” (Q1P6, ln. 1-4). However, once Martha moved to a private school, she seems to have found her place. She commented,

“it was a really big change for me! Now, I focus more on content. They know how to act at school” (ln. 6-7). In this case, Martha could reflect on the differences between teaching in an urban public school and a smaller private school. While she did not specifically say she preferred the smaller private school, her language suggests she has found a happier teaching experience through her change in schools.

In contrast, Jennifer, six years, and Kristen, five years, both focused on the current experience. Jennifer said, “I am more focused on Writing. But I encourage my students to be readers and we read various books to help us look at writing styles and genres (Q1P3, ln. 5-7). Her response suggests the concern is on content and helping students see connections between reading and writing, but there is no reflection on herself as a teacher. However, it is interesting that she used language that put her in the group of learners by saying “us”. This could mean that she still sees herself as learning with her students, or it could be that she views herself as a guide to her students.

Kristen, on the other hand, was focused on the excitement of teaching. Her comments were few, but she did say, “I get really excited about teaching” (Q1P4, ln. 4-5). There was no reflection in her response. Perhaps, due to her five years in teaching, she is making the shift to the second phase of teaching called “establishment” (Oplatka & Tako, 2009, p. 429). At this stage, however, the teacher should start to feel “self-efficacy and skillful in teaching” (p. 429) Although, I find evidence in Jennifer’s response, I do not see it in Kristen’s. Kristen’s lack of reflection could potentially be because she has taught in only one school and appears to have taught only one grade. When looking at the other five participants, we see that they have all changed their

teaching environment in one of several ways: Changing grade, changing schools, changing districts, or moving from public schools to private ones. Perhaps Kristen's limited experience is responsible for the lack of reflection.

Irene, seventeen years, and Laura, twelve years, focused on finding their place by trying out several different grade levels before realizing what age group they were most suited to teach. Irene, for instance, realized that she prefers teaching older elementary school children rather than younger children. She said, "I have taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, Kindergarten- only a year, and then I went back to 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I like that age. They know how school works, and we can spend more time learning content rather than how to be a student" (Q1P2, ln. 2-4). Through Irene's response, it becomes clear that she understands where her personality fits best within the elementary grade levels as a teacher.

Laura, like Irene, focused on finding her ideal grade level to teach. She said, "I have taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, which is my favorite, for the past 4 years. I also taught 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but I wasn't happy. They are too adolescent-y by then. I like my sweet little ones in 2<sup>nd</sup>," (Q1P5, ln. 3-5). While Irene enjoys teaching the upper elementary grades such as fourth grade, Laura has found happiness with younger students such as the ones found in second grade. Personality likely plays a large role in these types of choices. Age groups individuals find difficult to work with varies, but reflection is often required to ensure best fit of teacher to grade level, and both Irene and Laura seem to have managed to find their places.

**Student Focused.** Participants expressed a range of responses that varied from very student focused to teacher focused. For instance, Heather's response was very student focused. In her reflection, Heather commented, "however, when I was doing my master's degree, I learned a lot that would have helped me then. I wished I could go back and do that first few years over! They needed more culturally responsive pedagogies, but I didn't even know what that meant back then, you know? I just knew that they needed to be helped. There were poor minority students, and there I was to help them" (Q1P1, ln. 4-8). While Heather is very focused on the needs of her students, she could be described from the White Savior viewpoint. She does realize with time and additional training that culturally responsive teaching strategies are important, but she fails to see the trap of the White Savior mindset - the idea that her job is to raise up students she deems lacking because they are poor and minorities.

This is in contrast to Martha's reflection that, at first, appears to focus on the students, but moves to a teacher focused mindset. Martha begins with a description of her students saying they come from "low SES homes" (Q1P6, ln. 2) and then moves on to say they "needed more teaching about how to make it in school rather than just focusing on the content" (ln. 3-4). However, once she moves to a private school, the real focus becomes clear. Martha's focus was on her success in delivering the curriculum, and less on the experience of her students. This is made clear in her final comment, "Now, I focus more on content. They know how to act at school" (ln. 7).

Similarly, Irene expressed a teacher focused mindset by saying she prefers to teach fourth grade because, "they know how school works, and we can spend more time

learning content rather than how to be a student” (Q1P2, ln. 3-4). However, the use of the word *we* may be evidence that Irene perceives they are moving through the learning process together, so it could be that she is focused on students even she does show a preference for fourth graders over younger students. Laura also made a teacher focused choice in moving to second grade. She said, “it is my favorite” (Q1P5, ln. 3-4) and explained she was not happy teaching fifth grade because they are “too adolescent-y by then” (ln. 4-5).

Jennifer’s response is rather more difficult to place. There is no real reason given for the change from third grade reading to seventh grade writing. Furthermore, she uses language that appears to focus on herself at times such as saying, “I focused on reading” or “I am more focused on writing” (IQ1P3, ln. 5-6), but she also explains, “we read various books to help us look at writing styles and genres” (ln. 6-7). It appears the first two instances where Jennifer uses *I* statements may just be for clarification purposes to explain what she was teaching. This, then, leads to reading that she seems very student focused based on the use of *we* and *us* statements.

