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Using multicultural literature in the classroom to encourage tolerance and respect

Laurel Hartmann

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**USING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM TO
ENCOURAGE TOLERANCE AND RESPECT**

by
Laurel Katherine Hartmann

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Department of Teacher Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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at
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Thesis Chair: Marjorie Madden, Ph.D.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Dr. Janet Moss, whose constant support and guidance has helped me to evolve from a student to a teacher

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Abstract

Laurel Hartmann
USING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM TO
ENCOURAGE TOLERANCE AND RESPECT

2011

Marjorie Madden, Ph.D.
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this research study was to determine what happens when multicultural children's literature is used to supplement the kindergarten curriculum. Over the course of four weeks, students were read eight books about diverse cultures during centers and during circle time. Qualitative inquiry strategies such as parent questionnaires, audio recordings of small group and whole group discussions, student artifacts, and observations recorded in a teacher research journal were all used as a means of collecting data. Upon analyzing the data and searching for main ideas throughout the study, I found that multicultural picture books helped the children become more comfortable with talking about difference in a positive way. Additionally, it helped encourage the students to search for similarities between their own lives and the lives of members of diverse cultures around the world. Lastly, this study supported the idea that read-alouds are an effective way to present multicultural literature to young children in the classroom in an effort to supplement the standard curriculum.

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Chapter I

Scope of the Study

During my Practicum I placement in a very diverse kindergarten class, I began to take interest in the cultural awareness and beliefs of the children. When the year first began, the students were all friendly with each other, beginning to make friends based on their favorite activities such as playing on the swings, playing tag, painting, favorite television shows and others. However, about four or five weeks into the school year, I began to sense divides forming, even amongst such young children. Small comments that the students would make, such as Anna, a Latino American student who asked me, “Can I play with Katie on the playground?she’s white” made me curious as to the origin. I responded to Anna explaining that she could play with whomever she wanted and it did not matter what color their skin was. A few weeks later, Kelly, a Caucasian student of Irish descent approached me sullenly and said, “Monika said that I can’t be her best friend because she already has an Indian best friend”. Monika is one of the many students in the class who migrated to America from India. There are three dialects spoken among the Indian students in the class. I began to notice that these students divided among themselves into small groups, based on their origin and dialect. They would tell me about their play dates and about the friendships between their parents since they came from the same regions of India. By October, the behaviors of the students seemed to suggest that they had formed small groups or cliques to which they retreated during any free time activity such as recess or playtime. Of course, not all of the students chose friends based on the color of their skin or the language they spoke; many played

with peers who they knew from extra-curricular activities and so on. However, instances of bullying and exclusion began to occur between separate groups.

Another issue within the classroom that brought cultural relations to my attention was the case of Emma, a practicing Jehovah's Witness of African American descent. Emma's mother was very clear that her daughter was not to participate in any activities relating to holidays since their culture did not believe in these "Pagan-rooted" celebrations. So when Mrs. Appelson read stories about Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukah or Kwanza, Emma was sent to the back of the room to read a book on a completely unrelated topic or she was sent out of the room. Emma was aware that her religion was the reason she was not included in activities such as making bats or dreidels or wreaths. However, it was clear that her classmates were not. What these students saw was Emma retreating from a group because she was excluded. They were not given any information on why Emma did not participate or what she would be doing instead. They simply saw Emma leave the room with whatever materials she needed in order to keep occupied. The other children in the class were not given the opportunity to learn about Emma's culture, or why she did not participate in many activities, since there was no true outlet for them to talk about diversity and difference.

When I realized that so many teachable moments were being missed as a result of the lack of opportunity to discuss diversity, I decided to take action. What would happen if I began to openly discuss cultural differences in the classroom setting? What if the children were given the opportunity to learn about other cultures through interesting and meaningful stories and books? How would this knowledge impact their ability to demonstrate empathy and tolerance towards those who were different from one's self? I

knew that this task would not be an easy one but it would most certainly be meaningful to the students who participated and it could certainly help to promote understanding within our classroom community.

Based on the various issues of exclusion and discrimination I observed in the kindergarten classroom, I have chosen to focus on the use of multicultural books and stories. I would like to study specifically what will happen when I incorporate multicultural literature into the curriculum of a kindergarten class.

Story of the Question

After completing the course “Using Children’s Literature” as an undergraduate Collaborative Education student, I began to realize the many ways that authentic books and stories can supplement the curriculum, and in particular, social studies. Literature offers children the opportunity to learn something new, through vivid description and emotional contexts that are quite different from information presented in textbooks. Pictures within these stories offer the advantage of visual reinforcement which many students crave in order to truly internalize new information. With my knowledge of how effective story books could be in motivating students to learn, I decided to focus on the effects of multicultural literature in an attempt to combat the issues I was seeing within my Practicum I classroom. Exclusion based on race, class and socioeconomic status were some of the major behaviors I was able to observe in students as young as five years old.

Curious about these incidences of discrimination that I observed in the kindergarten classroom, I chose to focus on the impact of multicultural books and stories on the kindergarten classroom social climate.

Statement of the Problem

The research question I plan to investigate is: What happens when I incorporate multicultural children's literature into the kindergarten curriculum? When students are in a homogenous environment, it can be quite difficult to provide them with the diverse perspectives of different cultures. Similarly, when students are part of a varied population, they often retreat to social interactions within their own cultural group, still lacking the ability to gain a diverse perspective (Ford, 2010). Another issue affecting their ability to learn about different cultures is the cultural make up of the school's cultural populations in general. Hodgkinson (2002) explains that "even as elementary school populations are becoming 40% diverse nationally, their teachers are only 14% diverse and principals are 16% diverse,"(p. 6). As a future educator, it is important to consider how this statistic affects my students. While student populations become increasingly culturally diverse, the faculty and staff that support them are typically Caucasian Americans (Hodgkinson, 2002). Hence, the appropriate knowledge and cultural sensitivity that these children need in order to succeed may not be completely present due to the homogeneity of the teachers and administrators. Other issues to consider are the stereotypes that media, non-authentic books and television entertainment, as well as peers and family instill in children. Dessel (2010) elaborates, claiming that "studies on multicultural education in preschool children show that children begin to notice differences about skin color at a very early age" (p. 416). Dessel's findings suggest that very young children are being exposed to prejudices that further develop as they progress in school. The idea that children begin to notice difference this early

underscores the necessity for positive and constructive discussion so that fear of these differences does not turn into intolerance as the children age.

Lastly, uneasiness about ethnic and cultural differences can manifest itself in power imbalances among groups and can cause bullying, harassment, and potential violence (Dessel, 2010). These issues occur within schools across the nation, regardless of the anti-bullying programs in place in many of them (Dessel, 2010). The root of the problem can be described as a lack of knowledge about cultural practices and the little understanding of the benefits of working together as a community (Zhinger, 2007).

As the United States continues to grow with the constant influx of immigrants from around the world, teachers must take into account the various cultural differences of their students. Authors Harriott and Martin (2004) explain that these differences can encompass “religion, primary language, race, socioeconomic level, ethnicity, family composition, gender, and previous experience” (p. 48). To elaborate, in 1972 Caucasian students made up 78% of the public school population in the United States (Ford, 2010). By 2001, 40% of students in public schools were African American and 20% of the school-age children were speaking a language other than English at home (Dessel, 2010). Additionally, in the state of Oregon alone there has been a total increase of 567% of enrollment of English Language Learners in public schools (Favela, 2007). While this only represents one state, different patterns occur in all east and west coast states. Understanding of the cultural differences within public schools can provide some insight into school problems that occur for children of immigrant families and non-English speaking families. Hodgkinson (2002) states that “we have at least 7 million Americans who claim mixtures of two or more races. What this means is that educators could have

as many as 64 different racial combinations represented in their students,” (p. 5). He further explains that this pattern of diversity does not describe the populations in every state; after all only 300 of the nation’s 3,000 counties will see such multicultural patterns and over 2,000 of these counties contain 85% Caucasian students (Hodgkinson, 2002). While patterns of diversity may differ across the nation depending on region, students in all areas of the country will be exposed to cultural difference throughout their lives.

It is important for teachers to consider the ways in which cultural differences affect socialization for students within the school setting, as well as outside of the school walls. Carter (2006) argues that, “socialization as racial and ethnic beings begins early in life, and much of this socialization occurs during the compulsory years of schooling,” (p. 304). She suggests that since socialization in school is so crucial to the development of tolerance and understanding, teachers should become responsible for uncovering this hidden curriculum. Children often rely on information about other cultures that comes from sources including the media, peers and family members. This can often lead to stereotypes and prejudice that might affect their identity development and the way that they judge others (Dessell, 2010).

Carter (2006) and Hodgkinson (2002) provide ample evidence of the changing demographics in the school setting. Both authors, along with Dessel (2010), argue that teachers need to take on the responsibility of exposing children to diverse cultural and educational practices in order to offer them a vast perspective and ensure that they gain appropriate understanding of different cultures in order to help them avoid discrimination and stereotyping. When children are given the opportunity to approach difference through comfortable discussions and conversations, they are able to take in new

information about the practices of different culture and assimilate it with their background knowledge of their own culture (Carter, 2006). When students have a strong understanding of diverse cultures, they are able to develop empathy, and the ability to find shared ideas and goals with people that may be different (Dessell, 2010). This allows the classroom to develop into a community of students who may be diverse but work toward common goals.

