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**USING CRITICAL LITERACIES TO INSTRUCT THROUGH
MULTICULTURAL TEXT TO ENHANCE COMPREHENSION, HIGHER
ORDER THINKING SKILLS, AND RESPECT FOR OTHER DIVERSITIES**

by

Shannon Moncrief Enders

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

January 1, 2016

Thesis Chair: Dr. Stephanie Abraham

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Dedications

This manuscript is dedicated my mother, Cathy Moncrief who has helped me throughout graduate school and life.

To my mom and dad, who have always believed in me and my dreams no matter how far-fetched and out of reach they may have seemed. You have always been my biggest and loudest cheering section. It has never gone unnoticed.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Washington Township School District (Jack McGee, Cleve Bryan, and Joe Vandenberg) for allowing me to conduct this study. I also appreciate the support that I received I was honored with the invitation to present my study and findings at the UPENN 37th Ethnography in Education Research Forum. Thank you for believing in me.

To my colleagues and friends at BHMS, thank you for your help and concern throughout this process. It has not always been easy, but thanks for the support.

To the parents and the students in my class who were receptive to the idea of the teacher-research study and willing to help, thank you! Without all of you, I would not have a study to present.

Thank you to Ian, Ashleigh, and Aubrey. You have sacrificed much more than I care to admit. To my husband, you have always been my rock, but now you have added a new title: ***Super dad***. You done the impossible, getting our girls to all of their activities while my head as been buried in a book or on a computer. The words ***thank you*** does not seem to express my full gratitude.

Lastly, to my girls, my shoulders to cry on and the ones who truly understood what I have been going through for the last few years because you have been going through it as well. The bond that we have formed is set. I hope to continue to be as close in the future and revel in all of your future successes and all your moments of joy: BPJ, MJ, IWK, CEM, AAI, EEH, JF, KA, DT, and AS.

Abstract

Shannon Moncrief Enders

USING CRITICAL LITERACIES TO INSTRUCTION THROUGH
MULTICULTURAL TEXT TO ENHANCE COMPREHENSION, HIGHER
ORDER THINKING SKILLS, AND RESPECT FOR OTHER DIVERSITIES
2015-2016

Dr. Stephanie Abraham

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this approach was to instruct students using critical literacies within the confines of multicultural texts. While using a variety of texts, students were exposed to text and “voices” they might not otherwise have heard as well as learned to comprehend better and learned to use higher order thinking skills beyond the words on the page.

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Chapter I

Introduction

I teach by the motto “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” This motto is my way of reminding myself that as a teacher I must engage myself before I am able to engage my students. Effective teachers motivate students to buy-in to their education. Finding that motivating students to buy-in cannot be done unless students sense that their teacher cares for them before they care for their subject matter. For students to buy into what I am teaching, I realized that I must instruct in a way that will keep them motivated and engaged.

Teaching with critical literacies allows students to read in a way that deviates from the reading for which they are accustomed. For example, focusing on a critical analysis of the writer and his or her motive behind the story rather than simply on the characters and events within the narrative is a deviation in reading that most seventh-graders have not experienced. This deviation maintains their interest.

Additionally, it has been my experience that most of my students have not had the opportunity to read widely about characters who are different from themselves. Too often they read about characters with very similar characteristics and experiences. Although this may make reading comprehension easier for them, it does little to expand their understanding and acceptance of others’ perspectives. In this study, conducted in a large suburban school district, subjects read texts dealing with children who differed from the majority of the subjects in terms of economics, religion, or special needs.

At the onset of my teaching career, I took a particular interest in the *underdog*. I want to help them achieve success through learned strategies and skills. As a child, I

struggled with reading and lacked confidence in a classroom among children I perceived to be smarter than me.

It is my belief that in order for children to be able to utilize the skills and strategies that will enable them to be successful readers and writers; they must be convinced that I am there to support them first and foremost. At various times, I may act as their teacher, counselor, older sibling, confidant, or parent. This is a daunting task, but worthwhile. In the end, I know I have impacted students on a personal and educational level.

In September 2015 while barely knowing my students: their names, or their abilities, I selected a sample population for my study. I decided to work with my Supplemental English Language Arts (ELA) class. Since this class was composed of students who would benefit from additional ELA instructional time, I felt that this sample would potentially benefit from the extra attention that could stretch their basic comprehension to a more advanced level of thinking.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to investigate how students responded to instruction using a critical analysis lens to consider the stories of children who differed from themselves. The texts used in the study included main characters who were bullied, who came from a one-parent homes, who were socially excluded, and who simply varied from what the students perceived to be normal. Students read texts that provided a variety of perspectives challenged their beliefs. The stated goal of critical analysis is to prepare students to be able to disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, and focus on sociopolitical issues, as well as taking action and promoting social justice.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Years ago, simply teaching students to comprehend literature was a sufficient ELA curriculum. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require students to master reading and writing in a digital world. Students need to read multiple, credible sources in a variety of formats. In today's world, information is available from so many sources and comes in so many platforms that the ability to read and comprehend goes far beyond the reading of literature. Comprehension itself has become diverse; as a result, comprehending in diverse texts requires practice with diverse perspectives. Today's educators must teach students to look critically at a variety of texts and to prepare them for the ever-changing world in which we live. Our ever-shrinking world demands that we teach our students to be globally connected learners.

If we are to teach our students to think about the larger issues affecting their world, teachers must move from their lectern at the front of the classroom and refrain from speaking *at* their students in an attempt to transfer information. Instead, teachers must encourage their students to think for themselves. If we are to help each student achieve this goal, teachers must also provide the learner with individualized learning opportunities. This study's research question arose because of these concerns. The research question asked the following: How will instructing students using critical literacies within multicultural literature enhance, not only their comprehension and higher order thinking skills, but also their respect for others' diversities?

Story of the Question

When I was in elementary school, I had reading difficulties. Fortunately, my mother was an educator who was able to help me. In retrospect, I never had a *reading*

teacher or a teacher specialized in reading. If there had, my reading difficulties would have been discovered. Had they been reading teachers, culturally responsive instruction could have been the difference in my ability to learn and may have allowed me to flourish as a reader.

Learning about the children in your own classroom is the best way to tailor instruction for them. Regardless of the type of student, learners that range from one who needs remediation to the exceptional child, each must be stretched, developed, and challenged.

I strive to be transparent as a teacher. Parents and students alike know that I am truly there for the student and that I want to be a cog in the learning process. No matter how much I try, there will always be negative forces who continually denigrate groups of children due to their own limited worldview and the stereotypes they perpetuate. My goal is to teach the *unteachable* with the same commitment to excellence as the cream of the crop. More pedagogical work may be required in order to provide students the opportunity to hear from the voices they might not normally hear and to introduce them to cultures, disabilities, and people that they would otherwise encounter. Ultimately, they need to learn how to read, understand, and think beyond the words on the paper.

Here is What You Will Read About in the Thesis

In this thesis, you will meet the students in my Supplemental ELA Class. These students learned concepts associated with utilizing critical literacies through the reading of multicultural texts. Reading in this manner helped them comprehend at the basic level and to acquire higher order thinking skills. This experience has allowed them to understand their lives and the lives of others, and to develop tolerance, empathy, and

acceptance. They have challenged the status quo and the injustices that they have read about in texts. They used their voices to argue for the characters in texts we have read as well as those in real life, who have been unable to speak up on their own.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Teachers want their students to be successful. Good teachers ask themselves, “What do the students need to learn?” Great teachers ask themselves, “How can I teach all my students the skills to be a successful reader and then generalize those skills to other subject areas?” Chapter Two presents a review of the literature in the areas of critical literacies, multicultural literature, and comprehension with higher order thinking skills.

The idea of challenging the status quo, the inequity of power, and learning about other cultures and diversities is not new. According to Freire, (as cited in Luke, 2012, p. 15), "schooling was based on a ‘banking model’ of education, where learners’ lives and cultures were taken as irrelevant.” For too long, teaching and learning was done in this manner. With the use of critical literacies within multicultural literature, the previous approach to learning can and will change. Teaching with critical lenses shows students that each and every child in the class, as well as people around the world, does matter despite what they look like or what they believe. Students thought that the people they learned about are important. While that may be true, current education practices often left out many different people, cultures, and religions. This was a missed opportunity to educate children about forbearance. Teachers can use multicultural literature to help teach acceptance and tolerance in their school community and larger society. Students needed to realize that living in a world that consists of one human type, whether by color or culture, would be very limiting. Diversity makes the human race spectacular and interesting. Students must learn to read text through a different lens than they have previously utilized. When students put themselves in the shoes of others, not only have

they learned to comprehend and analyze the text, they also learned to empathize with others. In addition, students need to develop the ability to construct positive relationships with peers that are devoid of racism, sexism, and classism (Campano, 2007). Introducing children to new cultures and diversities is essential in helping develop the ability to navigate modern society, which will position them in a better chance for success. Students needed opportunities to meet others from different cultures, ethnicities, and races depicted in the texts that they are reading.

What are Critical Literacies and How do I Use Them?

Teaching using critical literacies in conjunction with multicultural texts will move students and their education beyond Freire's 1970 (as cited in Luke, 2012, p. 15) description of "typification of schooling as a bank model." The newer cognitive model invoked the readers' background knowledge and acknowledges the cultural bias that children bring to school (Luke, 2012, p. 7). Critical literacy was defined as reading or viewing textual material including: books, magazines, essays, images, movies, blogs, and videos in an active, reflective manner to gain a deeper understanding of diverse people and their experiences. It also provided students with the ability to read a variety of thoughts and opinions that they would not normally read about in traditional literary works. Looking at any text through a different lens such as gender, socioeconomic, or race allowed students to explore varying viewpoints and encouraged deeper thinking. Educators need to accept and broaden the new idea of literacy; it needs to have a new definition and understanding. Instead of thinking of literacy as simple skill sets, we need to start teaching literacy that involves social, cultural, and racial elements or frameworks that may also include those from the political realm.