Kristen’s response very clearly focused on herself. While she did say, “we do a lot of cool things with the kids” (Q1P4, ln. 2), the rest of her comments focused on herself, “I get really excited about teaching. I am also a graduate student, so I stay pretty busy” (ln. 4-5). In fact, the first comment could be that she views the activities as fun without necessarily having regard for what the students consider fun.

Overall, there was a wide range of variability on the focus between student focused to teacher focused. This is an interesting aspect that may help in better

understanding if and how these teachers use multicultural literature in their classrooms. It may also help identify how much influence the constructed environment has on the imposed environment. If, for instance, the teacher is student focused, we may see more concern with having multicultural books within the classroom that reflect the cultural backgrounds of the students or that help broaden their world view. However, those teachers who are teacher focused may bring in books they personally enjoy, or are dictated by the curriculum, with relatively less regard to how students may react to the books or the characters represented.

### **Favorite Characters**

Here, I will consider the types of characters participants recalled enjoying as young readers. This data was collected in two questions of my interview protocol: *Who was your favorite character from a book you read as a child?; What helped you connect with [character's name]?* The goal was to better understand the types of characters participants were drawn to and see what made the difference between a character they found it easy to connect with and those they found more difficult to connect with when reading.

**Brave and Smart.** Two of the six participants explained their choice of favorite characters were because they found the characters to be brave and smart. Heather explained that she enjoyed Nancy Drew and Madeline growing up. She said, “I was a plot person, honestly. I loved a good mystery! But I am sure it helped that Nance Drew was a girl who was brave and smart. Same with Madeline (Q2-6P1, ln. 4-5). Likewise, Jennifer explained that her choice of Matilda was, “because she was brave and smart”

(Q2-6P3, ln. 3). Both Heather and Jennifer clearly craved characters that modeled strength. Strong female characters are the types of characters postcolonial theory would suggest young women need to be exposed to through literature. The idea is that power is given back to women and girls in society through having brave and smart girls or women depicted in the literature.

**Daydreams.** While Jennifer suggested that Matilda was chosen because she was brave and strong, she also explained that Matilda, “was the most magical and wonderful character I had experienced. And I still return to her as an adult” (Q2-6P3, ln. 1-2) and “I felt lonely and like her and I wished I could be her” (ln. 3). Jennifer’s desire to be strong and overcome her circumstances help solidify the choice of Matilda as a favorite character.

Likewise, Irene explained that her mother’s romance novels made her “daydream about what it would be like” (Q2-6P2, ln. 6). These daydreams did not focus on specific characters, but they did give her maturing mind plenty to think about while reading. Meanwhile, Kristen enjoyed fantasy novels such as Harry Potter. She said, “I loved the world! Magic and excitement. It was fun. I guess it was mostly because [Harry Potter] is the main character” (Q2-6P4, ln. 3-4). Similarly, Laura explained that, as she got older, she became interested in books like the Nancy Drew books and Hardy Boys books because she “felt like [she] was right there with them solving the mysteries” (Q2-6P5, ln. 4).

Interestingly, the characters and books participants discussed as eliciting daydreams are the exact types of books we expect to be in this section, in contrast to



genres like realistic fiction. Two participants, Jennifer and Kristen, chose characters from magical realism or fantasy novels, and Irene's romance novels are written for their readers to escape into and have romantic daydreams. Similarly, mystery novels only work if the reader is drawn in and looking for the clues along with the sleuths in the book.

**Similarities.** Both Laura and Martha provided characters they related to because of similarities between themselves and the characters. Laura explained that Alice, from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, was her favorite character when she was round seven. She said, "I was maybe 7 or so when I read the book, I really felt like I understood how she was feeling. I wasn't a grownup but I was expected to be ladylike" (Q2-6P5, ln. 1-3). The requirement to show grownup qualities when Laura and Alice were still children certainly is a similarity.

Meanwhile, Martha chose to focus on Brother Bear and Sister Bear from the *Berenstain Bears*. She said, "I guess because they were kids, and they did things I would do. I just felt like I could sort of learn through them. You know, those books all had good moral lessons to teach" (Q2-6P6, ln. 3-4). The importance Martha places on learning lessons may be telling of how she views herself as a teacher. It appears to have been ingrained in her very as a young person.

**Comfort.** Finally, Irene said that as a very young reader one of her first favorite characters was Frog from the Frog and Toad stories. Primarily, she explained, "Frog was just nice. I liked the way he made me feel comfortable" (Q2-6P2, ln. 5). Comfort is a very important feeling especially when doing something new like learning to read. It

seemed an interesting reason to select a character and her favorite, but it is important because it has stuck with her since she was first learning to read. Those first reading experiences are extremely important and fostering connections with characters may be one of the keys to helping create a life-long love of reading.

**Animal Characters.** While most of the participants chose to focus on human characters, it is interesting that both Irene and Martha chose animal characters. Irene chose Frog because he made her feel secure and comforted, while Martha chose Brother and Sister Bear because they learned lessons and acted similarly to herself. This is very important to consider when help students select books to read. In fact, according to Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, the use of animals in picturebooks allows the author to “eliminate or circumvent several important issues that are otherwise essential in our assessment of character: those of age, gender, and social status.” (p. 92), so animal characters should be more popular choices as favorite characters.