Statement of the Research Question

When the concept of diversity as it pertains to culture and race, is not addressed in school, children will often develop without sufficient knowledge about how to approach these differences. This can lead to a fear of the unknown, which can manifest itself through racism, prejudice, harassment and violence. It is important for children to be exposed to a variety of cultural differences and similarities at a young age so that they may grow up with the ability to face these issues in a positive manner. Instilling tolerance and respect in students at a young age is the most powerful way teachers can help to combat discrimination both inside and outside of the classroom (Dessel, 2010). The literature surrounding culturally responsive classrooms places a large focus on the use of multicultural literature as a means of providing children with knowledge about other cultures so that they may consider their own cultures and the similarities and differences that each culture holds (Montgomery, 2000).

Based on the knowledge that classrooms across the nation are growing increasingly diverse and students are beginning to engage in discriminatory practices at a young age, the question I address in this study is as follows: What happens when I

incorporate multicultural literature into my classroom curriculum? In order to investigate this question I plan to carefully and systematically collect data and analyze it in order to uncover how the use of multicultural literature will affect peer relations within the classroom.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two provides a review of the literature surrounding the use of multicultural literature as a resource for teachers hoping to bridge cultural gaps within their classroom. Chapter three describes the design and context of the study, including my plan for implementing the literature, as well as vital facts about the class in which the study will be conducted. Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data and research and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter five presents the conclusions of this study and implications for teaching and learning as well as suggestions for further research regarding the use of multicultural literature in the classroom.

Chapter II

Literature Review

“With our country’s expanding relationships with other nations across the world the need for children to view themselves as members of a multicultural, global community is heightened. There is an increasing need for diverse perspectives in education”

(Alexander & Sanz 2006, p.22).

As American schools grow increasingly diverse in terms of culture, religion and socioeconomic status, there is a great need for innovative resources in order to reach the greatest amount of students in positive ways. There is also a great need for students to develop positive relationships with peers, devoid of racism, sexism, and classism (Campano, 2007). Incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom exposes children to cultures, values and traditions all around the world (as well as in the United States). When students are given such knowledge, they are able to find similarities and differences between themselves and their peers. Instead of developing a fear or discomfort as a result of the unknown, children will recognize differences in a more positive way because they have the tools and the knowledge to help them understand other cultures. Teachers across the country are turning to multicultural literature in order to guide their classes toward developing tolerance and a sense of community, by recognizing the heterogeneous make up of the group as a positive aspect (Alexander & Sanz, 2006). Teachers can use the diversity within their classroom to promote peace and respect by encouraging students and providing them with multicultural literature as a foundation for talking about difference.

This chapter defines multicultural literature based on the characteristics of the genre. It also describes the benefits of using multicultural literature, particularly those that affect students' personal growth, self-esteem and understanding of difference. The chapter also discusses three specific ways that teachers can use multicultural books and stories in their classrooms: teacher read-alouds, inspirational writing activities, and collaborative service learning projects. The research in this chapter provides a comprehensive view of multicultural literature and the ways that it can benefit the classroom as a community, and in turn benefit all students as they continue their education.

Defining Multicultural Literature

According to Guofang Wan (2006), Associate Professor of Education for the College of Education at Ohio University, literature allows people to “share our opinions, values, experiences, and what makes us happy and sad” (p. 140). Therefore, multicultural literature can be interpreted as stories and books that reflect such features of a culture other than that of the mainstream (Wan, 2006). Multicultural literature in the United States can include but is not limited to “literature that focuses on people of color (i.e. African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans); on religious minorities (i.e. Amish or Jewish); on regional cultures (i.e. Appalachian or Cajun); on persons with disabilities, and the aged” (Callins, 2006, p. 62). Callins argues that authors of multicultural literature often focus on these minority groups among others with the purpose of providing some insight into these groups, since they are often left out of public school curriculum (2006).

Some other characteristics that are typical of multicultural literature include heroes and heroines who help their own group and not necessarily the majority, people of color who hold important positions, illustrations that show differences among individuals in a particular group, and females portrayed as strong and independent (Morgan, 2009). As Shirley B. Ernst and Janelle B. Mathis (2007) elaborate, “multicultural literature is characterized by rich language, captivating illustrative techniques, and authentic stories (p. 10). This literature allows children to learn about the beliefs and traditions of others without the embedded stereotypes often found in books for children. Furthermore, artist and illustrator Mira Reisberg (2008) defines multicultural picture books as “books that are place-specific, culturally sensitive, well written, and visually appealing” (p. 251). This definition reflects the artist’s belief that these books have messages both in the text and in the illustrations that can appeal to different cultures, especially those minority groups presented within the story.

Another major aspect of multicultural literature is that it is usually non-fiction or historical fiction (Ernst & Mathis, 2008). These particular books and stories usually focus on a major historical event and the effects it had on a particular group, or the major characteristics and traditions on a specific culture. Authors of multicultural literature focus on conveying a truth and stereotypes are not embedded in the literature. Instead, accurate and appropriate information is shared through words and pictures to tell a story.

Specific criterion for identifying authentic multicultural literature should include selecting books that provide opportunities for class discussion and response, books that contain cultural elements that will provide children with new knowledge and allow them to appreciate different cultures, and illustrations that contain authentic portrayals of

people and cultures (Wan, 2006). It is necessary for teachers to consider the above criterion when selecting books in order to be sure that the material they are presenting is accurate and appropriate and truly provides exposure to a different culture in a positive way (Morgan, 2009).

The Benefits of Using Multicultural Literature in the Classroom

Multicultural literature can be used in a variety of ways to benefit classes of any age. Teachers who incorporate these books and stories into their classroom libraries as well as into their curriculum can use these resources to teach facts about different cultures, enhance the self esteem of minority students, and to promote tolerance among diverse students (Ford, 2010). Alexander and Sanz (2006) stress that multicultural literature “cover(s) multiple viewpoints in order to encourage attitudes of open-mindedness about diversity,” (p. 22). As these authors imply, multicultural literature is written with the intention of providing an unbiased look at a culture, in order to give relevant and applicable details about it and allow children to recognize both similarities and differences in positive ways. As author Winifred Montgomery (2000) states, “...from the characterizations, illustrations, settings, storylines, or specific references to historical events and human endeavors...students will learn about interesting and fascinating differences among people” (p. 34). Multicultural literature is meant to allow children to recognize diversity in order to promote tolerance and combat ignorance. It is also meant to spark interest and encourage students to ask questions about the unknown. Napoli (2007), a professor of children’s literature at Penn State, further explains, “Quality multicultural literature offers readers opportunities to read about characters from various cultures, lands, and background,” (p. 55). Napoli stresses the importance of giving

children the opportunity to learn about other cultures in order to broaden their horizons regarding their sense of self and their relation to the world around them.

Additionally, multicultural books are often used to enhance children's self-esteem and to help them understand the behaviors and beliefs of diverse cultures (Wan, 2006). Authors of multicultural literature want to direct their works toward children because as they grow, it will become their responsibility to achieve peace and unity throughout the world (Reisberg, 2008). As Montgomery (2000) believes, reading and talking about books that address a variety of cultures and cultural issues will help children understand the importance of working toward a peaceful society. For this reason, it is crucial that authors who seek to create multicultural literature provide accurate and honest depictions of different cultures (Morgan, 2009). This means conducting research in order to gain correct knowledge and familiarity with a chosen culture. It is important to present correct information for two reasons; the first being that it shows respect to the culture being depicted in the story, and the second being that it helps the children feel that they can relate to the characters (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). In their article, *Using Story Books to Promote Multicultural Sensitivity in Elementary School Children* authors Brian S. Kim, Jennifer L. Greif and Eileen F. Klein explain that by encountering problems within stories, children are able to take on the struggles of the character, which can often be similar to their own struggles, thereby gaining insight and direction for their own situation (2006). Since children often see books as a form of adventure, they live vicariously through the characters in the stories. When authors use literature to express cultural differences as well as cultural issues, children will try to make connections between themselves and the characters (Kim, Green, & Klein, 2006). Even at a young

age, children are able to internalize the issues taking place within a story and relate them to their own lives (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008).

Another benefit of multicultural literature is that it can promote tolerance by offering an unbiased look at a specific culture that does not reflect the perspective of the mainstream, but rather that of the minority (Morgan, 2009). Children are able to sense differences from an early age and it is important that teachers help these students to understand difference without forming prejudices. Kim, Green and Klein (2006) state, “More specifically... [multicultural] books can be used to help children develop a sense of identity, an awareness of the ways in which they are different from others, knowledge about their own and other cultures, and skills to relate effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds,” (p. 225). These authors stress that it is important for students to relate to others first so that they may become tolerant of differences. Students must recognize that all humans are similar, both in their core values (family and community), and their ability to express emotion and empathy. When children understand that all of their cultural counterparts operate with the same values and emotions, empathy is much more easily achieved (Kim, Green, & Klein, 2006).

Authors of multicultural children’s literature often choose to write within this genre with the aforementioned goals as the foundation of their stories. Sharon G. Flake is one of the many children’s authors who writes with the purpose of both depicting and appealing to minority cultures (Ernst & Mathis, 2007). This African American author uses her knowledge and her past experiences to speak to her audiences from a perspective that they can easily understand. Essentially, she began writing with the intent of motivating and inspiring children from her own culture. Writers such as Sharon G. Flake

are part of the reason that multicultural literature is so effective. Since it is told from the perspective of a minority character, and often written by an author from a minority group, the sense of appeal is authentic and truly speaks to children (Ernst & Mathis, 2007).