A qualitative study by Van Sluys, Lewison, and Flint (2006) conducted in a multi-aged, diverse classroom ranging from fourth through sixth grades in a Midwest elementary school. The teacher used inquiry-based learning that involved two students as the primary focus. Students worked together during the invitation time. The authors identified three themes: the location of knowledge and sources used to support knowledge construction, textual authority, and hair as representation of cultural identity. For instance, the two students, both girls, were given a task to inquire about how ethnicity affects hair type. It came from the idea that someone's hair was prettier once they changed it. They changed the look by cutting it, dying it, adding extensions, curling it, or straightening it. The students examined the photographs and wrote about what they observed. The students developed two questions during their investigation: "Why is hair different?" and "Why are the hairstyles different in the posters?" They made connections to genetic make-up. Finally, the students came up with two final questions that they wanted to find the answers to: "Why media sources like movies, pictures, and posters have 'mostly' white people?" and "Why this is the case in the Philippines and places like Mexico" (p. 211). During the study, it was clear that the girls used different lenses to analyze the texts constructed their own contextual understanding. The researchers viewed the girls as having a multitude of levels in complexity. The study demonstrated students asking questions and using critical literacies to ponder questions as well as situations. This study demonstrated that it does not necessarily matter that answers are found, but moreover, that students are questioning the text instead of settling for reading and accepting what was written in the text. This fosters students' skills to consider other

perspectives in the text and the world as well as to challenge what has always been and to make students think independently. (Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006).

Students viewed and read a variety of texts that allowed them to use a multitude of interpretive lenses to challenge the status quo. This encouraged them to be critical thinkers and provided the ability to fully think for themselves, and to feel comfortable doing so. For instance, an ethnographic study done by Kurki (2015) looked at how youth engaged in critical literacy practice in their everyday lives. Her study focused on twelve high school students who were enrolled in a diverse Canadian high school. She found that all students critically read a variety of texts. Therefore, students were not only transformed by the texts they read, but also they were influenced by their families and peers. The students did not mention any social justice action.

Students utilized critical literacies within a variety of texts to help them think independently, challenge the status quo, and question the injustices to highlight the importance for a 21st century learner. What would be a truly effective way to do that? What types of texts can they read that would enable students to think beyond their previous background knowledge and possible prejudices? By reading multicultural texts, students provided a simple way to promote student interaction with passages that challenge injustices.

Multicultural Literature, Isn't That Just Books on African Americans?

Banks asked (1998) whether if we were being honest, how many children in our classroom have our same background, heritage, and experiences, and answered, not many, if at all.

The schools have been reluctant to adapt their curriculum and teaching styles to make them more consistent with the needs of ethnic minority students. In many schools that have multiethnic populations, the curriculum, teaching, and motivational techniques remain Anglo-centric. (Morris, 1993, p. 144)

In this action-research, carried out in a fifth grade classroom, in a West Texas elementary school, Sarraj, Bene, Li, and Burley (2015) investigated how one teacher embraced a multicultural education through multicultural literature. The researchers identified four themes: Curiosity, Empathy, Preconceptions, and Bullying. The students expressed curiosity and the teacher reported that the students said they liked working with the text, especially the video ones. The students demonstrated concern and empathy for the main characters' as she struggled in the text, which they could identify with in class. They connected to the text in a text-to-self manner as they read *The Rainbow Tulip*. The students shared that they too felt different from their peers. Students stated that making judgments prior to knowing someone is incorrect, and that making friends with others dissolved stereotypes and misconceptions about a person. Finally, reading *The Sandwich Shop* provoked conversations about bullying. When asked about their experience interacting with bullies, students confirmed that they had been bullied before, and the easiest way to not be bullied, is to befriend the person who is doing the bullying. Sarraj, Bene, Li, and Burley believed that if students understood the negative effects of being bullied and bullying others that it helped in eliminating bullies in school. The teacher talked about being a bystander and how much it perpetuated the problem. Using the example from the Holocaust, the teacher painted a great visual for the students. The

study revealed that anti-bullying education is important and still needed (Sarraj, Bene, Li, & Burley, 2015).

Another study by Jehangir, Williams, and Jeske (2012) examined first generation college students. A longitudinal study that involved students from low-income households. The study investigated the students' experience in a multicultural learning community (MLC) as well as "examined the extent to which a curricular design incorporating a multicultural curriculum and critical pedagogy created avenues for self-authorship for historically marginalized students in a TRiO Student Services Program" (Jehangir, Williams, & Jeske, 2012, p. 267). TRiO was a program that housed low-income students and students with disabilities as they entered college. Participants were a diverse group of college juniors, seniors, or recent graduates who had been in the MLC; however the campus population was mainly white. The purpose of this community was to create a curriculum and infrastructure that challenged those students, their sense of isolation, and feeling of low self-worth compared to their white counterparts. Students said that the program helped to make connections with their fellow TRiO peers since they were together for most of the day. The data suggested that students who were in the MLC were more self-confident and in more control of their own destiny. In many cases, the interviewees reported that being in the MLC played a significant role in their college experience and development. A poignant quote from this study:

Cultivating spaces that allow for reflection and attention to one's development and personhood can be a compass by which to steer through the unknown territory of higher education and doing so combat isolation and marginalization

that prevent degree attainment and satisfaction in one's educational pursuits (Jehangir, Williams, Jeske, 2012, p. 269).

Although this study was about college students, the observations are readily transferable to the pupils in my classroom. I easily observed the comparison between the TRiO group and my students. Likewise acknowledged that they felt that peers thought they were different and that they felt that they are different. These same students are in similar classes throughout the day as they traveled from class to class.

Conclusion

After reviewing the preceding case studies, it is clear that reading multicultural text through a critical lens not only helps students comprehend with a deeper and wider understanding of the text that they are viewing, but also the world as a whole. I have decided to study the effects of using critical literacies, multicultural literature, and comprehension through higher order thinking skills with my students because I feel that focusing on these concepts promoted a student-centered learning approach that facilitates the identification of how to transition the individual child beyond surface level learning.

Chapter III

Research Design/Methodology

The purpose of this research was to investigate how students responded to receiving instruction through critical literacies allowed students to view diversities, which included children who were bullied, from a one-parent home, socially excluded, as well as other perceived deviations from normalcy. The actual study used multicultural textual sources and having children read them with a critical lens that they may not have used previously. Reading texts that have viewpoints that differ from what they were accustomed should trigger thoughts, emotions, ideas, and conclusions that they may not have had before. Therefore, this qualitative study consisted of “a complex, context-specific interactive activities where all educational differences are important” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 3).

The idea of my study being teacher-research was that the teacher finds a need from reoccurring patterns in his or her class. Teachers who used teacher-research were investigating real problems in their class. He or she then forms a study around that need and documents of what happened through the teacher-research process.

Students

This seventh grade Supplemental ELA Class consisted of six students, five white students and one Chinese student, whom all agreed to participate in the study. This class is an extra class that students have if they were identified as needing more time in ELA. Two of these children were also in a regular educational class of 20+ students for Reading and English. Three students were in regular education classes and had an Independent Education Plan (IEP). One child who had an IEP was classified as being on

the Autism Spectrum and was considered to have Persuasive Developmental Disorder (PDD).

Table 1

Student Information

Name *	Female	Male	IEP	No IEP	At or Below a 3rd Grade Reading Level	At or Below a 4th Grade Reading Level	At or Below a 3rd Grade Reading Level	At or Below a 5th Grade Reading Level	At or Below a 6th Grade Reading Level
Ronald		X	X						X
Noele	X			X				X	
Ariana	X		X				X		
Taylor	X		X			X			
Marcus		X		X					X
Anthony		X	X		X				
*All names are pseudonyms to protect student privacy									

Procedure of the Study

This class of six students was selected because I thought that they had the ability to be pushed further than students did in my larger class because of the 1-to-1 interaction we have in this sized class. The environment felt safer to the students, and they were

more comfortable in this small class situation. Allowing them to ask questions and challenge the text or opinions of others in a safe setting.

I collected data for six weeks. The students did the majority of the work in the classroom. The class would meet in a large classroom with 42 minutes of instruction for five days a week. I extracted anecdotal notes from the observations made during the lessons and kept my journal notes as well. I also recorded their conversations with their peers and myself in my journal.

The four texts that we read were: *7th Grade* (1994), *Stargirl* (2000), *Ramadan Moon* (2009), and *Remember Dippy* (2013). These texts dealt with a variety of diversities. *7th Grade* is about a seventh grade student, Victor, who tried to gain the affections of a girl that he liked named Teresa. It discussed the lengths he went to interact with her.

Stargirl was about a new and unusual girl who enhanced the student body's school experiences through all her antics. At the climax, Leo had to decide if he really valued what she thought or did he care more about the opinions of others. If he stayed with her, he would be shunned too, if he sided with them, then he would be a follower and would not have the affection of the one whom he really longs for. This book teaches acceptance and being kind, as well as being a leader and not a follower. Simply because everyone is doing something, does not mean you should.

Ramadan Moon is the story within the Muslim culture. In the text, it informs the reader what Muslims study, learn, and follow in the Islamic religion and traditions. Muslims all over the world had celebrated Ramadan and the joyful days of Eid-ul-Fitr at the end of the month of fasting as the most special time of year. The picture book gave

us, the reader, a clear idea of what they do during the celebration. Beautiful pictures provided, enabled the reader to clearly learn about Ramadan. The story followed the cycle of the moon from the first new crescent to full moon through Eid, the first sighting of the second new moon. Written by a Muslim who followed the rich traditions and the Islamic religion, this picture book was an authentic text.