However, it is likely that because books focused on animal characters are often, as is the case with both participants citing them as favorites, from very early literacy experiences. This could account for there being so few instances. As readers grow and move on to novels, they early favorite characters get left behind. Moreover, it could be that Irene and Martha took the question to mean they should focus on those earliest reading experiences while other participants focused on the ones that stood out the most from later reading experiences. The question does not specifically focus participants on an age or reading level.

## **Making Connections**

In the following sections, I examine the reading experiences participants described with making connections to characters. This data was collected in three questions of my interview protocol: *Did you find it easy to connect to characters when you read?*; *What types of characters did you find it easiest to connect with?*; and *What types of characters did you find it most difficult to connect with?* The goal was to better understand the types of characters participants were drawn to and see what made the difference between a character they found it easy to connect with and those they found more difficult to connect with when reading.

All six participants noted they felt it was easy for them to make connections with characters as they read when young. Responses ranged from participants being very sure they had made connections easily to being less sure but still positive. Heather, for instance, said, “For the most part, yes. I enjoyed reading and would sit for hours in my room or outside reading. It’s been a long time, but I feel like I found it easy (Q2-6P1, ln. 6-7). While she had to think back to when she was a child, Heather still felt confident that she had made connections with characters easily.

Similarly, Irene and Martha both felt it was easy to make connections. Irene said, “Oh, yes. Just plug myself right into a good story. And I’m still like that. I just get swept away. You know, if the story is good” (Q2-6P2, ln. 7-8). Likewise, Martha emphasized her continued love of reading by saying, “I do find it easy. I did when I was younger, but I do now too. Reading is very important even to us older people” (Q2-6P6, ln. 5-6). Both participants emphasized their ability to connect to characters draws them into the story

and has been an essential part of their reading experience. They are both life-long readers. Interestingly, neither Irene nor Martha find focusing on multicultural literature essential in their classrooms. Irene explained that while she sees value in having multicultural literature available to students in the classroom library, she does not place emphasis on students' selection of those texts. Likewise, Martha explained that she had not considered multicultural literature until our interview. This could be due to a lack of training for both participants in finding multicultural literature texts and how to incorporate it.

Finally, Jennifer, Kristen, and Laura seemed less sure, but still remained positive about their ability to make connections easily as young readers. Jennifer said, "I guess so. I hadn't really thought about not being able to connect. I just saw the books like they were movies. Like in the zone" (Q2-6P3, ln. 4-5). Jennifer's experience reading was more of a total connection. She was drawn in to the story. Likewise, Kristen said, "Yeah. I guess so, I hadn't thought about it that way. I just liked reading books that I liked" (Q2-6P4, ln. 5). Similarly, Laura explained, "I guess so. I wasn't thinking about it that way, but I connected to books and characters when I could get really in to the stories" (Q2-6P5, ln. 6-7). For these participants, connections were made not just with characters but with the whole experience the books created. Nancie Atwell calls this full emersion into the book being in "the reading zone" (2007, p. 11). The real world slips away and the reader enters the world of the book she or he is reading.

While some participants might not have conceptualized their experience as making connections to characters, all six explained having deeply personal reading

experiences. Again, it is interesting to consider how their ability to read and make strong connections might influence their choices in books for their classrooms. Furthermore, it is interesting to consider their enthusiasm for reading and books. It seems the enthusiasm they have would help them in motivating their students to read and find books they enjoy.

Their strong positive responses to being able to make connections could be true memories, but their reflections could also possibly be clouded by their teaching experiences. These participants are in the classroom everyday working with students and encouraging them to read, so it could be that they have talked about reading and motivation so much that it becomes a part of their dialogue to describe themselves in this way. Working with young readers would likely make them fluent with children's literature and help them remember their own reading experiences. However, there also may be an influence from the situation, as they were talking to a researcher and wanted to give responses that sounded appropriate. This is similar to the idea of giving the right answer even when there is not a correct or wrong response. Participants could have felt judged if they had said they found it difficult to make connections when reading. On the other hand, it is highly plausible that they gave responses that reflect their true positions on the topic of making connections to characters.

### **Experiences with Multicultural Literature**

In the following sections, I examine the experience participants described with multicultural literature. This data was collected in four questions of my interview protocol: *Did you read books about other cultures as a child?; What types of cultures?;*

*What experiences (for example, did you do a unit on a particular culture) did you have in reading multicultural texts in school?; How do you feel your views of multicultural literature have been shaped by your experience with it? Either in K-12, college or outside of school.* The goal was to find out what, if any, experiences participants had reading multicultural literature and what impact those experiences had on shaping their views of multicultural literature.

**Lack of Multicultural Reading Experiences.** No participants could recall having read multicultural literature during their K-12 experience as students. Some suggested this was likely because there was no concern about multicultural education or that it simply was not mentioned specifically. For instance, Heather said, “I don’t think we did; I mean, it wasn’t really a concern when I was in school” (Q7-8;10-11P1, ln. 1). Likewise, Laura said, “I don’t think we did much of that. I mean if we did, it wasn’t brought to my attention. I think it is much more of a concern now” (Q7-8;10-11P5, ln. 1-2) and Martha said, “I don’t think we read anything considered multicultural back then” (Q7-8;10-11P6, ln. 1).