Furthermore, multicultural literature is often praised for its ability to affect minority children in positive ways by providing positive role models and an optimistic and accurate portrayal of their own culture (Ernst & Mathis, 2007). These were the goals of the above author of cross-cultural literature. Susan G. Flake has received various awards for her writing, including her young-adult novel, The Skin I'm In, which tells the story of an African-American teenage girl from the protagonist's perspective and largely reflects the author's perception of her own adolescence (Ernst & Mathis, 2007). Flake's writing comes from her own experiences, which provide the reader with an accurate portrayal of her life, as an individual within a larger cultural group. The plot is therefore authentic and effective in the sense that it is based on truth and readers can relate to the stories. Therefore, when considering the benefits of multicultural literature, it is important to consider those benefits that are particularly chosen by the author (Napoli, 2007).

After studying the work of children's author Deborah Ellis, Napoli (2007) was able to identify three major characteristics of the author's stories. She explains that all of Ellis' stories contain the underlying theme of universal kindness, they are all written from a child's perspective, and they usually involve a character who draws on personal strength and courage as well as compassion (2007). Napoli (2007) expresses Ellis' feelings toward multicultural writing when she states, "If we embrace literature as a

mirror that reflects human life then we can regard multicultural literature as a vehicle for readers to see themselves reflected as part of humanity” (p. 57).

In addition to the writers who seek to increase cultural awareness and acceptance, the artists and illustrators of multicultural books and stories hope to reach those students to whom artwork speaks (Reisberg, 2008). Artist and illustrator E. B. Lewis has been celebrated for his illustrations for *The Other Side* and *Taking about Bessie* among many others. Lewis explains that his work is meant to “help children believe that difference is good [and to] see the world in a different light” (Ernst & Mathis, 2007, p. 11). Fellow illustrator Mira Reisberg similarly defines the rationale for her line of work as a means of creating a visual reference of difference for children. She states, “I understand how children learn unconsciously from images, so I am mindful of this in my own work. I know this is also true for other children’s book artists who embed positive and critical social and ecological messages in their images” (Reisberg, 2008, p. 252). Reisberg expresses that she hopes to instill in her art students and her audience the true value of caring for and about others. She also hopes that her students will extend this value to include other cultures, animals, and the physical environment. Generally speaking, this artist creates art with the intent of inspiring students to consider themselves a part of the world rather than just an individual within the world (Reisberg, 2008).

When unpacking the concept of multicultural literature as a classroom tool, teachers must consider not only their own goals, but the goals of the authors and illustrators. In the cases of Sharon G. Flake, E.B. Lewis and Mira Reisberg, these writers and artists choose to incorporate specific features such as personal references, difficult

cultural topics and ethical issues to name a few. Therefore, the perspective of the author is one of the many benefits of multicultural literature (Ernst & Mathis, 2008).

Another benefit is that since multicultural literature is non-biased it can be used in classrooms to teach about different cultures in appropriate and understandable ways. Tandria Callins (2006) states, “multi-ethnic literature, as part of a literature-based reading program, can be used in the classroom to affirm the cultural identity of culturally and linguistically diverse students and to develop all students’ understanding and appreciation of other cultures,” (p. 64). She further argues that multicultural literature can be an excellent means of reaching students in the classroom whose culture is different than the mainstream. This can be particularly true of students for whom English is a second language. In her article, *Using Classroom’s as Cultural Bridges*, Alejandra Favela (2007) explains that multicultural literature can be used to reflect the lives of ELL families and can increase their motivation to learn to read. Books that focus on minority cultures and especially bilingual books can help teachers to foster and encourage communication between school and home in a positive manner. Favela feels that by using multicultural literature in the classroom, parents of ELL students will feel not only more welcome, but also that their child is an important member of the community. Furthermore, bilingual books will allow ELL families to be a part of their child’s education, since they will be able to read with their child at home. It is expected that the use of books that reflect a multicultural classroom environment will encourage parents to stress the importance of literacy in the home, in order to bridge the home-school connection (Favela, 2007).

Strategies for Using Multicultural Literature in the Classroom

Multicultural children's literature has increasingly become a powerful tool in schools across the country because of the growing diversity in the United States. Teachers are now using multicultural literature in the classroom because "the need to focus more assertively and proactively on students' culture—their values beliefs, habits, customs, and traditions—may be greater now than ever before in our nation's history" (Ford, 2010, p. 50). Multicultural literature is becoming a crucial tool in creating a classroom community that is tolerant and respectful because it can help students to understand other cultures through reading about them and seeing vivid illustrations (Alexander & Sanez, 2006).

Multicultural literature can be used in the classroom to help students develop strong cultural identity and a healthy self esteem. Al-Hazza and Bucher (2008) stress that, "[in] order to achieve basic cultural identity, individuals must feel a sense of belonging or connection to one's larger culture... as individuals build cultural identity, they strengthen their self-concept and their positive views of their cultural group... by building a sense of identity and self-esteem... individuals are able to take on more responsibilities, try harder and work longer, and perform at a higher academic level" (p. 210). In their study of Arab-American students, these women focused on the elementary years of the subjects' education. They found that students of Arab descent were often the victims of prejudice and intolerance within the school setting because most American's have a negative opinion of this cultural group (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). By the end of their study, the authors were able to conclude that using multicultural literature in the classroom helped Arab-American students develop a sense of pride and cultural

appreciation. The children were able to relate to the stories used in class, and they were able to gain the feeling that they were welcomed in the classroom community and that their differences were recognized and also respected. The researchers also found that non-Arab students were able to develop a more tolerant and positive perspective of this culture by learning through reading (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). While this study proves to hold true for Arab-Americans, additional research (Dessel, 2010) found that other minority groups would likely show similar signs of growth in terms of cultural respect and honor, as well as growth in academic areas. Students of African, Asian, Latino, Native American and other racial and ethnic groups can certainly benefit from the use of multicultural literature to support literacy as well as content area subjects (Dessel, 2010). Specifically, this genre of literature can be used by teachers in the classroom through read-alouds, writing activities and arts and crafts.

Read-alouds

Read-alouds are one of the most beneficial ways that teachers can use multicultural literature in the classroom (Morgan, 2009). One reason that read –alouds have proved to be so affective is that “teachers often use their voice in special ways to make the characters in a book come to life” (Morgan, 2009, p. 5). Children prove to be most interested and engaged in a story when the teacher strives to communicate the story as it was intended to be read and not only does the teacher have the power to make the characters come to life, but also to help the children read between the lines with facial expression in addition to tone (Morgan, 2009). Furthermore, when the students are actively listening, they will be able to pick up on the cultural differences and similarities that they share with the characters in the story (Morgan 2009).

Morgan (2009) further elaborates in his discussion of culturally sensitive children's books that read-alouds are effective because the teacher can engage the students and encourage them to think critically by asking analytic questions throughout the reading. Furthermore, they can sense by the expression on the students' faces how they are actively perceiving and interpreting the story (Morgan, 2009). One strategy for using read-alouds suggests that teachers conduct a read-aloud or tell a story that includes a problem of some sort or an issue of current interest. The children then listen in order to discuss alternative solutions to the problem or issue (Montgomery, 2000). This particular approach focuses on having students work together in order to engage them in multicultural discussions that will in turn help them to understand one another in terms of their cultural differences but also in terms of their similarities as humans. They will be able to use what they know about justice, tolerance and understanding in order to collaboratively create solutions to problems that affect society as a whole. Children will see that by working together they have a collective power and can accomplish many goals (Zingher, 2007). Furthermore, students who are a part of a minority culture will have the chance to help the class by offering their own personal experiences and background knowledge as supplementary information. This will allow these children to feel a sense of pride and belonging within their classroom community. Teachers who choose to use read-alouds as a means of incorporating multicultural literature into their curriculum should take care to choose books that are age appropriate, contain content that will spark interest and conversation, and provide accurate portrayals of a given culture (Morgan, 2009).

Writing Activities

Multicultural literature can also be used as a tool for inspiration when encouraging students to write about their own cultural experiences. Gerald Campano (2007) explains that “the deepest intellectual resources in classrooms are the students themselves and one of the most powerful ways students can share their knowledge, partake in their own education, and intervene on their own behalf is by telling their stories,” (p. 50). Often students who are not part of the cultural mainstream choose not to discuss the major aspects of their larger culture because they fear it will reflect a lack of national pride (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). Teachers can model acceptance and understanding by incorporating these stories into their curriculum so as to motivate students to tell their own stories. Further encouragement can be done by asking comprehension questions and allowing students to develop answers that reflect their own cultural experiences (Wan, 2006). Additionally, allowing children to “story-tell” affects them positively in terms of academics by “promote[ing] oral discourse, perspective taking, the use of voice and rhythm, and practice in engaging an audience” (Harriott & Martin 2004, p. 51). Actively writing or speaking about oneself is a reflective process that forces students to work from the inside out in order to tell their story. Using multicultural books and stories as a form of modeling and motivation can help students to write and speak with pride and assurance that they will be heard, and they will be shown respect. It provides children with a way to express their emotions, especially their love and grief (Zingher, 2007). Providing students with a positive example of expressing emotion through writing encourages them to do the same. Through these instances, students begin to recognize literacy as a form of expression, and a means of

communication which fosters respect, tolerance and collaboration. As previously stated, teachers must choose age appropriate, accurate depictions of culture in order to use multicultural literature as a means of inspiration for writing about one's self (Ernst & Mathis, 2008).