The final text we read, *Remember Dippy*, was about an autistic child. It described how the autistic child affected his family from the mother to the cousin. It also helped people to understand that the child positively impacted the family in ways that had been previously overlooked or the child was considered to be incapable of doing. His cousin Johnny was very surprised to learn all the things Mem could do, and do better than Johnny and his friends. There was one autistic child in my class, and many children with a variety of disabilities in our district. This text brought awareness and the idea of empathy and respect for others who have physical, emotional, and mental disabilities.

Data Sources

I met with the students five days a week, 42 minutes per meeting. The data collected was through my self-reflection and the students' reflection as well. I journaled what I saw in the class, what students said and wrote, and how I felt about the lessons and the class discussions throughout the study. This helped inform my teaching. Students wrote in their journal answers to questions that I posted before, during, and after reading. They wrote in their journals after we had group discussions and they responded to other's thoughts and opinions. In their journals, students expressed themselves freely about matters that they may not have wanted to respond to orally.

I also took anecdotal notes from the observations that I made during the 42-minute class time. The notes that I took from observing, and overhearing conversations were crucial. Although they were brief, they allowed me to capture contemporaneous thoughts and feelings about the students and myself. The notes gave me a snapshot of what occurred in the class such as being confused, missing the major theme or topic behind discussed, or being off topic and distracted. This was beneficial to refer to while reflecting about the class and lesson. I told the students what I was doing with my notebook as I jotted down notes so that they were not self-conscious or concerned with what I wrote.

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the study determined the effects of using multicultural text in relation to critical literacies and comprehension. I took serious consideration of my students' ethnicity, gender, other diversities, and reading ability while I selected the four texts that my students read. My goal was to choose books that students related to on a personal level as well as enjoyed reading. I observed and listened to many conversations, I gained information regarding the students' comprehension and the ability to see injustices that took place that might not normally be discussed if not for examined text with a variety of lenses. I found patterns among my students that I documented in my journal. This focused my attention to specific areas; not only their needs, but of areas of need for further investigation or discussion. I analyzed my reflections in my teacher-research journal and I responded to my own observations of each of my students. Each child's journal was collected daily in order to be analyzed, which allowed me the opportunity to gather further insight into how they thought and if

their writings mimicked what they said out loud to the class or if their ideas and insights were developed more because of the class discussions.

Context

Bunker Hill Middle School (BHMS) is one of three middle schools in the Washington Township School District located in southern New Jersey. BHMS enrolls about 670 students and is a considered middle class, suburban community with exemplary school attendance. The school reported a 95% attendance rate for the year. Approximately 95% of the student body is provided with bus transportation. Some children opt out of provided transportation in lieu of providing their own transportation via walking, bike riding, or car rides.

Last year, student test scores qualified Bunker Hill Middle School for safe harbor, but there continues to be a significant gap between the special education and top-performing students. There are approximately 154 special education students at the middle school. In an effort to increase scores amongst its special education population, students provided with Resource Centers taught by regular education teachers. The goal was to increase student understanding of the standards that were included in the NJASK.

Of the 670 students, there are a large number of Caucasian students (567). There are 41 Asian Students, 43 African American Students, 23 Hispanic Students, and two Multi-racial students. This data collected via parent-provided demographics at the time of school enrollment. There are a substantial number of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch. Approximately 160 students receive aid for lunch. Even though the district is a middle class community, approximately 2% of the population is homeless.

Families from this sub group generally live in a motel within the district and their accommodations are financed by the state on an as needed and temporary basis.

There are 96 staff members. The staff consists of 73 women and 23 Men, including 90 Caucasian, 2 African American, and 4 Hispanic staff members. The staff turn-over rate is very low in the district. Most employees start and retire from the district.

Table 2

Population Demographics

Total Population (2010)	White	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Asian	Pacific Islander	Other Races	2 or more races
48,859	87.70	5.82	3.65	0.11	3.78	0.02	0.85	1.72

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Human relations are complex, so many analysis of what goes on in a classroom teaming with kids will end up with some unknowns and some ambiguities. Good research analysis raises more questions than they answer. (Shagoury & Power, 201, p.142)

Introduction

Chapter Four discusses the findings of my study, focusing on the effects of using critical literacies to instruct through multicultural text for the purpose of increasing comprehension, higher order thinking skills, and respect for other diversities. After I analyzed the information, my findings demonstrated the positive effects of reading a variety of multicultural texts with many different lenses. My analysis showed that using critical literacies challenged students to think independently and allowed them to challenge each other's opinions as well as what the thoughts are among society. The dominant themes were looking to lead change through leading by example, using different lenses and perspectives to gain better comprehension, and challenging the status quo.

Revisiting the Study

As explained in Chapter Three, I collected data over a six week time period. The students did the majority of the work in the classroom. The class met in a large classroom with 42 minutes of instruction for five days a week. While collecting data, I noted how students interacted towards each other, how they comprehended the text and

any substantial conversations that took place as we discussed the contents of the materials.

Implementation

In the days leading up to the start of my study, I asked my seventh grade Supplemental Class of six students if they would be willing to help me with an assignment I had to complete in order to finish my Master's program at Rowan. One of the reasons I decided to use this group of six children was because they often times say things to me leading me to believe they feel like they are not very smart because they are in this class. The intent of this class was to create strengths that they utilized in this class, other content area classes, and during state tests. I wanted to create a curriculum and atmosphere in my class that would help challenge those students and their sense of isolation and feelings of less worthy as compared to their peers (Jehangir, Williams, & Jeske, 2012). I wanted them to leave this class daily, or minimally by the end of the year, with confidence that they can do whatever they put their mind towards, they can do. I believe that half the battle is dealing with the confidence of a child and helping them truly feel that they are good enough to do anything they put their minds to. The following was the discussion I had with my students to introduce the study:

The Children: What's the study about?

Mrs. Enders: Back when I went to school, when a teacher said multicultural diversity what they typically meant was a text about black people. Where I went to school, there were predominately-white teachers and students in my school. Nowadays, when a teacher uses the terms multicultural or diversity we mean all the differences that students and teachers bring to class with

them. For example: eye color, hair color, height, and weight. Who lives in our home? For example, who lives in your home: Just your mom and dad? Just your mom or just your dad? Or do you live with your aunt? Or maybe your grandmom lives in your home? Do you have brothers, sisters, or are you an only child? Do you have half or step brothers and/or sisters?

Students started to raise their hands to answer the questions I was posing.

Students gave me insight to their families. They told me how many people lived in their homes, where they were in the birthing order, as well as other interesting facts that they expressed to the class. Two students were only children, and one was adopted. Two children's parents were not together either by divorce or because they were never married. I had three children who still lived with both biological parents. I had three students who had more than one sibling, but of those, only one of the students had all the siblings under the same roof. I had one student whose parents were taking care of a friend's toddler. They realized what I meant by the words multicultural and diversity.

Seventh Grade

After we finished sharing our thoughts, we read the text *7th Grade*, by Gary Soto. The text was about a seventh grade Mexican-American student, Victor, who returned to school after summer vacation. This text chosen was with the intentions that students related to the first day of school and to being in seventh grade. It also allowed students to look at the text through several perspectives, such as Victor, Teresa, and his French Teacher. After reading part of the text, students discovered Victor was in love with the girl Teresa and made it his mission to make Teresa his girl. The students and I discussed if they related to having a crush on someone.

Noele: I know what it is like to like someone and you hope to run into them or *accidentally*, bump into them, literally, I mean bump into them so you have physical contact.

Mrs. Enders: Anyone have a similar experience or at least is able to understand the main character's plight to want to be with Teresa?

Marcus: Yea, I get how he feels.

Even though Spanish is his first language, Victor had decided to take French this year in middle school so that he could get him noticed by her. He decided that the more time they were in class together, the better the chance he had to talk to Teresa and hopefully move from the *friend zone* to being her boyfriend.

As we read the text, we found that Victor does not know any French, but he tried to show off to impress Teresa. The French teacher could have embarrassed him, it was clear to him that Victor didn't know what he was asking, but he decided against it. The following data shows a class discussion of how students viewed a text from multiple perspectives:

Mrs. Enders: His teacher could have easily blow up his spot and put him on blast right? Why would a teacher do that? And why didn't the teacher say anything to Victor?

Ronald: A teacher might do it because he thought that Victor was messing around and trying to be funny.

Anthony: Yea, I had that happen to me, but I wasn't messin' around. I was serious and wanted to know an answer to a question.

Mrs. Enders: I can promise you one thing Anthony, I wouldn't do that. I know what it's like to have a question that you really want answered, but the teacher thinks you are trying to be a class clown. The only thing I might tell you to do, is to write it down and we can discuss it after we are done the present activity. So... why didn't the teacher blow up his spot?

Taylor: Because he knows what it is like to want a girl to like him?

Mrs Enders: Elaborate, please!

Taylor: Well he liked a girl in college and he tried to impress her and he spend all his money.

Noele: Right! When he had no more money, he had no more girl.

Mrs. Enders: (Writing an open-ended question on the board) What would need to have to happen to motivate you or interest you enough to make you sign up for a class, club, or activity after school when you normally would not participate?

Noele: I would only stay after or join a group if a friend joined the activity.

Anthony: It would have to be something offered after school that I liked then, I would probably would stay, but I would want a friend to go too. I wouldn't go by myself though.