It could be that there was little focus on providing multicultural reading experience during their K-12 education. If so, it would be interesting to consider what types of books were available at the time and why teachers chose not to read those texts. Likely, they may have read books that had other cultures represented, but that are not specifically multicultural. For instance, many classic American children’s literature have Native American characters but do not focus on the cultures of indigenous Northern American tribes. For instance, Elizabeth George Speare’s *The Sign of the Beaver* (1983)

is focused on the experience of a young White boy who is aided by Native Americans as he tries to survive a harsh winter alone in his family's cabin. It is the type of book that readers would only likely consider multicultural if they were asked to focus on the Native American characters. However, if the reader was simply asked to read and discuss the text in a class, it is unlikely the reader would consider it to be multicultural. I am inclined to believe this is the type of experience most of the participants would have had in K-12.

**Post-K-12 Experiences.** Two participants suggested their understanding multicultural literature was developed during graduate course work, while other participants (n=3) suggested they have little experience with multicultural literature and do not focus on it in their classrooms. One participant suggested that she tries to select a variety of books to expose her students to during read-alouds.

Both Heather and Laura said their experiences in graduate school influenced their understanding of the importance of multicultural literature. Heather said, "I took a class that made me realize I needed to think more about multicultural education and be more culturally responsive" (Q7-8;10-11P1, ln. 3-4). Here, Heather explains that a course she took as a graduate student was the catalyst that helped her understand the importance of multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching. Courses focused on these two topics are essential for teacher education programs to include as part of the curriculum. Without specific focus being placed on their importance, it is unlikely to be something in-service teachers are aware of or feel is important to devote their attention to in the classroom.

Likewise, Laura said, “I feel like I realized how privileged my experience was since most of the books were about White people” (Q7-8;10-11P5, ln6-7). Laura uses the word privilege in her response. White privilege describes the set of privileges afforded to people of northern European descent; people with fair skin. It comes out of colonialist ideologies much in the same way as the idea of the White savior. Laura’s experience as a graduate student helped her realize that she was benefited by her Whiteness since many of the books she had been exposed to were about White characters. Becoming aware of Whiteness and White privilege is something many people struggle with, so it is positive to observe that Laura was able to take a positive understanding and turn it around into a perspective taking situation. If she feels good and validated because characters in her books are White, what does that mean for people of color? What does that mean for underrepresented groups?

Kristen did not specifically say that her interest in using multicultural literature in her classroom came from any experiences in her personal education at the K-12 or college level. She explained, “I think it is very important to have books from all sorts of cultures” (Q7-8;10-11P4, ln. 3); however, she did not elaborate on why she felt this way or what educational experiences lead to her understanding of the importance of using multicultural literature in her classroom.

In contrast, Irene, Jennifer, and Martha do not focus on multicultural literature. Irene, for instance, explained that she feels access is important and texts “should be included in the classroom library” (Q12-15P2, ln. 1), but that she had difficulty finding texts on her own and was not sure how to incorporate them into her lessons. Jennifer



explained, “I want my students to read as much as possible. I don’t really think it is important to expect all students to read multicultural books” (Q12-15P3, ln. 1-2). Her current classroom is focused on writing rather than reading, so it might be that she values any reading that will help prepare her students to write a wide range of genres or about various topic, but that she does not see it as her responsibility to specifically introduce multicultural texts. Meanwhile, Martha seems not to have considered multicultural literature in general until our interview. She said, “I can see it as being important, but I honestly hadn’t really thought much about it until now” (Q12-15P6, ln. 1). Their lack of exposure to it at any level seems to add to the urgency in ensuring teacher education programs emphasize the importance of using multicultural literature in the classroom. Again, without training, how can teachers be expected to see the value of something they have no experience with using?

### **Defining *Multicultural***

Here, I examine how participants defined the term *multicultural*. This data was collected in one question of my interview protocol: *When you hear the term multicultural, what do you think of? How would you define the word multicultural?* The responses were analyzed using discourse analysis that led to themes. The goal was to determine if word choice helped further understand participants’ definitions and underlying attitudes or perceptions about multicultural literature in general.

When defining the term *multicultural*, participants tended to focus only on race and ethnicity except in two cases. Heather and Laura both provided definitions that went beyond race and ethnicity and looked at other aspects that might be considered when

thinking about what is considered multicultural. For instance, Heather said, “I thought it was just about a lot of cultures being represented, but my grad course taught me that it is way more than that. It is also about SES and gender and everything that makes a person who they are” (Q9P1, ln. 1-3). Likewise, Laura said, “I would think of various backgrounds. Immigrants and people from different places. But I mean it could be also socio-economic differences or that sort of thing” (Q9P5, ln. 1-2). Interestingly, both Heather and Laura specifically mention Socio-Economic status as something that helps define multicultural for them. Heather appears to have been impacted by her first experience teaching in an urban district where many of her students were of a lower Socio-Economic status; however, it is unclear if Laura’s teaching experience impacted her definition. Her focus seems to be more in line with her graduate school studies.

