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Pearls of Meaning: Preschool Children Respond to Multicultural Picturebooks

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Abstract

Employing a qualitative practitioner research method, this study examined preschool children's responses to multicultural picture books and gained insight into how pre-school children make meaning about illustrations and textual features that include aspects of culture. The authors explored how multicultural literature can be used to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity among young children. Mem Fox's, *Sophie* (1994) emerged as a salient text that evoked personal connections and response to complex issues such as cycle of birth, life, and death. We contend that early exposure to multicultural literature contributes to ongoing processes of meaning making and serves as a rich reservoir of understandings to assist in negotiating the world.

The picture book is like a string of pearls, where the pearls symbolize the illustrations, and the string symbolizes the verbal text (Cooney, 1998).

Introduction

The population of elementary and secondary school students continues to grow more diverse each year, and according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), approximately 48 percent of school-age children are students of color, almost 21 percent live in poverty, and approximately 10 percent are English language learners. In contrast, about 85 percent of the teaching force is White, middle class and monolingual, resulting in what is known as a "cultural mismatch." The National Associ-

ation for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in their 2009 Quality Benchmark for Cultural Competence Project reports that for the "optimal development and learning of all children, educators must accept the legitimacy of children's home language, respect the home culture, promote, and encourage the active involvement and support of all families, including extended and nontraditional family units" (1995, p. 2). The commonalities among diverse groups can best be examined through close examination of differences. Literature offers a range of opportunities for engagement with cultural differences. Careful consideration should be given to books used with young children for the ideas they reflect and the possibilities of those ideas. Reading a picture book to a young child requires some mindfulness with regard to the potential of the reading and how the text and illustrations might shape meaning of people and circumstances encountered. Early exposure to quality multicultural literature allows children from diverse backgrounds to see themselves in texts. It provides opportunities for cross-cultural empathy by allowing children to step away from a self-centered approach of interpreting their encounters to consider other's beliefs and values. As students learn about diversity, they may develop an appreciation for others and gain a broad view of their country and the world (Au, 2011). An early literacy pedagogy that incorporates multicultural literature has the potential to empower young children with knowledge of their world as they acquire reading, writing and speaking behaviors.

This research involves reading multicultural “picturebooks” to children enrolled in a university early childhood developmental center. We use the compound word of “picturebooks” to emphasize “the union of text and art that results in something beyond what each form separately contributes” (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007, p. 273). A picturebook is not simply a book that happens to have pictures. A picturebook is, in fact, a book in which written text and illustrations interact while each has a conscious aesthetic intention (Arizpe & Styles, 2003).

Multicultural Picturebooks in Nurturing Preschool Students’ Awareness of Others

Rochman (1993) explains the overall purpose of multicultural literature:

A good book can help to break down [barriers]. Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person - flawed, complex, striving - then you’ve reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us know each other (P. 19).

Thus, students should read and/or be read books that not only reflect their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds but also the diverse reality of this world we live in. “A rich literature diet provides variety—traditions and experiences that are both familiar and strange, characters that look like ourselves and others, and ideas that challenge and comfort.” (Bultler, 2006, p.18).

Quality multicultural picturebooks provide the opportunity for young children to explore the similarities in experiences across cultures (Barta & Grindler, 1996;

Hillard, 1995; Rochman, 1993), and develop appreciation for cultural differences (Rasinski & Padak, 1990). According to Norton (1990), while enjoying multicultural picturebooks, children from an ethnic minority group can boost self-esteem by identifying with and feeling proud of their heritage, and recognize the commonalities shared by all ethnic groups—needs, emotions dreams, fears. “The artist’s images in multicultural literature give children the opportunity to see the similarity among peoples and also to appreciate differences” (Creany et al., 1993, p. 8). Also noted in the research, “individuals who develop an appreciation for their own diversity are more likely to value others” (Creany et al., 1993, p. 3). This is especially true when a child is not around people of different races; multicultural literature will help children of all ethnic groups understand and relate to people of diverse backgrounds (Bultler, 2006).