Arts and Crafts

Providing children with the means to create authentic works of art is an excellent way to expose them to diverse cultures. Using multicultural literature, teachers can use the illustrations in the picture books to give students insight into the art of a particular ethnic group or cultural region. Lorena Johnson (2002) emphasizes "an art-centered approach to diversity education in teaching and learning can help students to understand how culture shapes experience and also helps students to see culture as a complex web of significance (p. 19)." Johnson explains that art helps to tell the story of a culture and can be very helpful in helping children to develop knowledge of the traditions and ideals of that particular culture. When children are given the opportunity to create an authentic craft that reflects the culture of an ethnic or racial group different from their own, they are being immersed in the culture and are able to appreciate its beauty (Johnson, 2002). Furthermore, encouraging children to create works of art that reflect diverse cultural perspectives allows them to develop a sense of connection across all cultures and "can convey and reveal our shared American and human heritage" (Johnson, 2002, p. 20).

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature surrounding multicultural books and stories, it is clear that this particular genre can be an excellent tool for raising diversity awareness within the classroom. Teachers can use multicultural literature to broaden the horizons of

students within the mainstream culture, as well as those from minority cultures (Wan, 2006). These authentic works of writing can help students develop understandings about different cultures, inspire them to express their own culture within the classroom community, and open the doors to openly and positively talking about difference (Campano, 2007). When students are given the information and the tools to expose themselves to cultural differences, they are more likely to develop positive relationships with peers from diverse backgrounds (Harriott & Martin, 2004). Additionally, they will have the ability to recognize similarities among cultures, a major stepping stone in developing tolerance and respect for others. Read alouds, writing activities and arts and crafts projects are three effective strategies for incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom. These strategies help students to internalize stories, reflect on their own cultures, and begin to work collaboratively within a diverse environment.

It is hoped that this particular study will further explore the ways in which multicultural literature can be used to reinforce the positive aspects of diversity in order to promote tolerance and understanding within the classroom community. The next chapter of this thesis will examine the design of the research study based data and research collection.

Chapter III

Research Design/Methodology

The qualitative research paradigm is the framework of this study. This paradigm is typically used in analyzing data collected in academic groups, to be investigated by teacher researchers. The method of the qualitative researcher is to “uncover, articulate, and question their own assumptions about teaching, learning and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). Quantitative research on the other hand, relies largely on numbers in order to represent “data, knowledge, evidence and effectiveness” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). Contrary to qualitative research, quantitative research stems from the idea that research should focus on scientific evidence, objectivity, and measurement (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p. 260). When considering a classroom, one must consider the diverse population within it. Children as learners have different needs and different ways of internalizing information. Therefore, objectivity is not a feasible goal when conducting teacher research. Instead, teachers must become completely subjective, considering the learning environment, the teacher practices, and the students’ needs as individuals (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

In conducting teacher research, it is important to consider that one is completely immersed in the setting for the duration of the study. The term teacher research refers to the studies of K-12 teachers and pre-service teachers working collaboratively in an inquiry community to question, evaluate and change educational practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teacher researchers put a large focus on opportunity and equity for all learners, constantly searching for ways to improve the classroom community and

assist all students in reaching their highest potential. Ruth Shagoury-Hubbard and Brenda Miller Power (2009) state: “Teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching. It is observing students closely, analyzing their needs, and adjusting curriculum to fit the needs of all students,” (p. 3). This form of practitioner research centers on teachers attempting to understand learning from the perspective of students (Hubbard & Power, 1999). This study aligns with the qualitative design of research because the goal is to improve student learning through the examination of teacher practices within the classroom setting.

Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) explain that when teachers act as researchers, “the professional context is [the] sight for research” (p. 42). For this reason, quantitative research is not the ideal paradigm to follow when conducting teacher research. Furthermore, the qualitative framework consists of “a complex, context-specific, interactive activity where all educational differences are important” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 3). When teachers conduct research, they are just as much a part of the study as the students because their own practices are being evaluated during their research. When teachers conduct research they must consider and evaluate their own assumptions about teaching, learning and schooling (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teacher researchers work within their own professional setting to uncover issues that hinder learning, and improve them by changing teacher practices and listening closely to the needs of their students on the individual level and on the collective level.

This study analyzes the results of using multicultural literature to supplement the class curriculum. The purpose of this strategy is to promote positive peer relations within the classroom by exposing children to diverse cultures and lifestyles. The teacher

research method will be used as the framework of this study in order to gather interpret and analyze data. This method provides the “framework for moving forward with the agenda to transform teaching, learning, leading and schooling,” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 119). The teacher research method is used for the purposes of this study because in my research I will look closely at the feelings and attitudes of students within a classroom setting and how these features evolve over time.

The qualitative inquiry strategies used to conduct this study include parent questionnaires, recorded focus group discussions, student projects and artifacts, and my personal teacher-research journal.

Procedure of Study

Before I began collecting data, I conducted informal observations of the atmosphere of the class in terms of cultural diversity and tolerance. I closely observed how the teacher approached issues of difference and documented the reactions and responses of the students. I gathered baseline data through parent questionnaires to gain insight into the cultural identity of each student. I listened closely to peer conversations to find out how students reacted to diversity and difference within the classroom and school environment. After familiarizing myself with the class schedule, I decided that the most appropriate time in the school day to incorporate multicultural literature would be during centers when I would have the opportunity to work with small groups as they rotated through various activities.

After observing the diverse population of the class, I decided to focus on eight countries for the course of the study. I first began to choose countries based on the

cultures present in the classroom as learned from the parent questionnaires. I knew that I would also include Guatemala since I would be going on a trip there and would be able to provide the students with many artifacts and pictures. After choosing Guatemala, India, Israel and China, I then decided to pick countries at random that I felt would have diverse cultures. I then chose France, The Caribbean, Australia and Kenya. I carefully chose authentic picture books that accurately represented each of these cultures and then designed a small project for the students to complete to accompany each culture that we read about and discussed. Additionally, I decided that each time I presented a new culture I would show it to the students on a map of the world. I then made passports for each child with eight boxes on each, labeled with the name of each country we would study. I planned to present two cultures/countries each week for four weeks in both small group and whole class settings. As children learned about each new culture, I would give them a sticker on their individual passports under each country to reinforce the idea of gaining a diverse perspective.

The first week of the study consisted of reading the story For You Are a Kenyan Child by Kelly Kunnane to small groups during centers, followed by small group discussions involving myself and about four to five students in each group. We discussed similarities and differences between American culture and Kenyan culture and the students talked about their own family structures and customs. To accompany the story, children made beaded bracelets that resembled the adornments worn by the characters in the story. Later in the week, I conducted a read-aloud of Everybody Bonjours! by Leslie Kimmelman as a class and students were given the opportunity to learn about French culture. Afterwards, we had another class discussion and students made the flag of

France out of construction paper. Since this was the first week of the study, I also took some time to discuss the purpose of a passport with the class. I explained that when you travel to different countries, your passport is stamped at the airport and one receives a stamp for each country he or she visits. I also explained that the reason I was recording our discussions was so that I could later listen to how much the students were learning about each country.

The second week of the study, I read the story Good Morning China by Hu Yong Yi to the small groups and asked the children to find similarities and differences between their lives in America and the lives of the people in China. In addition, they made paper fans similar to the ones used by characters in the story. At the end of the week I read Abuela's Weave by Omar S. Castaneda to the whole class and asked children to make connections between their lives and the young girl from Guatemala who was the main character of the story. I also presented a piece of volcanic rock, a Guatemalan quetzal (dollar) and a tapestry, similar to the one created by the main character of the story, which I had brought back from my recent trip to Guatemala. I also shared many pictures with the students, including some that I had taken in Guatemalan schools. At this point I began to analyze student responses by tracking them on a chart and updating it with the discussions from each new country.

The third week of the study, I read Mama's Saris by Pooja Makhijani during small group time and we discussed Indian culture. Since there are two Indian students in the class I was able to ask them to share some of their family traditions and to help us understand some of the customs of this particular culture. To accompany this story, students decorated imitation tea-light candles for the Diwali festival in India which is also

known as the “Festival of Lights”. On Thursday and Friday of this particular week, three parents came in to teach about Israeli culture and also read aloud the story Sammy Spider’s First Trip to Israel by Sylvia A. Rouss. The three mothers that came in had children create a Kiddush cup using plastic champagne flutes, aluminum foil and rhinestones for Passover, and a Chuppah, which is a large cloth held over a couple at their wedding (the children used fruit roll ups, gummy bears, teddy grams and toothpicks to create their own wedding ceremony). Another mother played her guitar and sang an Israeli folk song while students played along with various instruments such as drums, symbols, tambourines and many others.

The fourth and final week of the study, I conducted a read-aloud of the story Rata Pata Scata Fata by Phillis Gershator which followed a young boy growing up in the Caribbean on his adventures for one day. We discussed Caribbean culture and the environment in the story as well and found similarities and differences. Students created a palm tree out of construction paper to represent the Caribbean. The last story I read on Friday of this fourth week was Australia ABC’s by Sarah Heiman which presented Australian culture and customs in alphabetical order. This story provided many interesting and fun facts about this country and together we discussed the information presented and then students created koala bear masks. They also earned their last two stickers on their passport this week. The children were very proud to have filled up the eight boxes on their passports and were very excited to take them home and show their families all of the places they had “traveled” to.

Data Sources

To establish data for the research portion of this study, I used multiple and different qualitative research techniques. To begin the study I gathered data about students' ethnic and cultural identities by having parents and guardians complete a questionnaire which asked about cultural practices, family traditions and activities. I then charted this data to find commonalities among the students and their cultural identities. I used this knowledge to choose the cultures and countries that we would focus on for the course of the study. Throughout the study I used audio-recordings to document small group and whole class discussions as well as students' reactions as we read each story. I turned student responses into data charts and analyzed the responses to learn about the growth of the children's thoughts and opinions about difference. Additionally, throughout the study I kept a teacher research journal which allowed me to record my own thoughts and feelings about the data collected each day. Through my teacher research journal I reflected on my own behavior throughout the course of my research as well as that of the students. Finally, student artifacts were used to gain insight into the study. The projects that the children created for each culture of study as well as their passports were used to help this researcher reflect on the impact of each session.