Meanwhile, other participants with less educational experience in multicultural education used terms such as “different cultures” (Q9P2, ln. 1) or “different backgrounds” (Q9P3, ln. 1) in their definitions. These less specific definitions seem to reflect less familiarity with the topic leading me back to the assertion that teacher education should prioritize instruction in the area of multicultural education.

### **Teaching with Multicultural Literature**

In the following sections, I examine the experience participants described with multicultural literature. This data was collected in four questions of my interview protocol: *How do you feel about having your [future] students read texts from other cultures?; How valuable do you feel it is to read texts focusing on a variety of cultures?; What, if any, possible obstacles to using multicultural texts do you [expect to] face?; and*

*What makes a multicultural reading experience meaningful to the readers?.* The goal was to determine the value participants placed on using multicultural literature in their future classrooms and what concerns they might have about using it.

**Importance Placed on Multicultural Literature.** Here, we see a wide range of responses based largely on participants' experiences with multicultural education to help determine whether or not they feel multicultural literature is important for their students. Heather, for instance, said, "I want to expose students to many different types of cultures and help them see similarities and differences in people's lives" (Q12-15P1, ln. 1-2). Likewise, Laura said, "I think it is important that all students recognize themselves in something they read. I think multicultural literature is important to bring to students' attention" (Q12-15P5, ln. 1-2). Both participants have well-developed ideas about why multicultural literature is important. Kristen suggested she thought using multicultural literature was important as well, but did not provide any reasoning to support her assertion.

Irene, meanwhile, said that she considers it important to have books available in the classroom library but did not specifically mention expectations for students to read multicultural texts. Similarly, Jennifer said, "I don't really think it is important to expect all students to read multicultural books" (Q12-15P3, ln. 1-2). She went on to explain, "I think it is most meaningful when the student is reading a book they find interesting" (ln. 4-5). Her focus was on student choice in text selection. However, while autonomy is a key feature of supporting reading motivation, limiting choices so that some books students read do cover a variety of cultures provides crucial experiences in developing

perspective taking skills and still allows for autonomy. Additionally, she did not suggest that it was important to help students make meaningful connections to texts or to try reading outside their comfort zone. Finally, Martha admitted that she had not considered multicultural literature much before our interview. Again, teachers who had taken coursework devoted to multicultural education found more value in its inclusion than those who had not.

**Need for In-service Training.** All six participants mentioned they would benefit from additional training on how to incorporate multicultural literature into their classrooms. This fell into two categories. First, participants lamented their lack of resources on finding multicultural texts and, second, they were unsure of how to create meaningful experiences for their students. Teachers need continuing support in the form of workshops and staff development sessions to encourage the inclusion and research based methods that best help provide meaningful reading experiences to students.

While participants admitted they could see value in the incorporation of multicultural literature into their classrooms, most felt unprepared for finding books and helping students make meaningful connections. This was true for those who found personal connections with characters easy to make for themselves and those who had some training in multicultural education. Although no participants stated as such, it could be that they feel unable to teach multicultural literature without more understanding of specific cultures. It might also be that, since five participants specifically mentioned it, the concern is entirely focused on book selection.

## **Conclusion**

Through the process of talking with in-service teachers about their perceptions and attitudes about using multicultural literature in their future classrooms, I have found several important issues to consider. First, it is essential to understand what their experiences were with multicultural literature before entering the classroom as teachers; second, what, if any, graduate school coursework they were provided on the use of multicultural literature; and, third, it is important that teachers are provided training on how to incorporate multicultural literature seamlessly. Finally, it is important to consider how passionate teachers are about reading and their students.

With a good understanding of what in-service teachers' experiences were with multicultural literature before entering the classroom, understanding what books they may have read, and how they connect to characters when reading, we can begin to see what gaps there may be that need to be filled through in-service teacher training. For instance, my participants had a lack of experiences with multicultural literature coming into the classroom as teachers, both in their K-12 experience and their initial teacher training. This means many of the participants lack the knowledge and/or models of how to incorporate multicultural literature into their classrooms, and even at times, the rationale for why it may be valuable.

Likewise, it is essential to be aware of educational experiences in-service teachers may have been provided through graduate coursework. Graduate courses are fundamentally different and take different approaches to teaching than pre-service undergraduate courses do. Therefore, graduate coursework should be considered

separately from their pre-service education. Also, graduate coursework is often completed once the teacher is in the classroom, so importance may be placed on different concerns than it is before stepping into the role of teacher. For instance, preservice teachers may focus, as in chapter 2, on concerns about having time to incorporate multicultural literature; however, in-service participants focused on needing resources to help select texts and find ways of making the reading experience meaningful for their students.

Additionally, it is extremely important that in-service teachers are provided a clear understanding of how to incorporate multicultural literature. I believe this can best be accomplished by providing workshops for in-service teachers on topic such as book selection and activities for students to engage in while reading. This would also be a great opportunity to encourage social-emotional skill development through perspective taking and empathy building. After all, empathy is needed to encourage social awareness. According to Lobron and Selman, social awareness refers “to the knowledge children have that allows them to understand and relate successfully to other people, both people like themselves and those who are from different backgrounds” (2007, p. 528). It helps us see the richness of what it can mean to be human through the connections we make to characters when reading.