Early exposure to multicultural literature promotes a balanced, well-informed student able to successfully navigate in today’s global society. Making multicultural literature available to all students can foster mutual understanding, as well as individual self-esteem and confidence (Schoolwide, 2007). When pre-school children are exposed to multicultural literature, social problems such as racism and stereotypes can be replaced with “awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences including self-recognition” (Han & Thomas, 2010, p. 472). Children who have better cultural awareness are able to learn their own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, perceived notions and personal limitations (Han & Thomas, 2010). It is apparent that “children at this age exhibit great enthusiasm for finding out about the world and how it works” (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2005, p. 17).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study is based on the theories of reader response and multicultural literature. Reader response research utilizes student responses to text to provide insight into literary interpretations embedded in the reading process. This research situates pre-school children (and everything influencing their identities) in very active roles as readers/listeners (Beach, 1993). Reader response theorist Louise Rosenblatt (1982) describes the text as a stimulus that activates the readers experience with literature and life. In the case of the *read aloud*, the text serves as a blueprint for ordering, rejecting and sketching evocations from the reader.

Multicultural literature is “literature about racial or ethnic groups that are culturally and socially different from the White Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature” (Norton & Norton, 2003, p. 457). Multicultural literature is rich in cultural detail, uses authentic dialogue, and presents cultural issues with enough in-depth so that the readers can think through and talk about them. This understanding has informed us to select the multicultural picturebooks for the read alouds and to examine participants’ responses to the books in this study.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The idea for the study emerged from experience of two university faculty members. It was also framed by perspectives that recognize the ways literature can ignite imagination, promote understandings and act as a developmental support for young children. Vasquez (2014) describes her early school experience as an immigrant from the Philippines as one in which she found her “identity was constructed and maintained as

voiceless, as incapable of action, of making a difference in the lives of others, or indeed” in her own life (p. xii). As an immigrant, the first author expected to see a society where members respect, understand, and value each other and diversity is appreciated and celebrated. With this stance in mind, the researchers believe the seed should be planted when one is young so that it can blossom later. Therefore, pre-service teachers in the second author’s introductory literacy class visited the university early childhood center to observe young children. The pre-service teachers then had opportunities to engage with the children through reading, drawing and/or discussion. In a debriefing session, one pre-school girl stood out to many of the undergraduates. She spoke Mandarin and had little interaction with her classmates. She followed one teacher around the room and made an effort to crawl into her lap whenever she had the opportunity. This resonated powerfully for a Chinese American teacher candidate who shared similar experiences of being an outsider and feeling isolated in the primary grades. Her story engendered an intense conversation on cultural responsiveness in our class and encouraged the authors to consider how we might use multicultural literature with the pre-school class. The pre-school setting was rich with potential for fostering understanding about self and others.

The purpose of this study was to examine pre-school children’s responses to multicultural picturebooks to gain insight into how pre-school children make meaning about illustrations and textual features that include aspects of culture. Two questions guided this study: 1) how do pre-school children respond to multicultural picturebooks with themes related to diversity? and 2) how do they perceive diversity represented in the books?

Methodology

To answer the research questions, a qualitative practitioner research methodology (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009) was employed in this study. “Qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes” (Glesne, 1999, p. 24). Practitioner research allows us to assume a dual role, both as teacher or practitioner reading aloud to participants and as researcher studying their responses (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). The study was also guided by Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) standards for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This design was selected for three reasons: 1) to use triangulation to confirm or corroborate results; 2) to provide richer detail during analysis; and 3) to allow for new ideas or “surprises” that may result in fresh insights (Rossman & Wilson, 1984).

Participants

Convenient sampling was used in this study. A group of three-to-five-year-old children enrolled in a university pre-school located in an urban area in the northeast of the U.S. was invited to participate in this study. The purpose of the study was explained to the potential participants’ parents/guardians in a letter from the researchers, which was distributed at the beginning of the school year. Parents/guardians read the consent and contacted the researchers if they had any questions. If parents wished to have their child participate in the study, they signed and returned the consent form to the classroom teachers within a week after the letter and form were received. There were fourteen three-to-five-year-old pre-school children who participated in this study. The participants were primarily children of employees or students at the university. Among the fourteen participants, six boys

and eight girls, there were two Black, one Asian, and eleven White children.

Procedures and Multicultural Picturebooks Used in the Study

The project lasted for one semester from the beginning to the end. The researchers met the participants in their classroom once a week to read and discuss multicultural picturebooks about families, friendships, and cultural differences. Interactive read alouds (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004) were used and at the end of each book participants were directed to write or draw their responses to the text. Interactive read alouds allow teachers or researchers to place more responsibility on participants to share what they were thinking in a way that simulates an authentic reading experience. The two researchers took turns to read aloud and take notes but together facilitated the book discussions before, during and after the read alouds.