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the course of this study was used to help draw conclusions regarding the impact of multicultural literature on the classroom community and its ability to promote tolerance and respect among students. I used the parent questionnaires to gauge how involved the students were in their own culture by asking

parents to provide information on their cultural practices and involvement. Using this information, I was able to carefully choose which cultures we would focus on. Furthermore, the information gained during these interviews gave me insight into the cultural identity of each of the students and their familiarities with cultural customs and differences between varying cultures. By charting this data I was able to find things in common among the students and also to learn about the general cultural knowledge of the students. My teacher research journal allowed me to find trends among my reflections about the children's response to each culture spanning from the first week of the study through the fourth and final week. I was also able to gain insight into the atmosphere of the class after each new culture was presented. I then reflected on my own personal observations of student behaviors and reactions that could not be captured through audio-recording. I was, however, able to use the audio-recordings of each small group discussion as well as each whole group discussion to gauge any new understandings that emerged as we talked about new cultures.

Context

Community

Edward T. Hamilton Elementary School is one of the four elementary schools in the Voorhees Township public school district. There are a total of 28,126 people living in Voorhees Township which is located in Camden County, New Jersey. According to the 2000 Census, these 28,126 people reside in 27,227 housing units. Of these 27,227, 67.4% are family households and 24.9% are families with children under the age of 18. Among these family households, 57% are led by married couples, and 7.9% are female-

led households with no husband present. Out of this 7.9% of female-led households, 4.5% have children under the age of 18.

The racial makeup of this township as taken by the 2000 Census was 78.3% white or Caucasian, 8.0 % black or African American, 11.4% Asian, 5.2% Asian Indian, and 2.5% Hispanic or Latino. The population by age consists of 73.6% over the age of 18 including 10.9% age 65 and over. The percentage of the population under the age of 18 is 26.4%, and the median age for residents of Voorhees Township is 37.2.

Voorhees Township median income as of the 1000 Census was \$68,402 per household and the median family income was \$86,873. The per capita income in dollars was \$33,635. At this time 3.7% of families in Voorhees were considered to be living in poverty and of these 5% were families with children under the age of 18.

School

Edward T. Hamilton Elementary School currently serves over 500 students ranging in grade from kindergarten to fifth grade with a staff of 70 individuals. The ratio of teachers to students is 1 to 15. The ethnic makeup of the student population is 77.3% white or Caucasian, 8.2% black or African American, .9% Hispanic or Latino and 13.6% Asian/Pacific Islander. 3.1% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged. As per testing results, 96.7% of students at E.T. Hamilton Elementary School are considered proficient in reading and 95.4% are considered proficient in math.

Classroom

Miss Bruccoleri's kindergarten classroom is made up a morning class consisting of 21 students and an afternoon class consisting of 22 students. Of the morning students, 11 students are males and 10 are females. Out of the 22 afternoon students, 14 are males and 8 are females. The makeup of the morning class is very homogenous with 16 white/Caucasian students, 3 Latino students, one Chinese student and 1 Indian student. The afternoon class is similarly homogenous with 18 white/Caucasian students, 1 black/African American student, 1 Indian student, 1 Asian student and 1 Latino student.

Students

The behavior of the students in the morning class suggests that they are somewhat less mature than students in the afternoon class. Most of these children do not attend an afternoon program once they leave E.T. Hamilton. Academically, they are lower in general than the afternoon class with a few very bright students. The rest are average or below average. There are more students in this group that run the risk of being held back for another year of kindergarten.

The majority of the students in the afternoon class come from a morning program at a day care, private kindergarten or religious center. These students demonstrate a higher level of maturity both socially and academically. This is a larger group and an aide is present during their session. Most of the students in the afternoon class are on an average or above average academic level and are progressing nicely throughout the year.

In the afternoon class, three students have IEPs. Nicholas receives services for Autism Spectrum Disorder while Zachary Z. and Dylan both receive services for Specific

Learning Disabilities. Although children on the Spectrum typically demonstrate anti-social behaviors, Nicholas quite enjoys social interaction and tries very hard to fit in with his peers. When he first began the school year he was completely non-verbal, however he has come so far and is able to communicate with little assistance and he is progressing well in reading and writing with specific accommodations such as movement breaks, a token economy and speech and occupational therapy.

Dylan and Zachary are both very intelligent students who simply need extra attention to keep them focused and on task. Dylan and Zachary are also progressing nicely in reading and writing and prove to be on level with their classmates with little to no accommodations in the general education setting. Both boys also receive speech and occupational therapy throughout the week and all three students attend a special education class in the morning before arriving at kindergarten in the afternoon. These three students are accommodated by an Instructional Associate who helps them throughout the afternoon.

Students in both the morning and afternoon classes demonstrate kindness toward each other but tend to socialize exclusively with the groups that they are familiar with, such as neighbors or friends from extra-curricular activities. There are some instances of bullying among the students but they usually occur on the bus when less supervision is present and they “tattle” on one another on a regular basis. There seems to be more tension among the afternoon students who often have disagreements and arguments.

There is definitely a sense of learning community in both classes. Students often work in small groups and partnerships to create work and are comfortable with a

collaborative dynamic. The classroom is adorned with various examples of student work and colorful posters and pictures that cover the walls and serve as motivation and reminders to students of classroom rules and routines. The majority of information is presented using a SMARTboard and the children are often involved in using this educational tool throughout the day. Students also rotate through centers on a daily basis and work together on skills such as phonics, math, reading, writing and arts and crafts.

Chapter Four of this thesis discusses the results of the parent questionnaires, daily audio-recordings of student responses and class discussions, my personal teacher research journal, and student artifacts and work samples. Chapter Five then presents the conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for further topics of study.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, “What happens when I incorporate multicultural literature into my classroom curriculum?” As I sorted and categorized my data sources (teacher-research journal, parent questionnaires and conversations, focus group discussions, grand conversations, and students’ projects) I identified key data to report. A look across all data sources seems to suggest four main themes that reoccur throughout the research study. These include openness to talking about difference, recognizing commonalities among cultures, understanding why learning about diversity is important, and making connections by experiencing culture through a hands-on approach.

Revisiting the Study

As chapter three explained, I collected data over a four week period during which children were exposed to eight diverse cultures. First I used parent questionnaires to learn about the cultural identities of the students and also to help me decide which cultures to focus on. This information was charted so that I could find patterns in the cultural make up of the class and learn their background knowledge about cultural practices. By recording focus group discussions and grand conversations, I was able to chart student responses and gain insight into how their understandings of cultural differences were developing over time. Using my teacher research journal, I recorded and analyzed student behaviors throughout the course of the study to look for changes and growth in

terms of cultural acceptance and tolerance. Additionally, I asked students to talk about the projects that they created at the end of each story to gain a further understanding of their thoughts on diversity. Lastly, comments from parents were also used as a data source to track growth over the course of the study.

Talking About Difference

When I began the study the first week with For You Are a Kenyan Child by Kelly Kunnane, I first introduced the book by explaining that we would be reading a story at the “passport center” about a different country each week. Students were very excited about this idea and wanted to know immediately each country that we would talk about. I explained, “Today we will learn about Kenya!” I presented students with a map of the world and showed them where we were located in Voorhees, New Jersey. I then told them that we would “fly” across the map over to Kenya, which is a country in Africa. As I read the story, I stopped after every two or three pages to ask students about the pictures and about the story they were hearing. I prompted them to talk about the character and his appearance as well as his adventures throughout the story. Although the main character, a young Kenyan boy, had black skin, not a single child brought this up in our conversation. Instead they commented on his surroundings and the clothing of the characters in the story. Isabel, a young girl of Latino American descent stated, “Kenya is very different because we don’t have houses like that or clothes or anything like that”. Additionally, Sean, an Irish American student stated, “His clothes are different and the monkeys are different too”. Lara who is Jewish also commented, “They carry stuff on their heads!” While all of the students were able to find some sort of difference between Kenyan and American culture, not a single child in any of the small groups

commented on the color of the boy's skin this first week. My reflections from my teacher research journal dating back to that week supported this conclusion stating "The children were focused on finding similarities and differences among Kenya and America. I was surprised that these young children looked past the color of the boy's skin and did not note this as a similarity or a difference in any of the groups. I wonder if each child is afraid to be the one to say it or if they truly did not pick up on this key feature of this culture" (journal entry March 2, 2011). By the second week when we began to learn about China, the students seemed to be much more open to discussing physical differences. Many of them remarked on the difference in appearance between Americans and Chinese.

Ally: "China is kind of the same and different. Their eyes don't look like ours"

Genevieve: "Their skin is different!"

Isabel: "China is very different because we don't live in those little houses... but we do play cards and sit by the lake..."

Reflecting back to my teacher research journal through which I charted my observations of student behaviors, I had overheard a conversation between Ally and Lisa as they discussed Allison, a Chinese student in our class during snack. Ally was explaining to Lisa that Allison's family is from China so her eyes look like the characters in the book. Ally who is a particularly empathetic student then explained that even though her eyes are different Allison is still the same as all of their friends.

During the third week of the study, students learned about JunJun, a boy growing up in the Caribbean. Jordan remarked about the character and his mother, "They have

different skin.” This led us into a discussion of judging people based on difference.