Finally, passion for teaching and students is extremely important. All the participants showed their passion for reading. They easily named characters and books they had loved reading as children and they have all found their place in the classroom by taking time to reflect on their preferences in teaching. Additionally, they all want

their students to enjoy reading. This is true even for those who had little experience with multicultural literature. In some cases, the interview was the first time they had considered multicultural literature. This is true for Martha in particular since she is the only participant who specifically made mention of no prior consideration. However, they all said they could see the value in incorporating multicultural literature. Therefore, while there may be a need for additional training, participants can see the potential multicultural literature offers their students.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this study. First, case studies require a focus on a small number of instances, so there were only six participants. This means that no meaningful generalizations to the overall population of in-service teachers can be made based on the findings. However, that is not the goal of case studies. Second, there was some variation in participant's teaching and educational experiences, there was little variation in terms of demographics. Finally, third, there is the issue of bias. Participants may have been influenced by the fact that the interview was conducted by an educational researcher collecting dissertation data. Participants may have felt the need to provide responses they felt made a good impression of their teaching and educational backgrounds.

### **Future Research**

Future research in this area should consider larger groups. To do this, there should be a questionnaire developed that can more easily reach a wider number and range of participants. I believe that, as part of the questionnaire, questions should be

developed to consider participant reading motivation and maturity. Understanding participants' motivation, or lack of, will lead to a stronger understanding of their ability to connect with a wide range of characters when reading. Likewise, understanding their reading maturity, or what and why they read, will provide information on their use of resources to fill in information gaps when reading. For instance, it might help in determining if they are likely to consider reading historical fiction. Someone with a lower reading maturity who does not read for information may be less likely to read historical fiction since they are unable or unwilling to look up historical facts and consider accuracy.

Additionally, a longitudinal study would be valuable in looking at how perspectives and attitudes shift as participants move from pre-service to in-service teachers. Do their choices in text selection continue to develop, stagnate, or regress to focus less on multicultural texts? Are they able to find the time to incorporate multicultural texts into the curriculum? Do their concerns change from time-focused to something else? While longitudinal studies are often considered difficult to maintain, they are extremely beneficial to fully understanding teacher development.

Furthermore, research should consider student outcomes. In order for policy changes to occur, investment in teacher development must ultimately be connected to improvement in student learning. Therefore, future work should also consider potential implications for students' attitudes, knowledge, critical literacy skills, social awareness and/or motivation for reading due to teachers' use of multicultural literature.



Finally, research on incorporating multicultural literature in the reading classroom should be synthesized and made available to in-service teachers through publications in practitioner focused journals and workshops. While researching is essential to gaining a better understanding of the importance of using multicultural literature, it does nothing if teachers are unable to access the information they need to provide students meaningful interactions with the texts.

## 5. GENERAL CONCLUSION

### **Introduction**

Here, I will provide some general conclusions from the three studies included in this dissertation. First, I will consider similarities and differences between participant responses from the two case studies. Then, I will consider how the findings from the systematic literature review to determine what conclusions can be drawn when considering them with the results from the case studies. Finally, I will consider implications for future research and work based on the finding of the studies.

### **Comparing Case Studies**

Here, I will consider the similarities and differences between participant responses in the two case studies. Since each set of participants, pre-service and in-service teachers, were asked the same set of interview questions, it is possible to look at the two studies in this way. While the similarities may seem few, it is essential to understand the two groups are so different that even a few similarities provide insight. Likewise, the differences found between the two groups highlight the need for two separate case studies to have been conducted.

### **Similarities**

After completing both case studies, several interesting similarities between responses from pre-service and in-service participants became clear. First, both groups expressed a passion for teaching, and, second, both groups find value in the prospect of incorporating multicultural literature into their classroom curriculum.

Both groups expressed passion for teaching through their responses to various questions. While pre-service participants focused on their motivation to enter teaching, in-service teachers focused on their current teaching. However, in both cases, participants made clear their desire to work with students and help them develop their intellect. Through their communication, it is clear that their decisions and motivation for teaching have both emotional and cognitive underpinnings. As such, when addressing issues of multicultural literature, it would be important to acknowledge and align professional development with both aspects of teachers' motivations.

Additionally, all participants in both groups acknowledged they found some value in introducing students to multicultural literature. There was variation in degree of importance placed on including multicultural literature, but none of the participants said they felt it would not be worthwhile. Therefore, if you consider expectancy value theory, it is likely all participants would engage their students in multicultural literature reading experiences. As Eccles and Wigfield's (2002) explains, Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) suggests that people engage in tasks when they believe there is a value to the task and that they have some chance at being successful at the task. If teachers believe that there is value in multicultural literature, but rarely use it in teaching, then perhaps the disconnect is due to their belief about being successful at the task. Following that same logic, it would be important to understand the reasons that they may not believe in their success – which may be related to knowledge of cultures, knowledge of pedagogy with such texts, or knowledge of accessing such literature.

## **Differences**

Many differences can be explained by the lack of teaching experience pre-service participants had compared to the considerable teaching experience of the in-service participants. Likewise, some of the differences can be explained by the coursework all pre-service participants had completed through the class on multicultural literature. Since none of the in-service teachers had completed a course specifically on teaching using multicultural literature, and only two mentioned taking courses related to multicultural education, their responses in some areas differed with the pre-service participants'.