Five culturally authentic picturebooks were selected for read alouds to answer the research questions. The five picturebooks read aloud to participants were: *Whoever You Are* and *Sophie*, both by Mem Fox, *Matthew and Tilly* by Rebecca C. Jones, *Yoko Writes Her Name* by Rosemary Wells, and *I Can Do it Too!* by Karen Raicker. We selected these texts which represented the participants’ ethnic backgrounds in hope that they would better understand themselves and others from other cultural backgrounds and then learned to appreciate the differences around them. The text features of each book are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Text Feature Analysis

Book Title (Author)	Cultural Representation	Textual Theme	Artistic Features	Illustrated Cultural Conventions
<i>Whoever You Are</i> (Mem Fox)	Multiculture	No matter where we are from in this	Conceptual representations	Representations from different geographic

		world and whoever we are, we are same on the inside.		locations in the world
<i>Sophie</i> (Mem Fox)	African American Family	Family love along with the cycle of birth, life, and death are presented.	Expressionist representations	Family traditions Symbolism of hands as nurturing

Book Title (Author)	Cultural Representation	Textual Theme	Artistic Features	Illustrated Cultural Conventions
<i>Mathew and Tilly</i> (Rebecca C. Jones)	City life Interracial friendship	The rich aspects of city life and the strengths, complexities and joys of childhood friendship.	Impressionistic realism	Urban community that includes diverse people, dwellings, shops and street games
<i>Yoko Writes Her Name</i> (Rosemary Wells)	Japanese American, School life	Modern fantasy showcasing cultural diversity and acceptance.	Cartoon	Little cats from different cultures in a kindergarten class, a simple object (cup, pot, ball, box, etc.) with its English and Japanese names on each page. We make a case for a book using animals as multicultural because of the rich cultural themes embedded in the text.
<i>I Can Do it Too!</i> (Karen Baicker)	African American, Asian or Hispanic family, community	Growing up surrounded by love and support of those around (family, extended family, friends and community)	Expressionistic	Family with ethnic hair styles and diverse community

All five books demonstrate the qualities of multicultural literature: 1) rich in cultural detail, 2) using authentic dialogue, and 3) presenting cultural issues in-depth so that the readers can think through and talk about them. We characterize *Yoko Writes Her Name*, a book with animal characters as a multicultural picturebook because of the multicultural themes embedded in the text. Yoko’s character clearly identifies with the Japanese culture which is demonstrated through written language and cultural practices such as food.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources for this study included detailed observation notes from the read aloud sessions, digitally recorded read alouds and book discussions, transcriptions of the digital data, students’ verbal and written/ illustrated responses, and researchers’ reflective journals. Triangulation was thus assured through the varied data sources.

Data analysis was based on a naturalistic method as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). During the analysis, the researchers read and re-read the data and looked for patterns and themes across all data. The procedure followed was open coding, an unrestricted coding of the data (Strauss, 1987). This inductive process allowed for themes to emerge and for participants’ voices to be heard, thus presenting the perceptions of participants in the most forthright manner (Berg, 2001).

Findings

The findings of this study have clearly answered our research questions, namely, how pre-school children respond to multicultural picturebooks with themes related to diversity, and how they perceive diversity represented in the books. Participants were engaged in all of the read alouds and they were eager to discuss the books and draw pictures in response to the readings. They were enthusiastic to talk about their own lives and family traditions. This reflects the personal responses as explained by Sipe (2008), which focus on readers’ personal experiences. Performative and physical responses (Sipe, 2008) were also demonstrated as one participant enthusiastically came to the front and pointed at the page and another participant shouted out her responses. They made connections to cultural moments and differences. The more they were read aloud

to, the more responses they had, the deeper understanding they developed of the books and cultures. They genuinely enjoyed the read-aloud and were eager to respond during and after the read-aloud sessions orally and in writing. Observing and studying the participants' responses to these books, we realized that the majority of the participants demonstrated understanding of textual themes through oral responses and writing/illustrations. This understanding leads to knowledge of difference and understanding of others. We also observed some of the participants demonstrating the understanding of others in their remarks and behaviors.

Among the five books, *Sophie* emerged as the most salient multicultural text in answering the research questions. The picturebook served as stimulus that activated the readers' experiences with literature and life. Therefore, we will use *Sophie* to illustrate how participants responded to multicultural picturebooks with themes related to diversity, and how they perceived diversity represented in the books.