“Should you not be nice to someone just because they are different?” I asked the small group.

“No that would be horrible! That would be so rude!” they replied.

Sean continued: “Yeah, like if your girlfriend’s skin is brown and you’re not brown and you say ‘your skin is brown and I don’t want to marry you...’ that would be so bad”.

Zach responded, “Some people have white skin and some people have black skin”.

Dominic then added, “Some people have glasses and some people don’t have glasses!”

I later reflected in my teacher-research journal stating, “Today some of the students mentioned the color of the boy’s skin was something that was different. When we read the story about Kenya none of the children mentioned the color of the skin of the characters. I think that this is an example of how the children are becoming more comfortable talking about cultural differences. I am glad that the children are starting to be okay with discussing differences in the classroom. I am glad that the classroom is a place that they feel comfortable expressing difference,” (journal entry March 28, 2011).

To further explore my developing theory that the students were becoming more comfortable with talking about difference over time, I decided to consult the parent questionnaires that were distributed at the beginning of the study. Jacob, an Italian American student’s survey had been filled out by his mother. She wrote, “Our traditions

are more family-oriented than related to our culture.” In essence, Jacob’s mother was indicating that while Jacob is exposed to traditions outside of the American mainstream, most of these traditions are rooted in family get-togethers and are not so much a part of their cultural practice. Similarly, Mason’s mother described, “Our traditions consist of spending time with family for the holidays such as making cookies with grandma.” Mason’s mother indicated that the majority of their traditions were mostly based on spending time as a family, rather than celebrating cultural involvement. In a discussion with Jacob’s mother about a week later she explained, “Jacob just loves doing his passport! He is learning so much about people all over the world and their cultures and he talks about it all the time at home!” Furthermore, when Mason’s mother emailed two weeks later, she stated, “Mason has been learning so much about diversity and he tells me ‘just because it’s different doesn’t mean it’s weird, mom!’”

After analyzing the parent questionnaires, students’ responses from the audio recordings and my own teacher-research journal, in addition to the brief remarks I received from parents, I found that over the course of three weeks, the students were growing more comfortable with openly talking about difference. Not only were they talking about it during our focus group discussions and grand conversations, but also in their private peer conversations and at home as well.

When I analyzed the responses of students as they presented their projects for each culture, I found that they were comfortable recognizing and discussing differences in other areas as well. For example, as I tied Mason’s beaded bracelet onto his wrist he explained, “Even though boys don’t wear bracelets in America, today we learned about Kenya so it is okay if I wear this bracelet today”. Other artifacts such as the Diwali

candles that the students made demonstrated their openness to talking about difference. As Lisa turned on her candle switch she explained, “Our holidays don’t really have candles I think that India is cool because of the fireworks and the candles”.

Overall, I found that children were much more comfortable with talking about difference as it pertains to environment, clothing, housing, and food throughout the course of the four weeks. This was suggested through the students responses during whole-class conversations and small group discussions, my own reflections within my research journal, parent responses, as well as the projects they completed to accompany each country. As far as talking about race and physical appearance, students demonstrated a growing ability to comfortably talk about this topic as the study progressed and they became more knowledgeable about various cultures. This was evident through the increase in their comments pertaining to diversity. After analyzing the changes in comments made by the students and their parents over the course of the four week study, I was able to conclude that the students were demonstrating a growth in comfort when it came to talking openly about diversity and difference.

Finding Commonalities among Cultures

As I initially planned the study, I struggled when thinking of how I could encourage the students to be tolerant and respectful of each new culture we learned about. I decided that the best way to help them feel comfortable with the new cultures I would present would be to encourage them to look for similarities between their own lives and those of the children in each of the stories we read. Essentially, I wanted to them to connect themselves to the characters in the text. I first analyzed the data I gained through

the parent questionnaires to find out some of the traditions that the students practiced within their own cultures. As the parent questionnaires explained, seven of the students identified with Judaism and celebrated holidays such as Hanukkah, Yom Kippur and Passover. When the three parents came in to read about Israel, these students were able to relate their own family practices to those of the young boy in the story who travels to Israel with his family. Brooke explained, "My family celebrates Hanukkah too and the candle for India is kind of like the candle for Hanukkah because it's a holiday". Brooke demonstrated that she had made the connection that both of these cultures celebrate holidays with a ritual that involves candles. The students were also able to relate to this culture as they were able to play instruments while one mother played an Israeli folk song on her guitar. The mother explained, "Every country has music!"

Additionally, Colin connected his own life to that of the young girl in the story about India explaining, "Yeah my mom's name is Nirpa. That's an Indian name. Oh and I know a word in India...Cholo! It means let's go!" Deepp similarly reflected stating, "When we go somewhere like in India like when someone gets married my mom wears one of those (sari). My grandma wears bracelets all the time. Deepp was relating his own family traditions to the young girl in the book who was getting ready for a birthday celebration by dressing up in a sari and gold bangle bracelets. Other comments that students made during small group discussions further demonstrated the ability of the students to make connections to the countries that they learned about. Isabel commented, "China is a lot the same as us because we play cards and ride our bikes and sit by the lake like in the story". Lisa adds, "Yeah and we are making paper fans today like they have at the park in the book".

The ability of the students to make connections to their own lives and those of the students in the book allowed them to develop an understanding for these cultures on an empathetic level. My own observations further strengthened this point as I reflected, “I think it was good for the other children to see their peers relating to these cultures because it made them realize that even people in their classes may have similarities and differences beyond their knowledge” (journal entry March 23, 2011). A later entry in my journal explained, “I find that with each new culture I read about, the children try harder to find similarities between their own lives and those of the characters and pay less attention to difference. They often talk about their families and the things that they do together and how they are the same as the characters in the book” (journal entry March 21, 2011).

The theme of connecting one’s self to the character in the story demonstrated that the children were trying to find commonalities among their own culture as Americans and those of the children in the stories. As quoted in chapter two, Tandria Callins (2006) states, “multi-ethnic literature, as part of a literature-based reading program, can be used in the classroom to affirm the cultural identity of culturally and linguistically diverse students and to develop all students’ understanding and appreciation of other cultures,” (p 64). As the children grow more comfortable discussing their own culture, they become more understanding and appreciative of these many different cultures by finding common features among all cultures, including their own. Since many of the students were not familiar with their own cultures, I used the parent questionnaires to provide the children with information about their own cultural identity. In doing so, I encouraged the children to talk about the holidays they celebrate and any special foods, music, activities, or

clothing that related to their cultural celebrations. This helped the children to make the connections to the culture presented in the stories.

Further explaining this finding was the response of Ally's mother during a brief phone conversation we had during the third week of the study. She explained, "When Ally's brother mentioned that a boy in his class lives with his aunt and uncle instead of his parents, Ally told him that even though everyone's family isn't the same everyone still has a lot of things in common," she continued, "he has to eat and take baths and go to school just like you so he is just the same as you!"

Ally's response to her brother demonstrated that she is looking for common ground through which she can relate herself to others. Even more interesting is her desire to share this information with her family members outside of the school setting. After the conversation with her mother I reflected in my journal, "The students are constantly looking for ways to relate to each other in simple and complex ways. Whether sharing their favorite color or food, or talking about the holidays that their family celebrates, they are searching for things that they have in common with others. I think that when they see so many similarities, small differences such as height or clothes or freckles don't seem like such a big deal anymore" (journal entry March 28,2011).

On the final day of the study, the students were eager to find similarities between their own lives and those of people living in Australia. As I opened to the first page featuring a picture of an aborigine, Owen shouted out, "That man has a mustache just like me dad!" Later in the story, as the children learned that "tucker" is the Australian word for food, Audra explained, "Hey they eat shrimp and shrimp is my favorite food so that is

the same!” By this point in the study, the children were immediately seeking a way in which they could relate to the story by using the pictures in the book to help them understand Australian culture.

In conclusion, I found that through evidence indicated in the group discussions, my research journal and the parent questionnaires and discussions, the students were striving to find similarities among themselves and people of different cultures. This was strongly suggested by their responses to the characters in the story but also to real people that they had come in to contact with in everyday life. With little guidance, the students had begun to see the importance of relating to others in order to gain a deeper understanding of how humans can be different in many ways, but similar in many others. They demonstrated this through various comments during our in-class discussions throughout the four weeks and also at home as some parents explained as well.

Gaining Insight into the Benefits of Learning about Diversity

Another major theme that I noticed over the course of the study was an increase in understanding why learning about diversity is important. During the first week of the study, Drew asked me, “Miss Hartmann, why are we learning about different countries instead of just learning about New Jersey?” I explained to Drew that people who live in New Jersey did not always live here but in fact came from many different countries. I then used the parent surveys to help Drew’s group understand this concept further. “Guy’s family is from Israel, Megan’s family is from Ireland, Deepp was born in India and Aidan’s mom is from Korea,” I told them. The children were absolutely stunned by this information. “I thought we were all from America!” replied Zoe.

I later reflected in my journal, "...at this age the children's world view is so restricted because they know so little about diversity" (journal entry March 12, 2011). As I thought about the comments of the children, I realized that they understood very little about diversity even within their own neighborhoods because they only really knew about the cultures of their families if even that much. Ashley's mom explained on her questionnaire, "We explain to her that we are Irish but how much is understood is questionable". Similarly, Zachary's mother responded, "We do not have any traditions that are culture specific. I feel we are far removed from any culture other than 'American'. With this information, I decided that it was important to talk to children about diversity in a positive manner. As the weeks progressed and students began to recognize similarities and differences among the cultures presented in the stories as well as those among their classmates, they began to show increasing understanding of the importance of understanding diversity. After the third story, during the second week of the study, students' comments began to reflect this theory as shown in the following conversation.