One thing that I noticed between pre-service and in-service teachers is that, even though the time between childhood and the interviews were longer for the in-service teachers, their responses to questions about favorite characters were more specific. All six in-service participants were able to provide specific characters they connected with as young readers.

Likewise, there were differences in participants' abilities to make connections to characters when reading. In-service teachers suggested they found it easy, though some said they had not considered it to be about making connections with characters. However, pre-service participants focused on the need for characters to have similar backgrounds, family structures, and experiences as their own. This difference could be because in-service teachers spend much more time focused on talking about reading with their students while pre-service participants focus more on their roles as students. They

are continually using their knowledge of children's literature, which would make such knowledge more available to them.

Not surprisingly, pre-service participants found it much easier to define multicultural; however, they tended to focus their definitions on the textbook used in their multicultural literature course. In contrast, in-service participants tended to have less specific responses, indicating that their knowledge was more tacit and practical rather than formal. Two in-service participants who had taken graduate course work devoted to multicultural education also included low socio-economic status as another group to consider when they defined the term. This may also be related to their experiences of teaching, in which socio-economic diversity becomes more apparent as an influence in their students' lives.

Finally, in-service teachers were more focused on the concerns with selection multicultural books and how to make meaningful reading experience rather than time, which is what the pre-service teachers focused their concerns around. This difference could be because the multicultural literature course pre-service participants took part in covered book selection and provided activities that they could use in their future classrooms. In contrast, the in-service teachers understood more about the state standards and how to meet those requirements using a wide range of texts, but were unfamiliar with titles or specific activities. Such a finding indicates that multicultural courses for preservice teachers may need to make connections to state standards more explicit. Additionally, effective in-service teacher preparation for multicultural texts may focus on the process of text selection and evaluation.

## **Comparing Case Studies and Systematic Literature Review**

Here, I will consider the general conclusions that can be drawn when looking at the three studies, the systematic literature review and two case studies, together. Three key conclusions that can be made by comparing the case study results to the systematic literature review: a) teachers would benefit from more guidance and support, b) by more explicitly linking literacy and/or teaching theories in research articles of multicultural literature would benefit teachers who are trying to accommodate their students' needs with the ever-evolving educational standards set by federal and state guidelines, and c) that real-world teaching tips need to be provided to teachers to overcome practical barriers.

### **Guidance and Support**

While the pre-service participants tended to feel their course on multicultural literature provided them with many ideas on how to incorporate it into their classroom, they felt unsure they would have the time to do so. However, in-service participants were more concerned with book selection and ways to encourage meaningful reading experiences. Based on the evidence provided through the systematic literature review, we can see that there are sadly few practitioner-based journal articles for teachers to glean this information. Teachers need additional resources to help guide and support them in incorporating multicultural literature into their classrooms.

Beyond peer reviewed journal article, other sources for disseminating knowledge need to be considered. Potentially resources such as ILA's [readwritethink.org](http://readwritethink.org) website could provide such information in an accessible manner. Additionally, for schools with

librarians, this may be an area in which librarians and teachers can be encouraged to collaborate. Cultural groups may also work to curate book lists and lesson ideas (which are aligned to teaching standards) which could be accessible to teachers.

### **Literacy and Teaching Theories**

Likewise, attention to literacy and teaching theories would benefit both pre-service and in-service participants. As evidenced in the findings from the systematic literature review, this is often overlooked when articles are focused on practitioners. While neither case study provided clear evidence that pre-service or in-service participants cited literacy or teaching theories as concerns when incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom, their responses do show a need for it. For instance, pre-service teachers focused on concerns about having time to devote to teaching multicultural literature when they feel the state standards may keep them from being able to do so easily. A better understanding of literacy and teaching theories may help them to more easily identify ways to seamlessly incorporate multicultural literature while meeting the educational standards. Having knowledge of learning theories and reading theories provides for more flexible knowledge in which a more typical reading lesson could be adapted to use multicultural literature.

Similarly, in-service teachers were concerned with developing lessons that would make for meaningful reading experiences with multicultural literature. Again, having more understanding of literacy and teaching theories and seeing those identified in the literature would likely help them more readily adapt lessons to include multicultural literature into their classrooms. As the articles included in the systematic literature

review show, teachers are capable of creating many meaningful reading experiences focused on multicultural literature; however, the articles often appear to be specific to a particular situation as depicted in the articles. Therefore, articles tend to give the impression that the experience cannot be transferred easily to other classrooms. However, if there are theories to help explain the purpose of the activities and book selections discussed in the articles, teachers would likely find it easier to extrapolate the activities to their environments.

### **Real-World Teaching Tips**

Finally, none of the articles identified in the systematic literature review provided real-world teaching recommendations that would make replication in other classrooms easy. Too often, articles focused on specific situations, such as Obijiofor's (2003) article relating the experience of using literature related to Kwanzaa to build classroom community, that ensured success for the inclusion of multicultural literature. Had Obijiofor provided information theoretical framework that helped explained the rationale and the results, other teachers might be able to see applications of other types of texts that may be more relevant to their classrooms and do similar activities to encourage a strong and beneficial classroom community. Therefore, it would be difficult for a reader who is working in a different context to generalize from those examples. However, in-service participants suggested that practical examples from a variety of class types, was something they would benefit from. Several mentioned the need for workshops or professional development opportunities to learn how to incorporate multicultural literature. By directly translating research and theory into practical examples, researchers



can help ensure other teachers feel encouraged to implement practices and bring in multicultural literature into more classrooms.