Making the “Case”-Preschool Students Respond to *Sophie*

Using a brief 93 words, *Sophie* is a “circle of life” story that explores the textual themes of birth, nurture, life, love, family relationships and death. The text captures what Nieto (2007) describes as an integral aspect of multiculturalism in its ability to provide knowledge and information, to change the way children look at the world by offering new perspectives, to give rise to critical inquiry and to provide enjoyment and illuminate the human experience. *Sophie* not only meets the criteria of multicultural literature, but is equally a “critical text” in that it presents ideas that are not typically central to stories for young children. The text offers a space for what Freire and Macedo (1987) describe as a “radical

pedagogy” that encourages us to engage in discovery based on lived experiences. The Expressionist representations of illustrator, Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson portray the closeness of an African American family emphasized visually through characters with oversized hands that symbolize the nurturing role of the family unit. There emerges a “synergy” between text and illustrations that Sipe (1998) describes as an aesthetic whole that could not be achieved one without the other. This becomes particularly clear given the limited text and the striking imagery. The title page of the text invites us in to the world of the picturebook with a vibrant full bleed illustration that depicts a community. In the midst of the community looking out from the page, a solitary man stands in front of a home and it appears that he is waiting. In the first opening, a pregnant woman is almost cradled by the notably large hands of the five people around her. The text reads, “Once there was no Sophie.” The second opening reads, “And then there was.” In this illustration the same hands cradle the woman and her newborn child who we know to be Sophie. The hands strikingly exemplify the expressionist style of the illustrations and serve as a symbol to establish the textual themes of family, love and nurture. In the third opening we learn that the waiting man is Grandpa. Here we see his large adult hands entangled with the large baby hands of Sophie as the text tells us that, “Grandpa and little Sophie loved each other.” As the story progresses Sophie grows and Grandpa ages. On the twelfth opening the text reads, “And then there was no Grandpa, just emptiness and sadness for a while....” The text and illustration offer an aesthetic whole on the circle of life textual theme. In the composition, there is a pregnant Sophie juxtaposed with the image of Grandpa lying in a coffin. Their large hands continue to contribute to the overarching narrative. Sophie's hands are

folded above her stomach depicting life and Grandpa's folded hands rest on his lifeless body.

Sophie evoked response to the highly sophisticated visual aesthetic present in the text. The participants examined the nature of the real world through a process of ordering, clarifying, rejecting and sketching responses to the book. The active role of listening and the idea of clarifying began with the introduction of the author's name, Mem Fox and preview of the book's cover.

Student#1: Is he a fox?

Student #2: Is that a real fox [the dog on the cover]?

Student#3: Foxy?

Following the first opening of the picturebook, the conversation moved from an ordering or clarifying discussion of "fox" representing an animal and a person's name to address the presence of themes that were expressed visually. These initial reactions seemed to reject the oversized hands:

Student #1: Why are their hands so big?

Dr. B: Their hands are big. The illustrator did that.

Student #1: They are huge.

Dr. B: I love that word huge!

The large hands motif served as a strong symbol to guide the children through the text. The symbolic large hands would be mentioned a total of nine times by varying students.

Dr. C: Look at your hand and my hand. Is my hand bigger than yours? The grown up hand is bigger.

Dr. B: So here's Sophie... She looks what to you? Bigger?

Student #1: With big hands.



Figure 1: Hands Illustrated in *Sophie*

The talk of hands (see Figure 1) continued through questions that asked: *Why are her hands still big? Why are their hands backwards? Why are their hands still big?* The visual theme of hands as nurturing aspects of family had clearly emerged. The discussion of the hands allowed us to move on to other critical aspects of the text.

9th opening: *And then Grandpa grew smaller.*

Dr. B: How come Grandpa is getting smaller? He's getting smaller because he's getting what?

Children (many voices): Older.

10th Opening: *Sophie and Little Grandpa loved each other.*

Dr. B: What are they doing in this picture?

Children (many voices): Eating. Eating dinner.

Dr. B: Do any of you ever sit around the table with your families?

Student #4: I do. With my grandmom, Pop-Pop, Nana, Mommy, Daddy and Me.

11th Opening: *Grandpa's hands held on to Sophie*

Student #3: Because he is old.

Student #7: Oh. He is in the hospital.

Dr. B: Why do you think they are holding hands?