Through this conversation, students demonstrated their understanding of the text not only from the narrator's point of view, Victor, but also from Teresa and his French teacher. This text was a great story to discuss viewpoints and perspectives and introduced the idea of using critical lenses. This multicultural text offered Anthony and Ronald the opportunity to see the perspective of a previous teacher. It also allowed

Taylor and Noele to have the ability to be understanding of how different people can have a similar experience. The author wrote the text in third party omniscient point of view allowing the reader to see that Victor's French teacher considered how Victor felt as he had done things to impress a girl before as well. This helps the reader understand what all characters were thinking and felt as they read the text. It gave students the ability to become cognizant of thoughts and ideas that were different than theirs, (Jehangir, Williams, & Jeske, 2012).

Stargirl

The next day, students discussed the text we read yesterday, *7th Grade*. They quickly summarized the plot. Then, the new text was introduced that would be read, *Stargirl*, by Jerry Spinelli. In this part of the study, students read about students being bullied, students being bystanders because they were being ruled by fear, and students being treated unfairly due to being different.

I related *7th Grade* to the first chapter book that we were getting ready to read, *Stargirl*. We spent six school days reading it. Orally, the children read this text fluently; however, the figurative language made the text complex and very rigorous for them. Although there were many challenging parts of the text that we needed to stop and go over, I felt that this was the type of complexity would allow them to productively struggle. The main character, Stargirl was new to a school and arrived on the first day of school with the rest of her peers. After reading several chapters of *Stargirl*, as I asked questions, I realized many children did not fully comprehend the text by the answers they were giving. I taught the students how to annotate the text by chunking the text. Students read a page and wrote the important information that they read on a Post-It

Notes®. I taught the students by using my short throw, document camera, and the text. I used the scaffolding strategy of gradual release. I taught them how to do the skill, and then they did the skill under my supervision. Finally, they did the skill independently. We started paragraph by paragraph and then the students moved into doing full pages of the text prior to writing down the important parts of each page so that they comprehended easily. I observed students using the strategy well, and they inferred better than they had previously. Ariana was particularly successful with using the strategy, it helped her with both comprehension, and inferring, which was one of her areas of weakness. When the students began to read independently, they asked to use Post-It Notes® for the next chapter.

Eliciting change through leading by example. In this book, the main character does random acts of kindness (RAK). We discussed doing an experiment in which we would do RAK. While we were brainstorming ideas, I told them that I did a random act of kindness that I called Paying It Forward. I went through the Dunkin Donuts® line and paid for the customer behind me. Students responded positively to this example and understood the idea of RAK from the responses they shared.

Over the next few days, my six students did RAKs and noticed that the recipients appreciated their kindness. The following data was a discussion held regarding students trying to change the status quo:

Girl in the hallway (went into the classroom): Did you see what Anthony just did?

He picked up my book! Wasn't that nice?

Anthony: (later during 8th period) Guess what?

Mrs. Enders: What Anthony?

Anthony: I helped a girl today who dropped their book.

Mrs. Enders: Oh yeah? How did they react?

Anthony: She smiled and said thank you. I think she was shocked.

Mrs. Enders: Why?

Anthony: I don't know her, I mean I see her around, but she isn't a friend of mine.

Mrs. Enders: Anthony, I bet you that will mean so much to her. Out of all the people in the hallway, a person she doesn't know well picked up her books. Way to go. I hope she pays it forward.

Anthony: She did!

Mrs. Enders: What do you mean? How do you know?

Anthony: At the end of the day, we were leaving for the busses and some kid left his locker open.

Mrs. Enders: Ok?

Anthony: She noticed it and closed it for him. The boy who left his locker open probably never realized that she closed it for him. So she did something nice for some kid who probably won't ever know.

Noele: That's great Anthony, but guess what I did Mrs. Enders?

Mrs. Enders: What Noele?

Noele: I told my table that I was going to sit with that boy that sits alone. Some of my friends, where like "why?" I told them because, how would you feel if you were new to a school? Wouldn't you be pray'n for someone, anyone to sit with you? I know I would.

Mrs. Enders: Wow that was great! That was kinda a big deal to say that to your friends. Very cool!

Noele: (high fiving Mrs. Enders) you know Mrs. Enders... You know how I roll.

Mrs. Enders: Ok playa... Werk!! I am proud of you. Did any of your friends come with you? Just wondering.

Noele: Yea, actually one of my friends came with me and at the end of the lunch period when we were walking upstairs, one friend ask if she could sit with us tomorrow.

Mrs. Enders: Noele! That's awesome. That is making a change, a small change albeit, but a change for the better. Way to be an influence in a positive way.

Having students go around and completing RAKs not only allowed them to do something nice to see how it could be beneficial for other people, it created a positive ripple effect. The students saw that change starts with them and that an act does not have to be huge to have a positive impact.

Different lenses. As we to read *Stargirl*, students realized that we knew exactly what Leo thought because we read the story through his lens. However, we were not privy to other characters' thought, feelings, and opinions unless they spoke directly to Leo.

Another major character was Hillari. She was the antagonist to Stargirls protagonist in the text. She was popular and did not like all the attention that Stargirl had received from all her antics. As the other characters in the text, we only truly knew what the characters' perspectives were if Leo was involved in the conversation.

The first time I asked students to use a different lens to view a text was when I asked the following questions: If Hillari was the narrator, how would the book be different? Give a situation from the book from Leo's perspective and then give that same scenario from Hillari's perspective (think about what we know about Hillari and how she feels)? The following is a similar example of what Ariana, Taylor, Marcus, Ronald produced.

Marcus wrote the following in his journal:

Question: If Hillari was the narrator of this book, how would it be different?

Student Response: Her perspective would be more mean (sic). And she would insult Stargirl mean.

Question: Give me an example of a situation from the book from Leo's perspective and then Hillari's perspective.

Student Response: At the football game, Leo's point of view was Stargirl was going crazy and having fun. But Hillari's point of view she was being annoying and not caring about anything at that moment.

Noele wrote the following in his journal:

Question: If Hillari was the narrator of this book, how would it be different?

Student Response: She would say bad things about her and not like her.

Question: Give me an example of a situation from the book from Leo's perspective and then Hillari's perspective:

Student Response: Stargirl dancing on the feild (sic) during the football game.

Hillari's perspective – Stargirl sang happy Birthday (sic) to Hillari.

Initially, students had difficulty viewing the text from another voice or perspective. After discussing it further, they articulated their understanding of Hillari's perspective. However, their ability to write it as fluently as they were spoke it, was not equivalent. Ariana, Taylor, Marcus, Ronald had some comments that they wrote down that led me to believe that they understood the questions and gave a written response that clearly stated their opinion. After reading Noele's journal response, I did not feel that Noele clearly understood the idea of the question being asked. Students were supposed to discuss a scenario and explain how Leo would have explained it from his viewpoint or perspective. Then discuss the very same situation and explain how Hillari would have viewed it. However, Noele gave an example from Leo's perspective and then explained a different scenario from Hillari's perspective.

One thing that Noele brought up in conversations that was a valid point; since this book is written from one perspective, Leo's, we did not truly know how every character thought and every conversation that was had, we *assumed* that this was how they truly acted or what was truly said. It is all from one opinion; one perspective.

Challenging the status quo. There were parts of *Stargirl* that the students enjoyed. However, about halfway through the book, the students lost interest, motivation and engagement. This was evident in our conversations about the text at the beginning of each class period and at the end of it. Students would say that it was getting boring and it was not juicy enough. Anthony said, "The book was good and all in the beginning, but now it is just dragging on." The other students concurred. In order to keep them motivated, I skipped through the text to find a few parts where the book easily led students to aspects of critical literacy that dealt with multiple perspectives being vied and

challenged. The students were more apt to participate and expressed their thoughts and opinions about how the author, Stargirl, and other characters may have felt if the text was written from their perspective.

In the text, Stargirl was *shunned*. Students and I discussed what the use of that vocabulary word meant in context. They came up with a working definition: being ignored. We then read further and saw that Leo used the phrase *the silent treatment*. Then, I turned the questions to the students to have them be self-reflective and asked: Have you ever been given the silent treatment and how did it feel? If it did not happen directly to you, could you give me some ideas of how it might feel to be in that person's shoes? Taylor responded to these questions in her journal with a short response:

Araina wrote in her journal: No, but it would hurt my feelings. I like to have friends.

I asked Taylor to verbally give a more descriptive answer.

Ariana said: it did not happen to me, but if it did it would make me sad.

Marcus wrote in his journal: Good, the person who was ignoring me probably got on my nerves.

The students understood the general idea of the silent treatment; however, I did not feel as though they truly understood how upsetting it could have been if Stargirl was an average teenage girl. As their teacher, I felt it was important for them to realize how it could be detrimental to a child and be very hard to deal with being ostracized from a group. Of these six students, I have three that are popular, two whom are liked, but popularity does not seem to be something they are concerned about as long as people like them. The sixth child does not seem to notice at all that people may think she is different

than others because of her disability. She misses those social cues; this can be both a blessing and a curse; in this particular case, I believe it to be a good thing because her feelings are spared. Throughout the years, I have had students who said to me that they feel like they are in special education when they are in the smaller classroom with only a few students in it. Their peers will joke around with them saying they must be stupid or slow since they are in *that* class. However, this group of students seems to be less upset about me teaching them in my current classroom since I teach the other 100 students in this room as well. However, both Noele and Marcus have asked, “Why am I in this class? I have a regular English and a regular Reading class.” I told students that this class allows the teacher to work very closely and specifically with any issues, they may be having. This does help put students at ease, but I am very sensitive to this issue and make sure never to say or do anything that made them be perceived as different from that of my other students that I teach. When I asked students questions to see if they understood what the silent treatment meant, they understood that someone was ignored, but their responses were generally short, not in-depth and did not demonstrate that they totally understood what a negative impact it could have on an adolescent’s life.