### **Future Areas of Research and Training**

After completing the three studies for this dissertation, I have found there to be several essential areas for future work in researching and developing professional development opportunities for educators.

#### **Research**

Areas of future research include assessing how teachers are using multicultural literature in their classrooms. This might include interviews, questionnaires, books scanning to determine what texts are available in classrooms, and observations. Ideally, there would be quantitative and qualitative data collected to help give a deep understanding of how teachers are using multicultural literature in their classrooms. It may be useful to conduct purposeful case studies to document exemplars of teachers who are integrating multicultural literature into their instruction as that would provide information on both the materials and practices.

Additionally, future research should consider student voices to see how students react to, connect with, and understand multicultural literature. This research might require interviews, observations, and surveys. Research in this area could help develop our understanding of the potential social-emotional advantages of incorporating multicultural literature into classrooms. Social-emotional advantages could be focused on helping students better understanding themselves, who they are, and where they come from, better understand world relations and how to interact with people from a wide

range of cultural backgrounds, and better understand perspectives of people they interact with on a daily basis. Likewise, there could be reading comprehension benefits for students. Reading comprehension can be helped when students find it less difficult to make text to self or text to life connections. Reading books from their cultural perspective could benefit students by making those connections easier for them to see. Such practice then could provide a scaffold for when students are reading texts featuring cultures that are less known to them. Finally, as theory suggests, but it is not yet documented empirically, researchers could consider the potential link between reading motivation and reading multicultural literature.

### **Pre-Service Teacher Education**

My research for this dissertation has helped me develop a better understanding of which aspects of a multicultural course persists, and what does not when teaching pre-service teachers about multicultural literature. For instance, textbook selection seems essential to helping build a strong foundation. Surprisingly, pre-service participants' responses provided evidence that many of their views (e.g., defining multicultural literature) were more strongly associated to the textbook choice rather than the diversity of views presented via lecture. Therefore, instructional text selection is an important decision for course design.

Likewise, more should be done to ensure students see the connection between educational standards and the incorporation of multicultural literature. There appeared to be a perception that teachers would need to make a choice regarding standard based instruction or multicultural instruction. Rather, efforts to help future teachers see how

they could accomplish both goals (content standards and multicultural text usage), simultaneously, may reduce this assumption.

Regarding the specific course that students took, changes in those directions had already been made, but these findings provide evidence that additional analysis and changes to the course may be needed. Specifically, the course design had already transitioned from teaching literature by culture to teaching by topic or theme. This has provided more recent students the opportunity to see how to incorporate a wide variety of cultural perspectives on a topic or theme such as family or coming of age. However, the text book used continued to present cultures individually which appeared to create a schema through which students organized their knowledge. Additionally, we incorporated activities to help students develop lessons around various literacy strategies to ensure pre-service teachers are able to see that multicultural literature can be used in exactly the same ways as classic book options with minimal additional work required. However, perhaps the assumption that using multicultural texts is deviating from the traditional curriculum should be more explicitly discussed in class. Such assumptions may also be reinforced when preservice teachers are in their field placements, and may not be observing the use of multicultural literature. Potentially, providing purposeful opportunities for current teachers, who are using multicultural texts regularly, to interact with preservice teachers may help to address this assumption.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development opportunities should include several key features. First, there should be time devoted to understanding book selection and awards that help

identify multicultural texts, such as the Coretta Scott King Award or the Stonewall Book Award. Finding texts is the easiest way to ensure they make it into the classroom; if the teachers cannot identify multicultural texts, having strategies and activities will not matter. Related to locating books, teachers should be provided with strategies for assessing the quality of multicultural texts.

Providing workshops on various interactions students can have with multicultural texts is also an essential part of the professional development needed. Providing information on ways to help students benefit through intrapersonal and interpersonal connections to multicultural literature will allow teachers to feel confident in bring multicultural literature into their classrooms. As noted earlier, teachers see value in such texts, but may need guidance in how to use them. Likewise, helping teachers identify reading instruction benefits of using multicultural literature would also prove useful so they can see that the value of multicultural texts extends beyond growth in cultural and social understanding, but also supports instructional reading goals.

Finally, when I think about the importance of multicultural literature, I often think of Carl Sagan, the astrophysicist, who wrote in his book *Pale Blue Dot* (1994), “To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever know” (p. 7). The image referred to in the quote is a famous one taken by *Voyager 1* in 1990. In the image, taken from beyond Neptune, we see a tiny speck of light. That is Earth. Multicultural literature helps us better understand each other’s perspectives and cultural identifies. It helps us learn to work together and feel connected. In the vastness of space, our planet

holds the only known forms of life at present. As Sagan pointed out, we need to learn to be kind and accepting of each other. I believe reading literature focused on a vast array of cultural perspectives can help in this endeavor.

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