Student #3: Because he's old and sick.

12th Opening: *And then there was no grandpa, just emptiness and sadness for a while.*

Student #6: And then he died.

The ordering process represents an understanding of Grandpa's aging. Many of the children understood his growing older, becoming smaller, being hospitalized and his ultimate death as events that emerged in a clear order. The response, "And then he died" actually occurred before we saw the image of Grandpa in the coffin. Personal sketching of the story events enabled this response to emerge. The children did not seem to be surprised or upset by Grandpa's death. Textual connections to aspects of family had been shared in response to the 10th opening in which the family was gathered around the table. A student responded that he sat around the table with his Gandmom, Pop-pop, Nana, Mommy and Daddy while another student shared that her daddy cared about her mommy and her. However, the children made no verbal connections with the death of Grandpa.

Initial responses to the large hands in *Sophie* was based on confusion about their enormity, yet as the process of ordering the text continued for several students the hands took on a significant role in the family and served as a powerful tool for caring. In the 13th opening we see a grown up Sophie with a baby of her own.

13th Opening: ... till a tiny hand held on to Sophie's.

Student#1: Why do they have big hands?

Dr. B: ...why do you think she [the illustrator] made these big hands. Look at the picture. What do the hands look like? What are they doing?

Student #8: Cuddling

Student # 2: Hold them [the baby].

Student # 9: Covering the baby up.

The hands motif had shifted from the grotesque to embody what the illustrator seems to have set out to do in making them central to the caring shared by families.

As illustrated in the case of *Sophie*, many of the participants' responses were personal. For example, when discussing *Whoever You Are* participants shared their various after school activities, languages they spoke at home which they were very proud of, or where they lived. This reflects the personal responses as explained by Sipe (2008), which focuses on readers' connections based on personal experiences.

Though participants did not specifically respond to the racial differences of the characters or the urban features of the community, findings indicate that their discussions did address the theme of difference present in the texts, for example, when they identified different languages and skin colors illustrated in the texts. They could identify the feelings of characters. For example, one participant said Yoko was sad when she was hiding from other people and her friends should say sorry to her. When responding to *Matthew and Tilly*, although Matthew is White and Tilly is Black, one participant said they were brother and sister several times indicating his ability to recognize family as multiracial. Participants were also able to identify that books have themes and demonstrated understandings of the theme:

Dr. B: Well tell us what do you think it's about?

Dr. C: Yeah, what do you think it's about?

Child: I think it's about friends.

In this study, experience with the text was grounded in personal understandings and moved to include examples of understanding of self and others as the reading progressed. Participants' responses showed how they made meaning starting

from the level of very personal understanding in all of their drawings to include broader and higher levels of understanding beyond self as indicated as the discussions progressed and particularly in the case of *Sophie*.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide insight on young children's responses to multi-cultural literature, the importance of multicultural literature and how multicultural literature should be taught or introduced to young children. As demonstrated in the findings, young children were willing and able to enjoy and engage with multicultural literature with big ideas. *Sophie* serves as a strong example of this willingness and ability with the text as a stimulus that activates the readers experience with literature and life (Rosenblatt, 1982). Most of the participants' responses were personal (Sipe, 2008), which focus on their personal experiences, though performative and physical responses (Sipe, 2008) were also demonstrated in their responses. They were able to make connections to cultural moments and differences illustrated in the texts. Quality multicultural picturebooks thus provide the opportunity for young children to explore the similarities and differences in experiences across cultures (Barta & Grindler, 1996; Hillard, 1995; Rasinski & Padak, 1990; Rochman, 1993).

Early exposure to quality multicultural literature can impact young children's views of this world as demonstrated in participants' responses, and the impact can be lasting. Weeks after the project when Author 2 was walking past the early childhood center, one participant, a young boy who was one of two African Americans in the class, ran up to her:

Child: Dr. B, do you love everybody?

Dr. B: I try to.

Child's Teacher: Tell Dr. B. Why you are asking her that?

Child: ...(too excited)

Child's Teacher: Who did we just read about?

Child: Martin Kuther King

Child's Teacher: Martin Luther King tried to love everybody.

Child: Are you coming back to read to us again? Where is Dr. C?