Different lenses and perspectives. Other challenges students noticed and were able to discuss were bullying, prejudice, and being different from the population. As they read the text, the students came across a part in the text where Stargirl dressed a certain way and behaved in a manner that characters in the book could not relate. My students said that she was different. They were not able to see how being different was anything other than being weird. We talked about using and positive phrasing about being different. Alex came up with unique. I thought that was an excellent example of a

positive spin on a word that could turn mean. From the example of calling her weird, unique was a more accurate and fair word choice. By the end of the text, I could tell by the conversations that we were having my students realized how people are afraid to stand up for what is right for fear of being ostracized from the group. Ariana made the point in her notes that being a bystander is just as bad as being involved because you are allowing it to happen, when you know it is wrong and do nothing to stop it. She used the example when Hillari was having a tantrum about students doing the bunny hop with Stargirl. When Stargirl brought the bunny hop around the dance floor again, Hillari confronted Stargirl. Hillari yelled at her for ruining everything and smacked her in the face. All the students stood there, but did nothing. There was obvious fear of being or feeling left out.

Ariana: I felt like that group of kids would rather be miserable in the group, than outside the group. At least when you are in the group, you have someone to hang out with. Outside the group, there is no one to talk to or be your friend.

In the text, Hillari was a bully and no one went against her for fear of her getting other students to shun them as she did with Stargirl and Leo. While Stargirl did not feel that way, it was evident that Leo did in the text because he had mixed feelings as to whom he should hang out. At one point, he sought advice and the question was posed to him: Whose affection do you value more, hers or theirs? That was one example of a decision that Leo made to be part of the group or be with someone who was not part of the group.

Ronald: When Hillari did different mean stuff toward Stargirl and said horrible

things about her, people knew it was mean and realized that some of the stories she produced were made up, but they said nothing to end it or to stop Hillari from spreading these rumors.

I noticed that having students use critical literacies it helped them to think independently and challenge the thoughts that they read and heard their peers make (Kurki, 2015). Likewise, Sarraj, Bene, Li, and Burley (2015), state that when students bullied others it can have a negative effect on the child. Optimally, this study would help subjects proactively deal with bullying when they notice it happening. Students must learn to stand up for themselves. My students were also able to see the same things and they saw how some people fear differences. Whether it was because they do not understand someone or they do not like the competition, as was the case in *Stargirl*, the fear of differences can be intimidating.

This text was also another opportunity for students to practice using their critical lens. They used a variety of lenses; they could understand a different person's perspective other than that of the narrator. Throughout the text, students challenged some of the injustices that happened to Stargirl and Leo in the book and discuss in class. While discussing the possible viewpoints of others, debates happened where each student would state their case as to why a person may have felt a certain way. Students noticed situations where people judged others unfairly.

Ramadan Moon

After *Stargirl*, we moved on to the picture book, *Ramadan Moon*, by Na'ima B. Robert. We spent two days on the text. When I introduced the picture book, Marcus was just as excited as the other students to be reading a short book with pictures inside;

however, I noticed that his attitude toward the book changed as you will see later as well. Since it was a picture book, the act of reading and writing did not take very long.

I asked the students to look at the title and the pictures on the book and give me their best prediction as to what we would be reading. Students came up with a number of ideas, but none that captured the essence of what we would be reading. I posed the following question, “What do you think *Ramadan Moon* is about?”

Anthony wrote the following in his journal:

A man who is lonely a hungs (sic) out at the swing and has a pet cat.

Ariana wrote the following in her journal:

I think this will be about a man who gets lost or explores the night.

I told the students that we would be reading about an Islamic, religious holiday called Ramadan. I told the students we would be taking turns reading. At this point, I noticed a change in Marcus’s behavior. He was no longer excited about the picture book. I started to read, and Marcus put his head down. I did not address this behavior until it was his turn to read. When he read, his voice was lower than usual, and he read at a very quick speed. Everyone else read with their normal tone and expression and enjoyed looking at the picture book. I could hear and see their excitement as they read. This was one book that I noticed many students were excited to learn something new.

Then I wrote Ramadan on the board, and the children looked through the picture book and looked for things that stood out for them. The students gave me words and phrases describing what they noticed. (See Figure 1)

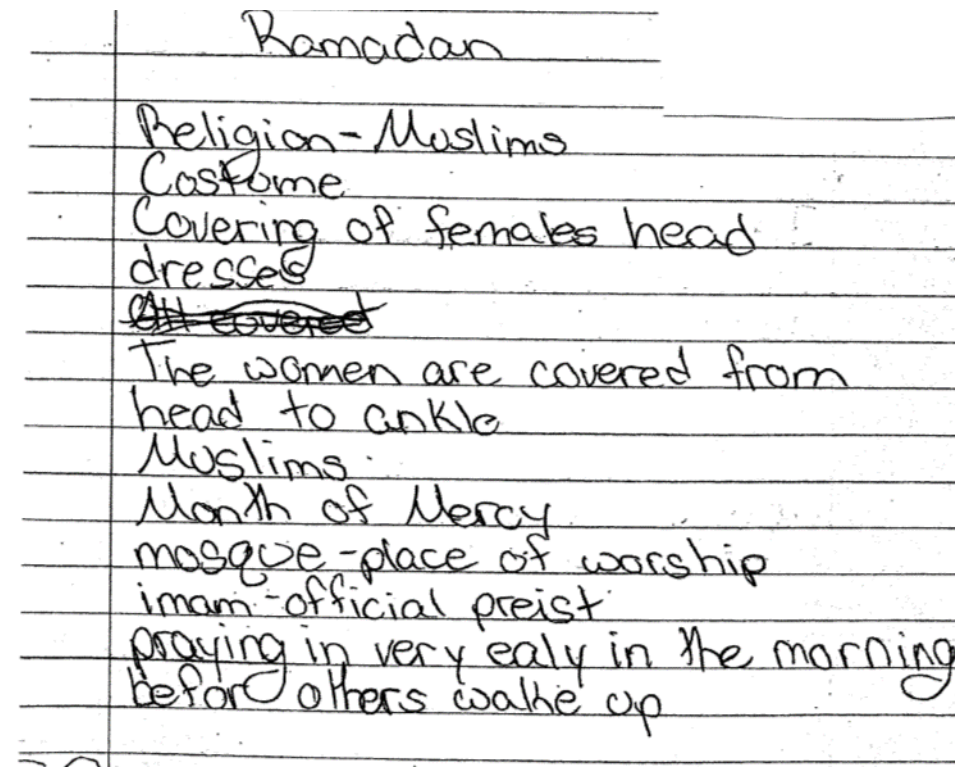


Figure 1. Notes for Ramadan Moon

The students told me what they learned while reading or noticed in the pictures. I added the details they shared under the title Ramadan that was on the board. Marcus did not participate at first, and again put his head down. I observed that Marcus was disinterested, not engaged. The students copied the ideas and notes in their journals. I asked what they personally thought and felt as they read the text.

Marcus wrote the following in his journal:

I absolutely, positively didn't like it at all. It was boring and had no emotions. If I had to rate it it (sic) would probably a negative number because I hated that book and I would never ever recommend that book to anyone unless they wanted to be bored to death. Absolutely hated it!

Unfortunately, Marcus did not enjoy the text as the other children did. The other children really liked the book and the fact that it was reminiscent of elementary school. Anthony told me that he loved picture books, and he remembered when his teacher would read them to him. I wanted Marcus to be motivated to read and participate in the next text.

Different lenses and perspectives. After reading *Ramadan Moon*, I asked them to respond to one writing prompt. This is where I wanted the students to transfer the notion of looking at text while using a critical lens and a different perspective. The question was, “If *Ramadan Moon* was written by a Christian person, the text might be different, how?” I wanted students to write something to the effect that Christians do not know the religion first hand, but that is not what they wrote.

Ronald wrote the following in his journal:

Ronald’s Answer: We don’t kneel down on mats. The traditions will change because they do different beliefs.

Taylor wrote the following in her journal:

Taylor’s Answer: It would have churches and women would wear whatever they want (sic).

Marcus’ wrote the following in his journal:

Marcus’ Answer: It would change because the people in the pictures would (sic) be covered by their scarfs. (*after clarification, he meant wouldn’t be*)

In conclusion, I think that reading *Ramadan Moon*, was a good selection.

Students learned about a different culture from their own. However, they did not realize on their own that they should have the ability to compare and contrast their traditions and values as it pertains to religion and holidays. The students were naive in their thoughts towards Christianity, and how some churches within Christianity still want women to dress very conservatively. However, this practice also showed that students did not have a lot of experience throughout their K-6 educational experience with different cultures/religions. They had no prior knowledge that would allow them to generalize to the Islamic religion. Seeing the way the children answered the questions, lack of ability to answer the question in depth or correctly, I asked them what religions they have previously discussed in school. They told me Christianity and Judaism were the only religions that they learned about in elementary school. This explains why they did not seem to have a frame of reference in order to state some of the similarities and differences within the religion of Islam compared with their own religion or other ones they have studied in the past.

Remember Dippy

The last text that we read critically was, *Remember Dippy*, by Shirley Reva Vernick. We started this text approximately two and a half weeks into the study. The students began by predicting what they thought the text would be about by looking at the cover only. I wrote the question on the board: What do you think about the story and character by looking at the cover only?

In response to this, Ariana wrote the following in her journal:

- Nobody forgets about Dippy.
- Is his name really Dippy?

- Nobody remembers Dippy
- It's okay
- He is in 9th or 10th grade
- He has trouble making friends in school
- He has an egg roll in his shirt pocket.