Me: "Why is it important to know about different cultures?"

Ally: "So that maybe if our friends are from different countries we may know about them"

Nakul: "Can we learn about Russia?"

Adrian: "What about Japan is that a lot like America or is it different?"

Hayley: "I think we learn about different countries so that we don't think that just because it's different it's weird"

In conjunction with these comments, my research journal noted, “The students are becoming more aware of difference but in a positive manner. They enjoy learning about a new culture and the people who live in different countries all over the world. They find this information to be new and exciting and they are showing a genuine interest in cultures other than their own” (journal entry March 11, 2011).

Later that week when the students completed their paper fans for the country of China, I asked them some questions as they presented their finished projects to me.

Me: “Lisa, why did we make paper fans today?”

Lisa: “They are the ones from the story that everyone has at the park. When we make paper fans we can know what it’s like to be in China”

Me: “Have you ever had a fan before?”

Lisa: “No but I saw them in that movie Mulan!”

As Lisa expresses in the above conversation, creating a craft for each culture helped her to relate to the culture of study. Additionally, it allowed her to make a connection to her own background knowledge and the new information provided in the story. Lisa learned that paper fans are an iconic part of Chinese culture and also learned that she can make a paper fan that resembles a real Chinese paper fan.

Two weeks later, we returned to the conversation of the importance of learning about diversity. Me: “So why have I spent these past few weeks helping your class learn about different countries?”

Colin: “So we can know about different people and help them”

Faith: “Because when you grow up you may not know about it if you didn’t learn it”

Genevieve: “If someone comes here and you don’t know who they are then you can know about who they are because you ‘tached’ us!”

Me: “You are all right! And if someone is different does that mean that we should say they are weird?”

Ally: “No! If everyone was just alike we wouldn’t be able to tell each other apart and it would be so boring!”

After connecting my own personal thoughts collected in my journal and comparing them with the information gained from the parent questionnaires at the start of the study as well as with the audio recordings, I was able to find that the students were developing a strong sense of why it was important to learn about diversity without ever truly being told that it was important. Instead, they were making connections based on what they already knew about culture, which was basically their family traditions, and the new information that they were gaining about people all over the world. With the combination of this information, the children were able to recognize diversity as a positive feature of society and that knowing about diverse cultures is important because the more that they know, the better prepared they will be for life in many aspects.

Connecting Hands-on Experiences and Cultural Understandings

In planning the course of my research, I knew that I wanted to use literature: specifically detailed and authentic picture books, to guide my students through a long lesson on understanding diversity in positive ways. However, I knew that I wanted them to do more than just hear a story and talk about it, so I decided to devise an arts and crafts

project to accompany each book. I also decided that the projects should connect back to the stories to further strengthen the students' understanding. Therefore, I decided to have them create beaded bracelets like those worn by each character in the book about Kenya. For China, they would make paper fans to mimic the ones held by patrons dancing in the park as in the story. To learn about India we would make Diwali candles, since the main character of the story talked about this important Indian holiday. All of the crafts (explained further in chapter three) would help the children feel like they were a part of that particular culture and would also serve as a reminder of the new country they learned about that day when they were at home and no longer had the book to look at. While these projects all proved to be meaningful for the children, they responded best to two cultures in particular: Guatemala and Israel.

In teaching about Guatemala, I had an advantage over the other cultures that I presented. I had recently returned from a trip to Guatemala and had many artifacts to share with the children. Since I had so much to show them, they did not actually do a project for this country. Instead, I allowed the children to pass around a Guatemalan dollar which is called a Quetzal, a rock from Volcano Pacaya which I visited during my trip, and also a large tapestry that I had purchased during my ventures. The students were absolutely enthralled with these artifacts, arguing over how long they were able to hold them, and asking question after question about the money and the volcanic rock. Additionally, as I looked back at my data charts, I found that the students asked the most questions about Guatemala. They wanted to know:

Lisa: "what kind of food do they eat there?"

Megan: “do they have cars?”

Drew: “can you get there on a train?”

Ryan: “are there a lot of volcanoes?”

Samantha: “do the people live in houses?”

These are just a few of the many questions that the students asked me as I read them Abuela’s Weave” by Omar. S. Castaneda. Additionally, they were making so many connections to the story as well. Jessie remarked, “I call my grandma abuela too!” and Owen noticed, “Miss Hartmann the blanket she made looks just like the one you bought!”

After we finished the story, I showed the children a powerpoint presentation of pictures I had taken during my trip. They were able to see real photos of a school and a kindergarten classroom. They marveled over the many similarities and differences they noticed in all of the pictures. They particularly enjoyed the ones of me climbing the volcano with my fellow travelers. Later that day, I wrote in my journal, “This was the most successful lesson so far. I felt like the children were really connecting with the culture since I had so many real pictures and artifacts to share with them. It was almost like a mini-class trip to a Guatemalan museum where the students can learn so much more than what is just being said by a teacher” (journal entry March 8, 2011). As I reflected back on my writing, I noticed that this phenomenon presented itself when the three parents came in to help the class learn about Israel.

Brooke’s mom explained after she led the children in a fabulous craft, “I think that having them make the Kiddush cups helps them to feel like it a ‘real’ holiday that

needs to be prepared for, just like some may make Christmas cookies or decorate Easter eggs” . Guy’s mom elaborated, “I will play an Israeli folk song and have the children play instruments along if we can get some instruments. Music is a great way to experience culture!” Additionally, after Dylan’s mom presented her wedding Chuppah to the class, creating one out of fruit roll ups (fabric), tooth picks (persons who hold the Chuppah up) gummy bears (persons getting married) and a teddy gram (Rabbi), became a much more meaningful activity. She explained, “I wanted to have them do a project that I could also show them an authentic version of so that they could see that this is a very real tradition for Jewish people”

Further strengthening this notion were the responses of the students during our final grand conversation on the last day of the study. I asked the students: “What was your favorite culture to learn about?” In the morning class, seven voted for Guatemala, eight voted for Israel and six voted for various cultures. In the afternoon class, ten voted for Guatemala, and nine voted for Israel, leaving only three students voting for various other cultures. They explained:

Isabel: “I liked Guatemala because we got to hold the rock from the volcano!”

Dominic: “Guatemala because we got to see pictures from the kindergarten there”

Audra: “Israel was my favorite because I liked making the cup with all the sparkles on it”

Sean: “I liked Israel too because Brooke’s mom was a good reader and she showed us that paper from Israel (torah)”

Dylan: “I liked when Guy’s mom played the guitar and I got to play the drums”

Zach: “Yeah I liked that the best too!”

Mason: “Oh yeah me too that was the best because we got to play that song from Israel”

Later that day I reflected, “Having the parents come in to help teach about the cultures was meaningful to the students in so many ways. First of all, they were able to see that diverse people live right here in their own town. Second, they were able to see that even their peers’ families are diverse and everyone values culture in a different way. Third, they were able to experience these cultures with real artifacts brought in by the mom’s. Also, the projects they created had so much more meaning because the parents could give them so much more information on them” (journal entry March 25, 2011). Lastly, about a week after the conclusion of the data collection period, Ally’s mother stopped by the classroom. She wanted to talk to me in person about the study and how it affected her daughter. Ally’s mom explained, “Ally comes home everyday so excited to tell us about the new country she learned about. She tells us all about the projects she makes and why they are important to that country. I think this is a really great thing you are doing here, exposing the kids to diversity. It’s really going to benefit them in the long run so it is great that you are starting it in them so early”.

The data gained through parent conversations, student responses and my own research journal help to support the theory that learning about a culture became more meaningful when the students were able to experience it first hand, particularly with artifacts and anecdotes that came directly from people of that culture or from the country from which it originated. The students demonstrated a deeper understanding of Guatemalan and Israeli culture for these very reasons and therefore made stronger

connections with their own lives once they found that people that they already know come from these particular cultures. I feel that had I been able to present each culture with a first-hand account, they would have all been much more meaningful and interesting to all of the students in general.

Summary of Data Analysis

As quoted in chapter two, “[multicultural] books can be used to help children develop a sense of identity, an awareness of the ways in which they are different from others, knowledge about their own and other cultures, and skills to relate effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds,” (Kim, Green and Klein, 2006 p 225). After looking across my data sources, I found that students became more comfortable talking about difference, particularly in the sense of physical appearance. This was something that they initially had seemed uneasy with but eventually were able to discuss in a positive way. Additionally, students demonstrated an increasing ability to find similarities between their own culture and ones that are different. Although at first they mostly found that diverse cultures were very different from their own, by the end of the study they were much more concerned with finding commonalities. Furthermore, students developed an understanding of why learning about diversity is important. They began to recognize that diversity is present in their small town as well as across the globe and it is actually a positive feature of society that should be embraced. Lastly, students demonstrated that learning about a culture through first hand-experience is particularly beneficial. The data suggests that when students are presented with authentic artifacts and information given by people who identify with a certain culture, the information is more meaningful and is more deeply internalized. While using multicultural literature

can certainly help children to learn about culture, they are more likely to demonstrate understanding when they are completely engaged and when the sources are authentic.

Chapter Five presents the conclusions and implications of this study as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations and Implications for the Field

Summary

In concluding my research, I found that students demonstrated growth in a multitude of ways after being exposed to authentic multicultural literature within their classroom environment. After spending four weeks presenting eight diverse cultures through multicultural picture books and having students create crafts to represent each new culture, I found that this study benefited the children by providing them with a comfortable environment in which they could openly talk about difference, encouraging them to find similarities among diverse cultures to help them relate, helping them to understand the significance of diversity, and introducing them to different cultures through a hands-on approach.