This demonstrates a resonance of textual themes and is a strong example of the rich reservoir of understanding that multicultural literature can provide. Teachers and other adults set examples for children by talking about books. The more they see adults talk about books, the more they want to talk about books. They begin to understand themes and start to make deeper connections. They may even develop provocative questions as with the child above and connections to *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr.* by Doreen Rappaport (2007). During the read-aloud, this explicit awareness may not be present, but overtime, it starts to emerge as students dip into the reservoir at their disposal. Students thus engage in an ongoing process of meaning making (Sipe, 1998). Based on the findings of this study, we have created a model applying Sipe's (1998) concept of an "ongoing process of meaning making" that emerges from textual experiences (See Figure 2).

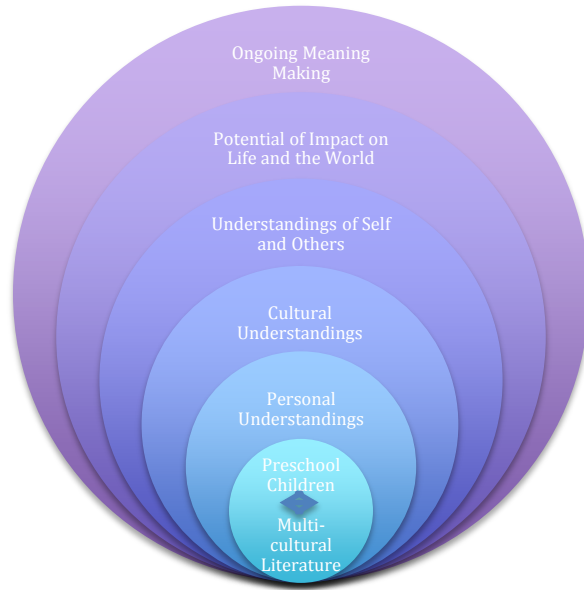


Figure 2: A Model of Preschool Children Responding to Multicultural Literature

Living in a diverse world, younger children should be provided with the opportunity to interact with multicultural literature to “see the similarity among peoples and also to appreciate differences.” (Creany et al., 1993, p. 8). Creany et al. (1993) argue that “individuals who develop an appreciation for their own diversity are more likely to value others” (p. 3). As demonstrated in the study, the more they were read aloud to, the more responses they had, and the deeper understanding they developed of the books and cultures.

Quality multicultural picturebooks should be made available in preschool classrooms for both read alouds and independent reading. Interactive read alouds should be used frequently to involve young children in discussing both texts and illustrations. As indicated in this study, children’s experience with the text was grounded in personal understandings and moved to include examples of understanding of self and others as the reading progressed. Preschool classroom teachers can start with multicultural picturebooks that allow students to make connections more easily

and scaffold students through the reading and response process. Teaching can be guided around students’ questions and concerns.

Implications and Conclusions

Several implications can be drawn from this study for teacher preparation programs and researchers. Pre- and in-service teachers need to be prepared to be more capable of evaluating and teaching multicultural literature. Rochman (1993) reminds us that the best books break down borders and surprise us, which is especially true when using multicultural texts and particularly those of a critical nature. As illustrated in the case of *Sophie*, teachers must play a role in helping students negotiate meaning when comprehending multicultural literature; however, it requires teachers’ knowledge and techniques to guide the students through the process. These requirements could be challenges for many pre- and in-service teachers. We argue that a Multicultural Literature course should be included in a teacher preparation program to teach pre- and in-service teachers how to select, evaluate, and use multicultural literature in classrooms. Work with pre-service teachers must continue to focus on the need for multicultural literature and the work that must be done to become comfortable with these texts. Besides a Multicultural Literature course in a teacher preparation program, it is necessary to provide professional development workshops to build in-service classroom teachers’ knowledge and confidence around multicultural knowledge and building a classroom library with multicultural literature.

There continues to be a need for quality multicultural literature for young children. Several aspects or areas still need to be investigated in the future. How might we learn more about the cultural understandings

that young children possess? Also of interest is the examination of how the multicultural books can be used to foster deeper understandings of self and others while creating a space for empathy in various forms. This study implies teacher's knowledge and techniques on the use of multicultural literature in classrooms deserves further investigation. Lastly, a multi-site study will help to compare and contrast findings to promote deeper understanding of this topic.

In conclusion, multicultural literature offers a deep reservoir to draw upon. As we witness far too many instances of cultural clashes in the media, it raises questions about the educational experiences of the individuals involved. Although many Americans live, learn and worship in racially isolated areas, schools can be a place to experience difference and to raise questions in a safe environment.

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