The cover had limited visual information, so the students did not make a prediction that would necessarily prove to be correct; however, they did use the details that they had available. Afterwards, I told the students that one of the main characters, named Remember was autistic. Then, we made a concept web on the board of things that they knew about autism. It started out as being characteristics of an autistic child, and it developed from there into other issues that students have noticed or guessed would be associated with children who have autism. Marcus was extremely vocal during this activity. He was the dominant person who gave answers and suggestions. (See Figure 2)

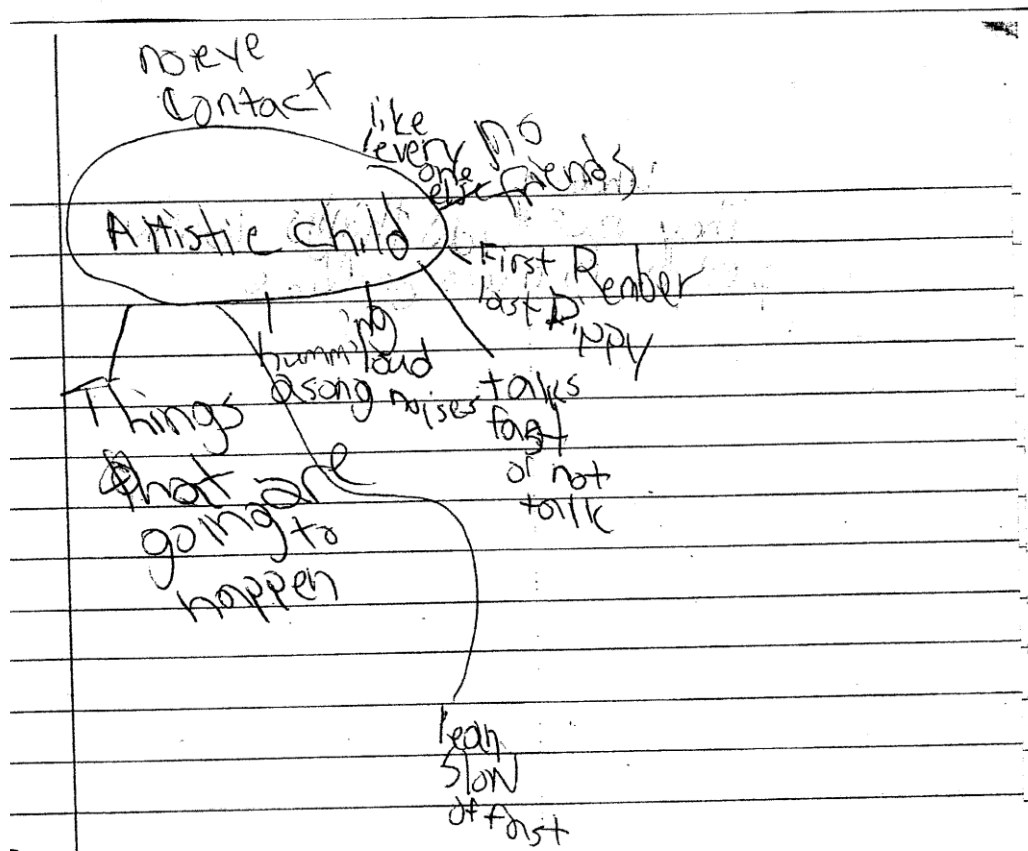


Figure 2. Concept Web

A few days later, as we continued to read *Remember Dippy*, the students came in to class and were excited about the lesson. In class, we wrote a strong and accurate collaborative summary. For homework, the students recalled what we did in class and created a summary that contained elements similar to the earlier collaborative summary (See Figure 3 for the work we collaborated on). In the next class, the students shared their work with each other, and learned from watching others engaged in the process. This led into a class discussion of reading and writing from different perspectives.

Chapter 6 Summary: Remember Dippy

After Mo, Reed, and Johnny went to bed late he was woken up by a soft touch. It was Jo ~~with a phone~~, saying that his aunt Collette was on the phone. She was annoyed that Johnny was not home to watch Mem when she went to work at 9am. Surprisingly, Aunt Collette was not too angry and told Johnny not to do it again. She asked him to grab her sweatshirt on his way to the 7-11.

When Johnny went home, it finally happened; the mailbox was changed. It went from DOPE to TRY SCOPE. Inside the mailbox was a small bottle of mouthwash.

Johnny, went into 7-11. Mem was reading a magazine and Aunt Collette was helping customers and being friendly. Johnny noticed the *man* again. He went up to aunt Collette and they were talking. Johnny tried to eavesdrop, but he couldn't hear everything.

Johnny asked Aunt Collette about the "dirt." Aunt Collette told Johnny that she liked the man, but it was too difficult at her age. She also meant it was too difficult with Mem. Johnny told her that he would "babysit" Mem so she could go out on the date.

Mem and Johnny went to get their hair cut. Miss Holly was not there. That was an issue for Mem. He was very nervous about Leesha cutting his hair. After Johnny suggested turning on the Weather Channel, Mem calmed down, and got his hair cut. It turned out nice. Next was Johnny. His haircut was nice, but he hated the way Leesha styled it with gel.

Johnny went to Niko's to rinse his hair. He noticed Niko hunched over the floor. We finally learn why Niko's been acting weird. It is because he lost his grandmother's diamond ring down the pipe on the floor that he was going to give to his girlfriend to ask her to marry him.

Figure 3. Remember Dippy Collaborative Summary

Different lenses. Noele volunteered to share her work with the class. I put her summary on this white board using the document camera and I read it aloud. We discussed how this text might have been different if another person's perspective was the

focus. For example if it was written in the perspective of Aunt Collette, Mem, or even Dirk.

Taylor: If the text was written from Aunt Collete's perspective, she would probably write about how hard it is to be a mom.

Anthony: Ooh Ooh and that taking care of Mem is hard because he is autistic. And that she is happy to have Johnny's help this summer.

Noele: I bet we would hear a lot about Mem's jerk of a deadbeat father and what happened to him more too. We probably would get more info about how she truly felt about DJ and this new relationship.

Mrs. Enders: Great points. What about if it was written from Mem's perspective?

Marcus: It would probably be about the weather man that he likes to watch and video games. Maybe a little bit about Jo and how he thinks she is pretty and Leesha his new friend.

Anthony: I think the book would be shorter.

Mrs. Enders: Why do you think that Anthony?

Anthony: Mem doesn't say too much so it wouldn't be too long.

Mrs. Enders: Unless the author decided to do the third person omniscient. Does anyone know what that means?

Noele: That the author knows it all. Like what everyone is thinking. Mrs. Enders, you went over that in first period in my regular reading class.

Mrs. Enders: Good job remembering that, Noele. So if it was third person

omniscient we then could get a really good sense of what Mem was thinking inside his brain, not just what he said out loud.

Marcus: True. True

Mrs. Enders: So now what about our antagonist. Our bad guy. What if the story was written from Dirk's perspective?

Noele: I am still not convinced he is as bad as he is made out to be by Johnny.

So I think he would say things like I don't know why people treat me like I am a jerk when I am not. Or like, how much he really wish he had good friends like Johnny, but no one will give me a shot.

Ronald: Really, come on. Like Dirk would talk like that? You're delusional.

Noele: Johnny and even we think that Dirk is a jerk. But what if it is not him at all doing all these pranks? What if it is one of his friends or another kid in the neighborhood? We all assume that because Dirk is said to be a jerk by Jonny and has threatened to beat up Johnny that it is true. We don't really know if any of it is true. It could be just Johnny trying to make everyone think that about Dirk.

Mrs. Enders: Wow, Noele, I honestly never even thought about the possibility of Dirk not being the one who did all the pranks. I believed Johnny because he spoke with such conviction and set the scene so clearly with the details. I now will read this with a different perspective, question or a wondering ever time Johnny talks about Dirk.

Anthony: Yea me too! Maybe he isn't so bad.

Mrs. Enders: Hopefully the book reveals who has been doing these pranks and then we can know for sure.

After having this discussion with the students, I felt as though they understood that a different perspective from which a text is written impacts the information or story that the audience receives. Providing students with the ability to challenge the perspectives allowed them to challenge the status quo. They extended their knowledge of perspectives to influence information they receive in all their classes, especially History. They asked themselves questions like: Who wrote this? Was the author present during the time that he/she are reporting on? Whose voice is being heard? Whose voice is deliberately being left out?

As my class and I continue to read, students will be encouraged to bring these questions up so they feel comfortable challenging the opinions of those in authority. The conversation below is an example of students asking themselves critical questions regarding the author's purpose:

Mrs. Enders: (speaking as she wrote) What do you feel the purpose of the text is from author's perspective at this point.

The students were able to write about their reasoning for selecting the purpose and then openly discuss it as well.

Marcus: To entertain?

Mrs. Enders: Possibly Marcus, I am enjoying the book, so it seems like that would be an appropriate answer.

Anthony: To show how some people, even your family treat people with a problem not the right way.

Mrs. Enders: What do you mean?

Anthony: Johnny is sometimes annoyed with how Mem acts, but he can't help it.

Mrs. Enders: Ok, but how would you feel if your cousin who was old enough to really hang with you, still needed a sitter? And you had to bring him everywhere you went?

Anthony: I'm not sure, but I know it's not right though.

Mrs. Enders: Fair enough. Maybe Johnny will have a change of heart later in the text. Let's wait and see. Make a note about this in your journal and let's come back to it at the end of the book. Let's see if Johnny changed and has a newfound respect and maybe love for his cousin Mem.

As the students and I were discussing the author's purpose, students brought up the fact that people sometimes doubt or challenge the ability of those with a disability. I thought it was an astute observation by Anthony to notice that this was not only happening, but that it was unfair assumption of those with a disability. As we read the text, a few topics came up that caused great discussions. The students discussed one character, Niko, being in what a few called a bad or dark place. Another topic that came up with Niko is possible addiction. We expanded on that, and students discussed whether they ever knew of anyone who tried to quit something addictive like drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes. This gives students another perspective in which to think or use a different lens. The students shared their experience in writing, but added more detail as we discussed it in the large group.