After four weeks, I found that the children had become increasingly comfortable with talking about diversity and difference. Through group conversations, parent responses and my own personal reflections, I found that the children were not only growing more comfortable with talking about difference in lifestyle, such as housing, food, environment, location and so on but also differences in appearance including clothing, race and other physical features. By the end of the study, the children were able to talk about difference in a positive manner, free of judgment or stereotyping. Instead of demonstrating that they were “color blind” they proved that they were conscientious of diversity and difference and that they accepted it as a positive feature of society.

Additionally, the students demonstrated growth in their ability to find commonalities among diverse cultures in order to make connections between their own lives and those of the characters in the stories. The students did so by relating to cultural traditions, hobbies, activities, cuisine, physical features and more. Throughout the four weeks, the students began to look for similarities among very different cultures in an attempt to find common ground that they shared as human beings, rather than the obvious differences among them such as skin color, family structure, and language.

Furthermore, by the conclusion of the study, the students were demonstrating a strong understanding of the importance of learning about and understanding diversity. They were able to verbally explain this importance with comments such as, “I think that we learn about different countries so that we don’t think that just because it’s different it’s weird”. After four weeks of learning about cultural differences and similarities, the students were able to make connections to their own lives in a diverse world and understand why it is important to approach diversity with an open mind and an open heart.

Lastly, the findings of my research suggested that the children were able to form stronger bonds with diverse cultures when given the opportunity to experience them through hands-on activities and authentic cultural features. Essentially, the students communicated that the two cultural presentations that they were able to internalize the most were Israel because parents of Israeli descent were able to come in and help the class experience the culture through food, music, and crafts, and Guatemala because I was able to show the students photographs and allow them to hold authentic artifacts from my visit to the country. During these presentations the students were not only

engaged and interested, but they were able to actively experience the culture through a hands-on approach.

Conclusions

After reconnecting with the literature surrounding the use of multicultural literature in the classroom, I found that my study was beneficial to students because it helped to expose them to diverse cultures that they would not have otherwise been exposed to through the typical kindergarten curriculum. This is important because multicultural literature can help children to be open-minded about difference and approach it in a positive manner. As previously quoted in chapter two, author Winifred Montgomery (2000) states, "...from the characterizations, illustrations, settings, storylines, or specific references to historical events and human endeavors...students will learn about interesting and fascinating differences among people (p 34). Montgomery explains that multicultural books can help students to develop understandings of diverse cultures through interesting and authentic characters and the words and pictures that help to tell their story. I found that my research supported this idea as the children took in new information about cultures such as the different types of food eaten around the world, the different styles of homes, the various activities and hobbies practiced by the characters in the stories, the differing family structures, and of course the diverse environments and habitats of humans around the world.

In addition, multicultural literature can help children to develop tolerance and acceptance for diverse cultures by helping them to uncover a multitude of similarities and differences among cultures around the world to which they can relate their own lives and

cultural practices (Kim, Green, & Klein, 2006). This was evident throughout my study as the students constantly searched for commonalities among their own lives and those of the characters in each story. Students did so by talking about their own cultural practices such as holiday traditions, family hobbies and activities and more as they related to the cultures presented in the story. This was evident through instances such as Jewish students relating their own celebration of Passover to the making of a Kiddush cup in honor of the holiday as shown in the book about Israel. Additionally, the students were able to relate the creation of Diwali candles to lighting candles on a Menorah or putting candles in the window during the Christmas season. Students also discussed similarities such as physical appearances and environment as they reflected on their own lives and background knowledge. This consisted of relating their clothing, hair and eye color, skin color, traditional dressing and so on.

Moreover, through this study I found that even though kindergarten students are too young to read on their own, multicultural literature can be beneficial to these young students when presented through read-alouds. By reading the story out loud to the children, I was able to make the text come to life by using intonation, enthusiasm and volume to help make the story interesting and meaningful for the students. As they listened to the story, they could connect my words with the illustrations and form a picture in their mind to help them imagine they were right there in the story, experiencing the culture first hand. Not only do read-alouds help the story seem real for the children, but it allows them the freedom to read between the lines as they follow facial expression and changes in tone and volume (Morgan 2009).

Essentially, the findings of my research closely aligned with the current literature supporting the use of multicultural literature. The children were able to gain diverse perspectives through which to view the various cultures of the world. They also began to make connections among cultures and search for similarities which helps to promote tolerance and respect for difference. The students were also able to reap the benefits of multicultural literature even though they are very young, through read-alouds which helped the stories come to life for them and therefore were very entertaining, engaging and interesting.

Limitations

The major limitation affecting the course of this study and the findings was the available time to conduct research. This study took place in a half-day kindergarten in which data was collected from a morning and afternoon class. The entire school day for each class was only two and a half hours, so having enough time to read a story and create a craft with ten groups of five to six children on a weekly basis in addition to the weekly whole-class story and craft was extremely difficult. This affected the study because often the grand conversations and small group discussions would have to be cut short due to time constraints. This issue mainly occurred because although it is a kindergarten class, the math and reading programs used by E.T. Hamilton School are designed for full day kindergarten classrooms and therefore, in order to conduct benchmark assessments and keep the kindergarten classes of the entire district on the same schedule, a large amount of information had to be taught each day in addition to these multicultural lessons.

In addition to the time within each day that research could be conducted, the overall time frame of the study was also a limitation. The span of this study was four weeks, during which eight different cultures were presented. For the purposes of this study, particularly in such a young group of students, a much longer span of time would have been ideal, such as a semester or even the entire school year. If the time frame of the study were expanded, the teacher researcher could choose more cultures to present and also spend more time teaching about each culture.

Implications for the Field

After analyzing the data I received throughout the study in order to draw conclusions about the use of multicultural literature in the kindergarten classroom, I found that there were certain areas that could be further investigated. One area in particular would be how the data results would change over a much longer period of time. Teacher researchers who plan to conduct similar research in their classrooms would likely benefit from designing such a study to span a semester or even an entire school year. This would allow for a more in depth look at each culture by using more than one book to learn about each, and also the possibility to explore more cultures, and experience them more intensely, possibly through class trips or addition guest presenters.

Another implication for future teacher researchers is the age group of the students who participate as study subjects. While kindergarteners have an amazing energy and a mostly untainted view of the world and the positive and negative interactions among cultures, it is difficult to know what they are truly thinking and/or feeling as they can easily be distracted and or go off topic. Additionally, their lack of writing skills makes it

different to provide children with a private outlet through which they can express their ideas feelings and emotions. Teachers conducting research on the use of multicultural literature may want to consider doing so with an older group of students, perhaps in grades three or four.

This study could also be improved by providing parents with more opportunities to provide input in terms of their thoughts and feelings about the growth of their child over the course of the study. This would allow the teacher to more closely track the ways in which the students are expressing their knowledge of cultural identity, similarities and differences and understanding of the importance of diversity outside of the classroom. Furthermore, parents could also be more directly included in the study by providing them with the opportunity to present their own culture to the class as only three parents were able to do in this study as a result of time constraints.

In summary, the use of multicultural literature in the kindergarten classroom can help students to develop diverse perspectives, open minds, and a tolerance and respect for different and unique cultures. This study suggests that teachers provide students with authentic multicultural literature through which they can learn about the cultures and traditions of different groups of people around the world. It is the role of the teacher to prepare students for a diverse world in which people of various cultures must work together in order to achieve a peaceful and successful society. By introducing multicultural books to students at a young age, teachers can provide the first stepping stone for children as they become a part of society and help them to be conscious and accepting of diverse cultures and people from all walks of life.

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Appendix A
Parent Questionnaire

Parents and Guardians,

Please answer the following questions to better help me understand your child's cultural identity.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Laurel Hartmann

1. What nationality or culture does your family/child mostly identify with?

2. What are some traditions that your family upholds that relate to your culture?

3. Does your child participate in any extra-curricular activities that pertain to his/her culture?

4. Would you be interested in coming in to help the students learn about your culture?

*The countries/cultures we will focus on are: Israel, Australia, China, India, Guatemala, The Caribbean, and Kenya however this is not a limitation! We would be happy to learn about any/all cultures and countries!

Appendix B

Small Group Discussion Guide

Using Multicultural Literature To Promote Tolerance and Respect in the Classroom

Focus Group Guide 1:

- Discuss features of the culture that the children learned (new information)

- Discuss character
 - Family
 - Language
 - Appearance
 - Activities
 - Feelings

Focus Group Guide 2:

Discuss the culture presented in the following ways:

- Discuss similarities to American culture

- Discuss differences from American culture

- What is your culture?

Focus Group Guide 3:

- Discuss appearances of characters
 - Can you be friends with someone even though they look different?
 - Speak differently?

- Have you ever felt like the character in the story?

- Why is it important to learn about this culture?

Focus Group Guide 4:

- Have you ever been afraid of someone because they look different than you and or your family?

- Have you ever said something to someone that was not nice just because they were different?

- How can reading stories about people who are different help you to be a better friend?

Appendix C

Whole Group Discussion Guide

Whole Group Weekly Discussion Guide:

- What culture did we learn about in this story?
- Tell me something you like about this culture
- Tell me something about this culture that is different from your culture
- Tell me something about this culture that is the same as your culture
- Have you ever been in the same situation as this character? (traveled somewhere new, done chores, eaten new food etc.)
- Why is it important to learn about other cultures?

Appendix D
Photos of Student Artifacts



Appendix E
Multicultural Children's Books