Mrs. Enders: Please write the questions from the board in your journal and answer them. From page 49: 1. What is he doing when is talking to

himself? 2. What is the purpose of that paragraph? 3. How can you connect this to your life?

Noele: On question number three, is this referencing question number one or question number two?

I thought that was very mature of Noele to ask this question. It showed clear metacognition, because she did not understand what the question was asking because she was not sure which question was referenced. I was pleased with the interaction that she was having with her self-talk and the text, this is something she was not displaying earlier in the September or October.

Comprehending on a higher level. The next day, I overheard a conversation between Noele and Ronald. Noele stated that she really liked the book. I have found both of the students answering comprehension questions with ease and going on to the higher order skills such as inferencing. After I observed the interaction between the two students, we read page 93. The following is an excerpt: “Dirk used his shirt to wipe the mustard off himself, and when he did his face reappeared, it was ketchup red” (Vernick, 2013, p. 93).

Marcus: But I thought he spilled mustard?

Mrs. Enders: Marcus, I actually thought the same thing when I read that part. So what I did was, I went back in the text to that part and reread it. It did say he spilled ketchup. So, do you think it’s a typo or what?”

Anthony: (raised his hand) Because when he wiped off the mustard from his face, it was tomato red because he was either so embarrassed or he was steaming mad.

Mrs. Enders: Wow, Anthony! You are right on with that explanation. Way to go!

Ronald: The text said, “his face reappeared, it was ketchup red,” isn’t that a metaphor?

Mrs. Enders: You are right Ronald! Wow you guys are awesome today!

We discussed that he squirted himself with mustard because he did not pay attention to the direction that he held the bottle. The students observed that the reason was that he had been watching the girl he liked talking to other boys

Ronald: He’s retarded.

Mrs. Enders: (In a calm voice) That term is not appropriate and it is offensive, but let me explain to you why. It was a word that people used thirty plus years ago to mean mental retardation. It could also mean people with a severe mental defect. Back then, people did use the word retarded. No one was offended because that was the only word that they had to describe a person with a physical and/or mental disability. Let me show you guys something (Mrs. Enders went over to her computer and logged onto dictionary.com. She turned on her short-throw projector and displayed the results. Then she read). The technical definition is “less advances in mental, physical, or social development than is usual for one’s own age” (Dictionary.reference.com, 2015). I would say in the last 20 years or so, we have come up with proper terminology for people who have disabilities. They also call it being politically correct or PC. Let me ask you something Ronald, when you used that word, and please correct me if I am wrong, you meant it to mean he is stupid?

Ronald: Yes. But, I am not calling him retarded!

Mrs. Enders: I know and I understand what you mean, but what you are saying is that retarded means stupid, so what that implies is, people who have mental retardation or have a physical or mental disabilities are stupid. Do you understand what I mean?

Ronald: Yes. Then can I call Dirk, stupid?

Mrs. Enders: Yes, you can.

My analysis of our conversation was that because Anthony used the word retarded without pause or conflict, he probably uses it regularly and had no real indication that the word had a negative connotation other than in the way he was meaning it, to be stupid or dumb. Because of the opportunity to have open and honest dialogue he at the very least think about the implication of the word and choose another word for what he is trying to say. This coincides with what Luke (2012) stated in his research. He studied Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where Freire stated, "Schooling was based on a 'banking model' of education, where learners' lives and cultures were taken as irrelevant" (Luke, 2012, p. 15). For too long, teaching and learning was in the manner where kids listened and teachers lectured. While using critical literacies, it shows students that each and every child in the class, as well as people around the world, do matter despite what they look like or what they believe. Students think that the people that they learn about are important. I felt that handling this situation with care and respect was the best way to not only ensure that Ronald was listening to what I was trying to teach him, but it showed that I valued him as a person as well as other people as well.

Different lenses and perspectives. The next chapter we read had to deal with divorce and remarriage. This next quote, from the character Johnny in the text:

I did not feel peaceful at all and did not know if I ever would. Everything I touched these days turned to a megaflop. Maybe I would have been better off spending the summer with Dad and Princess Kim in Maine. Where there was less disaster to get into. However, no, problems found me wherever I was, and solutions dodged me. I wonder what would go wrong next. (Vernick, 2013, p. 143-144)

The students and I started to talk about divorce. A few of the students are children of divorced or single parents.

Ronald: This year at Thanksgiving I decided to go my Dad's for Thanksgiving and my mom was upset.

Mrs. Enders: Why?

Ronald: My mom said that it was going to make her upset if I didn't stay with her.

I wanted to see my one sister, (my dad's daughter from another mom), my dad, and all my cousins. At my mom's house it is just us, the regular family.

Mrs. Enders: I have two questions to ask you. Do your older brothers have a choice if they want to go? Did you tell your mom how you were feeling?

Ronald: My brothers are older so they get to make their own decisions.

According to my mom, I do not. I have to do what the adults decide. I didn't tell my mom why I wanted to go.

Mrs. Enders: If you talked to your mom she might understand. Last question,
how do you think your mom felt?

Ronald: What do you mean?

Mrs. Enders: When you chose your Dad to spend time with during the holiday,
how do you think your mom felt about it?

Ronald: Umm sad probably. She probably felt like I picked my Dad over her.

Mrs. Enders: You know, my parents are divorced too, and when it was holiday
time, I always thought I selected where I wanted to go. My mom told me
that they never gave me the choice. Tell you what, I think I liked that
better. Once I made the choice, I felt like I was always hurting someone's
feelings, ya know what I mean.

The students seemed to get what I was saying, and Ronald nodded his head in
agreement. I thought the conversation was done and ready to move on, but just then,
Noele jumped in with the following statement that led to a conversation:

Noele: (nonchalantly) I just met my Dad recently.

Mrs. Enders: Really? Wow, how did that happen?

Noele: It was in the summer and I was at my cousin's swimming. I looked at him
and I don't know if someone told me or I just knew.

Mrs. Enders: How did you know?

Noele: He was the only man with one leg.

Mrs. Enders: Oh ok, that would do it. Were your parents married at some point
and divorced when you were very little? Why had you not seen him
before this?

Noele: My Dad cheated on his wife.

Mrs. Enders: (shocked by how matter-of-fact she was) Oh, ok. How did you know?

Noele: My mom told me. He didn't have a relationship with me, because for many years he didn't tell his wife.

Mrs. Enders: Does his wife know now?

Noele: Yes.

Mrs. Enders: Are they still together?

Noele: They are still together and my dad and I do email now and text.

Mrs. Enders: How does that made you feel?

Noele: That she is ok with it the way it is now

After this conversation, not only did I have better insight of my students' personal lives, but also I found that the children were able to gain insight on each other. They realized that there is no perfect home. Everyone is dealing with something, it may be a similar issue or completely different. However, this is when we discussed the idiom: "Do not judge someone until you walk in their shoes." Ariana expressed that it meant we should not judge people because we do not really know them or what they are dealing with on a daily basis. I thought that was very insightful.

Students also understood from this conversation that people have different viewpoints even when they were involved in the same situation. They may be seeing the same situation, but they feel a different way than another person who viewed it. You never know what is going on in someone's home or life that makes them feel a particular way or have a particular viewpoint. This could allow them to be more accepting of

people and have empathy for others that they may not have prior to this conversation. I could tell by some of their expressions, they were shocked to hear some of the stories that two children discussed. Three children in this group have their parents still married, and a single parent adopted one child. I think it gave the children a different respect for their peer.

We then discussed in this class period was with a character named Leesha. The following excerpt is from *Remember Dippy*:

“What’s so bad,” she bristled, sitting up, “is that my parents live there, and if they’re not yelling at each other, they’re yelling at me. “They hate me. They hate me because I survived the car crash and my brother didn’t, ok?”

“My father doesn’t think I see the empty beer bottles he hides in the car trunk.

And my mother, well, she hasn’t gotten out of her pajamas since it all happened.”

“My friends and don’t come over any more, we just cut school....it’s more fun this way”. (Vernick, 2013, p. 116)

Mrs. Enders: Wow pretty heavy, what’s going on here. Let’s talk about the situation and what we read is happening versus what we infer is happening.

Noele: She rather be here with her aunt in Hull, Vermont, than home in Chicago.

She is lonely and she feels like her parents don’t care about her. And she cuts school in the hopes to get caught so someone notices her.

Ronald: It sounds like she thinks her parents wish she was the one that died and not her brother.

Mrs. Enders: (After a deep breath) Ooh, ok so how would you feel if you were her?

Anthony: Like maybe she is thinking what is the point of living, maybe she should just commit suicide.

Mrs. Enders: Anthony, you might be right, she might feel like that.

Marcus: It sounds like she hates her life there and if finally making some friends with Mem and Johnny, so she is happier here than she would be at home.

Mrs. Enders: I think you've all made some good points and supported your inferences. Nice work!

Taylor: She's not happy.

This conversation was important to have, students need to know that there are students out there (maybe even them) that feel a certain way or have certain situations occurring at home that impacted why they feel or act the way they do. It is important for students to realize that there are different situations that children are unfortunately involved in that makes them have a different viewpoint than another.

Challenging the status quo. As we continued the conversation we began to deal with the way people judged others without knowing them.

Mrs. Enders: You're right Taylor, from what we are reading she is not. Any of you think about how she dresses, if that has anything to do with how she feels?

Ariana: Yea, she wears dark clothes, dyes her hair, and wears black make up, it is not very happy sounding.

Noele: It sounds like she is depressed by the way she dresses too.

Mrs. Enders: Do you think this is something the author did purposefully? Like to make us think she is depressed? Do you think she might change her clothing and look if she were happy?

Noele: Maybe the author did it to show us she is upset. I guess we will see if she seems to feel happier and her clothes stay the same or change.

Mrs. Enders: Good Point. But do you think all people look that way, with dark make-up and clothing when they are depressed. What if that is her personal style?

Ariana: I guess it could be her style, but it doesn't sound like someone I wouldn't want to make friends with.

Noele: Why?

Ariana: Well then if she isn't depressed she seems kinds like goth or emo, you know, the kids who wear all the dark clothes and listen to that type of music.

Mrs. Enders: Geeze Ariana, all that you picked up on was a possible stereotype or judgment, it seems a little harsh. Just because a person dresses a certain way or looks certain way, doesn't mean they aren't worthy of having friends or making new ones. You know?

Ariana: No, no, I get what you are saying, but usually they aren't very friendly.

Mrs. Enders: How many children who are dressed like we are describing have you tried to befriend?

Ariana: None, I said earlier I would want to make friends with them.

Noele: Do you hear what you are saying Ariana, this is what Mrs. Enders has been talking about, judging people before you know them as a person.

Mrs. Enders: Precisely! Nice catch Noele.

Noele: Thanks.

Ariana: Oh I see what you are saying, I am saying she is a certain way because the way she looks and not because she has acted a certain way.

Mrs. Enders: So what I want you to do is to try to think about those thoughts and feelings you just had and try not to put them on people without seeing who they are by their actions not their clothing.

Ariana: Ok.

The students were very open to the class and the conversations that took place. I think students talked freely because they knew that the room was a safe place and consequently, our conversations became more in depth. Our interactions led me to believe that reading multicultural texts through a critical lens enabled them to understand the text and their own biases more deeply. It allowed them to comprehend the text at a basic level, and allowed them to attain higher order thinking skills essential for readers. These skills included metacognition, inferencing, understanding the perspectives of different characters, using different lenses to read and analyze the text, and making connections to themselves and the world. For instance, Sarraj, Bene, Li, and Burley (2015) found similar evidence when they spoke to students. In their research, students were exposed to the text *The Rainbow Tulip*, the students stated that it was wrong to make judgments prior to knowing someone, and the easiest way to dissolve misconceptions about people was to make friends with them.

In the case of my teacher-research, the book *Remember Dippy* allowed students to connect with the narrative because our school had an autistic child and many severely handicapped children. The text provided opportunities for students to express empathy for people whom they perceived as being different. It also allowed students to have a better idea of other people's perspectives.

The student's responses to the texts we read: *Stargirl*, *Ramadan Moon*, and *Remember Dippy* provided the answer to the research question: Will using critical literacies to instruct through multicultural text to enhance comprehension, higher order thinking skills, and respect for other diversities. We used critical literacies to dissect the text and students understood the text on a deeper level.

They moved beyond literal comprehension to the point of inferential understanding. Moreover, some of these students demonstrated improved metacognition strategies by pausing to question their own comprehension.

Chapter V

Summary

After reflecting on this study, it is my belief that the students developed their reading ability in several areas. I found that using multicultural text and the critical literacy approach impacted the students positively. Their growth was due to a combination of the materials taught, their level of engagement, and their increased comprehension and fluency. In this study, I provided the students specific diversified and multicultural texts that were at their instructional reading levels. I used my professional judgment regarding the selection of books that would provide them with diverse perspectives.

The students were not always thrilled with the chapters we read. At times, they said the material was boring, but they always participated. It was my belief that although they expressed their displeasure with being bored, in fact, their complaints were most likely due to the productive struggle.

After spending six weeks discussing the texts with the students, I noticed that they had become more comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, and real-life connections. Once students developed a trusting relationship with each other and with me, they began to relate their personal experiences with the characters and events in the texts. While some remained at the surface level, others had connections that were deeper. Overtime, the open classroom climate encouraged students to believe that they could share their thought and opinions. Their level of trust was evidenced when students discussed their experiences of being bullied, of having been tease, and in some cases being a child of divorce.

Even though the selected texts were challenging, I felt that students struggled productively. I wanted these students to be challenged so they would grow as readers and learners. All too often, critical literacy education is reserved for advanced students (Lalik & Oliver, 2007). However, I agree with Comber (2003), Edelsky (1999), and Luke (1997) who argue that “critical literacy should be an integral part of literacy education for all learners, regardless of ability and age” (Park, 2012, p. 631).

Conclusions

After the study, the students continued to utilize the skills they learned during the six-week study. They annotated the text to help them comprehend. They used journals and Post-It Notes® to aide in comprehending the text and documented their thinking. To further encourage these new behaviors and validate their opinions, I documented and discussed in detail their suggestions.

At times, even with the best intentions, teachers reserve the harder material for the higher echelon students or for those in the regular education classes. The thought process is to avoid use of challenging material so that the students are not frustrated. The reality is, in doing so; valuable, teachable moments are missed. After conducting this study, I have learned that the material does not need to be difficult in order to be used for critical literacy. Implementing these strategies allowed students to think more critically about the text, and strengthened overall comprehension. Incorporating culturally relevant text and student-led discussion groups into my classroom, created meaningful reading experiences for my students.

Cambria & Guthrie (2010) concluded that engaged readers utilized metacognitive strategies to understand, respond, and discuss text. I found this to be true in my research,

particularly with Noele, Anthony, Makayla, and at times Marcus. Toward the end of my study, while reading *Remember Dippy* (Vernick, 2013), students provided more in-depth opinions and connections than they had in the beginning. Noele, seemed to not only enjoy the text, which kept her engaged, but also connected emotionally to the characters. I believe it is why she has learned to comprehend at a higher level than those whom did not connect to the text.

One of the most interesting things I discovered was that some were uncomfortable reading *Ramadan Moon*. I have wondered if it was due to the book being about Islamic religion and culture, which has been widely discussed in the media and even at times criticized, in recent years. It may have led the children to make judgments based upon what they have seen on the news or have heard in their homes.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this teacher-research study. The first limitation, was a time constraint that resulted from the slow EIRB approval process. My school district was very accommodating and gave me the required approval a full month earlier than the EIRB's. Had the approval process been quicker, more data could have been gathered and this would have strengthened the findings. The time limitation eliminated one of the selected texts and thus, eliminated several important concepts about race. A longer time frame would have been ideal and would have allowed students to have experienced the full intent of the study.

A second limitation was the accessibility of the books. I bought seven copies of each book: *Stargirl*, *Ramadan Moon*, *Remember Dippy*, and *Riot*, spending over \$100 on books and shipping. Having these particular books was essential to my study in order to

expose students to culturally relevant books that provided them the ability to view texts with different perspectives, and enabled the opportunity to hear from voices that they normally would not hear, and allowed them to speak on their behalf.

The third limitation was a particular parent who did not want their child to learn outside the traditional basal reader. The parent said the child was frustrated and the child did not comprehend the material. Although the parent did not support her daughter's participation in the study, she remained as part of the sample. The girls' responses showed growth. It is possible that the parent's opposition to the study affected the results. The child has the same diagnosis as the main character in the book *Remember Dippy* that was the narrative in which the parent had a problem. As Purnell, Ali, Begum, & Cater (2007) contended, "Culturally relevant stories and activities help young children connect academic lessons to their life experiences, making the content more meaningful" (p. 421). The opportunity to read a text that had a main character who had autism is something that was crucial for the group to read and interact with because of the autistic child in our class.

Implications

After I collected and analyzed all the data, this study could have been conducted as a yearlong project. The project would begin with an initial assessment in September and concluded with a reassessment in June. This would have provided nine months of data to track student progress. The assessments would have included a standardized test such as PARCC and an assessment of reading such as a Critical Reading Inventory (CRI).

Two thoughts resonated with me. First, research done by teachers improves instruction both locally and globally (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Secondly, as stated by Dewey, I have certainly grown by reflecting on this experience (1916). As a result of this study, I have learned more about myself as a teacher and what I need to do ammend the my overall teaching practices. I have come to believe that educating children in a way that fails to allow for appreciation, tolerance, and empathy for others is not acceptable now. It is irresponsible at best. We cannot keep educating children to become adults that engaged in a similar linear thought patterns that people have maintained for decades. If we continue to teach in the traditions of the past, we will perpetuate problematic beliefs about people who are different from ourselves. We need to educate children with differences in mind. We need to teach not only tolerance but also appreciation of our diversities. “Critical literacy approaches view language, texts, and their discourse structures as principal means for representing and reshaping possible worlds” (Luke, 2012 p. 8 -9). The world is ever evolving and we need to be as well.

Using the critical literacy approach and having students read a variety of diversified and multicultural texts allowed them to challenge their thoughts and the thoughts of others. It also allowed them to think deeply about how characters may have felt in a given situation and felt a situation as well. This is not a typical approach. Oftentimes, we read and ask surface level comprehension questions. Since we are asking students to step into the texts and become the character that they are reading about, it is imperative that we teach with a critical lens. The way that teachers approach, texts need to be modified in order for them to get the optimal result from their students. Rather than

relying on what is written in the text, students will have to do a lot more thinking about critical literacies.

Critical literacy approaches may assist in reshaping our world (Luke, 2012).

Teaching with critical literacy lenses is not a simple task. Students come to school and class with preconceived ideas about people. As we read, we are asking students to “pay attention to and seek out the voices who have been silenced or marginalized” (Harste et al., 2000 p 383). We need students, in a sense, to cross over those borders that our forefathers created so that we can encourage students to be border crossers in order to understand others (Giroux & McLaren, 1994). Critical literacy and the discussion of viewing texts and life through multiple lenses provides students the opportunity to experience just that.

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